

# Free Swimming Programme: Throughput data by local authority

*Statistical release – 5 February 2010*

## **Purpose of release**

This statistical release presents the number of free swims recorded by all local authorities participating in the Free Swimming Programme. The release includes data for the first three quarters of the programme – firstly for April, May and June 2009 (Quarter 1), then for July, August and September 2009 (Quarter 2) and finally for October, November and December 2009 (Quarter 3).

## **The Free Swimming Programme**

The Free Swimming Programme is a £140 million programme designed to increase participation in swimming in England and lead to subsequent health and economic benefits. The initiative is based around those local authorities which opted to be part of the Programme providing free swimming for children aged 16 or under and for adults aged 60 or over. Free Swimming, along with a variety of other initiatives, will contribute to the target set out in the London 2012 Olympic Legacy Action Plan to get two million more adults more active by 2012/13. It is also expected to make a significant contribution to the Government's commitment to provide five hours of PE and sport for 5 to 16 year olds and three hours of sporting opportunities for 16 to 19 year olds.

The Free Swimming Programme is a cross government initiative with funding from five government departments - the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department of Health (DH), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and Communities and Local Government (CLG) - as well as investment and resource from the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) and Sport England (SE).

For more information about the Free Swimming Programme see:

[http://www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/sport/5809.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/sport/5809.aspx)

## **Key messages**

### Number of free swims in Quarter 3 (October to December 2009)

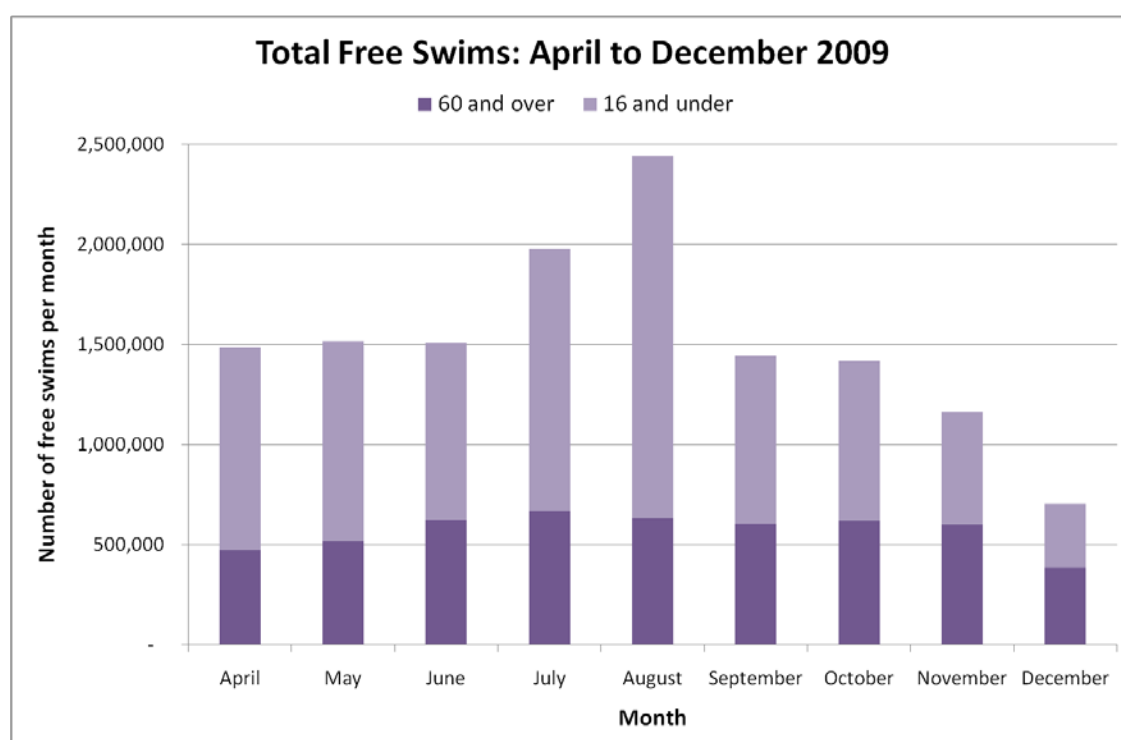
- 1.68 million free swims were recorded for the 16 and under age group between October and December 2009.
- 1.60 million free swims were recorded for the 60 and over age group in this period.
- In total, 3.28 million free swims were recorded across both target groups in quarter 3.
- The local authorities reporting the highest total number of free swims in the third quarter were Birmingham (86,319), Wiltshire (77,076), Doncaster (67,345) and Leeds (63,868).
- The region reporting the highest total number of free swims in the third quarter was the North West (516,592).

### Total number of free swims to date

- Over the period April to December 2009, 8.55 million free swims were recorded for the 16 and under age group, 5.11 million for the 60 and over age group – a total of 13.65 million free swims across both target groups.

