



department for  
**culture, media  
and sport**

# Free Swimming Programme

Throughput data by local authority, April 2009 - July 2010

Statistical release – September 2010

Our aim is to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, support the pursuit of excellence, and champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries.

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# Background

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## 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 sixteen months of the Programme from April 2009 to July 2010.

## The Free Swimming Programme

The Free Swimming Programme was a £140 million programme designed to increase participation in swimming in England and lead to subsequent health and economic benefits. The initiative was based around local authorities providing free swimming for children aged 16 or under and for adults aged 60 or over. The Free Swimming Programme, along with a variety of other initiatives, was expected to contribute to the target set out in the London 2012 Olympic Legacy Action Plan to get two million more adults more active by the London 2012 Olympics. It was 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 was 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), as well as investment and resource from the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) and Sport England (SE).

The Free Swimming Programme was originally scheduled to run for two years from April 2009 to March 2011, but finished early in July 2010. This will therefore be the final official statistical release relating to the Programme. Further information about the decision to end the programme early is available from the DCMS website:

[http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/hot\\_topics/7192.aspx](http://www.culture.gov.uk/news/hot_topics/7192.aspx)

# Key messages