### Seasonal pattern of free swims

- As expected based on the seasonal pattern observed in the Welsh Assembly Government's Free Swimming initiative, the number of free swims undertaken in quarter 3 was lower than the number recorded in quarter 2.
- As the chart below illustrates, the seasonal change was particularly marked for the 16 and under age group, although there was also a substantial fall in the number of free swims recorded for the 60 and over age group in December, a pattern also observed in the Welsh Assembly Government's Free Swimming initiative.



### **Swims per 1,000 target population**

A key difference between the local authorities participating in the Free Swimming Programme is the size of their 'target populations' (60 and over and 16 and under) – the allocation of revenue funding for the Free Swimming Programme was based on the size of these populations. In order to aid the interpretation of the data on Free Swimming, the number of free swims undertaken per 1,000 residents in each of the target populations has been estimated. When interpreting these data, users should note several factors that could influence the number of free swims per 1,000 target population, including:

- Tourist destinations - some authorities, such as those with coastal resorts or other tourist attractions, will have large numbers of visitors from outside the authority who may use the free pool facilities, increasing the number of free swims per 1,000 target population taking place, especially during holiday periods.

- Proximity of pools to local authority boundaries - authorities with pools located close to boundaries with authorities who are not participating in the Programme (or who are participating in the Programme but have no pools of their own) may have larger numbers of residents from other authorities making use of the facilities, increasing the number of free swims per 1,000 target population taking place.
- Number of pools - different authorities involved in the Free Swimming Programme have different numbers of pools, which will influence the number of free swims per 1,000 target population taking place. The extent to which the population of the local authority is dispersed or concentrated (urban vs. rural) may also influence this measure.
- Income distribution – while the Free Swimming Programme removes entry price as a barrier to swimming for the target age groups, background levels of sports participation may be lower in local authorities with a large proportion of residents on a low income, as people with low incomes are known to participate less in sport than those with higher incomes. While swimming participation may be expected to rise to a greater degree in local authorities with a large proportion of residents on a low income, the absolute number of free swims per 1,000 target population may still be lower than in more affluent local authorities.

Taken together, the range of factors which could influence the number of free swims per 1,000 target population mean that users should not draw firm conclusions from small differences between local authorities on this measure.

### **Guide to data included in this release**

This statistical release presents the number of free swims recorded by all 255 local authorities participating in the Free Swimming Programme. The release includes data for the first three quarters of the programme – firstly for April, May and June 2009 (Quarter 1), then for July, August and September 2009 (Quarter 2) and finally for October, November and December 2009 (Quarter 3).

The release contains ten tables which show the number of free swims:

- Report 1 shows the number of free swims by people aged 16 and under by local authority and by month
- Report 2 shows the number of free swims by people aged 16 and under by local authority and by quarter
- Report 3 shows the number of free swims by people aged 16 and under by region and by month
- Report 4 shows the number of free swims by people aged 60 and over by local authority and by month
- Report 5 shows the number of free swims by people aged 60 and over by local authority and by quarter
- Report 6 shows the number of free swims by people aged 60 and over by region and by month
- Report 7 shows the number of free swims by people in both target age groups by local authority and by month
- Report 8 shows the number of free swims by people in both target age groups by local authority and by quarter

- Report 9 shows the number of free swims by people in both target age groups by region and by month
- Report 10 shows the total number of free swims between April to December 2009 by people in both target age groups per 1,000 target population by local authority

Each table includes the following information:

- Local Authority Name: The name of the local authority participating in the Free Swimming Programme. The authorities included in this report reflect local government structures post-April 2009. An asterisk beside the name of the local authority denotes that they joined the 16 and under element of the programme late. A double asterisk denotes that the local authority withdrew from the 16 and under element of the programme after 1 April 2009.
- County: The name of the county within which the local authority participating in the Free Swimming Programme is located.
- Region: The name of the region within which the local authority participating in the Free Swimming Programme is located.
- Offer: 'Both' signifies a local authority that is offering free swimming to both people aged 60 and over and children and young people aged 16 and under. 'Just 60+' signifies a local authority that is only offering free swimming to people aged 60 and over.
- Free Swims: This shows the total number of free swims as part of this scheme by people in the relevant target age groups across all the participating swimming pools in in a given time period (either a month or a quarter). It **is not** a measure of the total number of individual participants taking part in free swimming.

Beneath the main table of data, there is a list of a further five local authorities that are participating in the Free Swimming Programme, but do not have any public pools of their own. These authorities are working with neighbouring authorities to support the national free swimming offer.

This release also includes two maps which present the data in Report 10 (the average number of free swims per thousand population between April and December 2009). One map covers the 16 and under group and the other covers the 60 and over group. The results are shown as quartiles (i.e. the number of swims per 1,000 target population in each local authority have been divided into four intervals, each containing 25% of the local authorities). For each age group, the lower, second, third and upper quartiles are calculated by ordering the data from smallest to largest number of swims per 1,000 target population, and then finding the values below which fall 0-25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, and 75%-100% of the data. Local authorities who have been participating in the Free Swimming Programme for a given age group for less than the full 9 months covered by these data have been marked separately, as have the five local authorities that are participating in the Free Swimming Programme, but do not have any public pools of their own.

### **Supplementary data**

We have appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) to conduct a national evaluation of the Programme. They will be collecting their own data via online surveys to supplement the throughput data. They will also be collating data from a number of other sources, and will be conducting a number of case studies with local authorities.

The first report from this evaluation, based on the experience of local authorities in Year 1 (April 2009 to March 2010) of the Free Swimming Programme will be available in early

Summer 2010. This will consider the economic and health impacts generated by the programme over the course of the first year. The second and final report from this evaluation, covering the full two-year period of the Free Swimming Programme, will be available in May 2011.

Further data on swimming participation amongst adults is available from the findings of the Active People Survey (APS), which can be accessed via the following website: [http://www.sportengland.org/research/active\\_people\\_survey/active\\_people\\_survey\\_3.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey/active_people_survey_3.aspx) In addition, data on swimming participation amongst children is available from the findings of the Taking Part Children's Survey (TPCS) which can be accessed via the following website: [http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference\\_library/publications/3681.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/reference_library/publications/3681.aspx)

### **Next release of data**

The next release of throughput figures will take place in April 2010 and will include data for the fourth quarter of the programme – January, February and March 2010.

### **Methodology**

1. All local authorities that signed up to be part of the Free Swimming Programme were asked to provide contact details for a nominated data collection lead. This person is responsible for collating and reporting throughput information from all the different centres/sites offering free swimming within their local authority area.

2. For the first quarter of the programme – April, May and June 2009, Sport England developed a system for collecting basic throughput information on a monthly basis from the data collection contacts using a web-based survey tool. They also developed a guidance document for local authorities setting out what information was required and how it should be reported. A copy of the guidance document is available from the DCMS website: [http://www.culture.gov.uk/what\\_we\\_do/sport/5874.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/sport/5874.aspx).

Towards the end of each month the data collection lead was sent an e mail reminder to submit their data. The e mail reminders included within them a link to the online survey tool. By clicking on this link the data collection leads were able to access the online survey and submit their data.

The deadline for submission was two weeks after the end of the month. Sport England was responsible for monitoring the data returned by local authorities. A basic quality check was carried out on every return to ensure that all the numbers added up as they should. Basic checks were also carried out to ensure that there was an appropriate explanation when the number of centres/sites reported by a given local authority differed from one month to the next (this could be the case, for example, because one site was closed for refurbishment, or because certain pools are only open during summer months). Any obvious errors were identified and clarification sought from the local authorities concerned.

3. For subsequent quarters of the programme (Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 from July to December 2009), the system for collecting throughput information on a monthly basis has been operated by PwC. The system used has been a secure web-based database, where data can be entered by each local authority. A guidance document has been prepared for local authorities setting out instructions for entering data within the new system, and each local authority nominated data collection lead has been provided with a personalised username and password. The overall guidance for local authorities, setting out the information which is required and how it should be reported as remained unchanged.

The Free Swimming Programme website for data submission opens on the first working day of each month to allow local authorities to enter their data for the preceding month. Local authorities are invited to submit their data by way of an email which is sent to each, providing details of the website and the data which should be entered. This is then followed up by a first reminder email which is sent to all non-respondents, approximately ten days later. A final

reminder email is sent to any remaining non-respondents on the submission end date. Local authorities are then given around five days to submit their responses. Targeted telephone calls are made to local authorities who have not responded by the submission close date, requesting that they enter their data as soon as possible. Late submissions cannot be entered directly onto the website directly by the local authority. Instead, local authorities are requested to contact the PwC team who will enter the data on their behalf. The data is entered in an override format, and a comment is added to the data entry to note that the submission was late.

The website provides an e-mail address and telephone number for local authorities in the event that they experience any issues or have any queries. In addition, basic checks are carried out on the data to identify any obvious errors, which are then checked with those concerned.

4. Any apparent errors in the data picked up by PwC or Sport England for which no satisfactory explanation has been provided have been excluded from this analysis. This means that they, along with any missing data, will appear as a '-' in this statistical release.

5. The size of the two target populations within each local authority was based on the Office for National Statistics mid-2008 local authority level population estimates (<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15106>). At the local authority level, these estimates are available in five year age bands. In order to estimate the size of the 16-and-under population size within each local authority, 40% of the size of 15-19 age group population was added to the size of the 0-14 age group population.

6. The number of free swims undertaken per thousand people in each of the target populations has been estimated for those local authorities which have participated in the Free Swimming Programme since its launch.

7. Two local authorities identified errors in the data that they reported for the second quarter of the programme after these data were first published in October 2009. The relevant figures have been updated in this release, with a net effect of increasing the total number of free swims in the second quarter by 1,979. The local authorities affected were Hartlepool and Newark and Sherwood.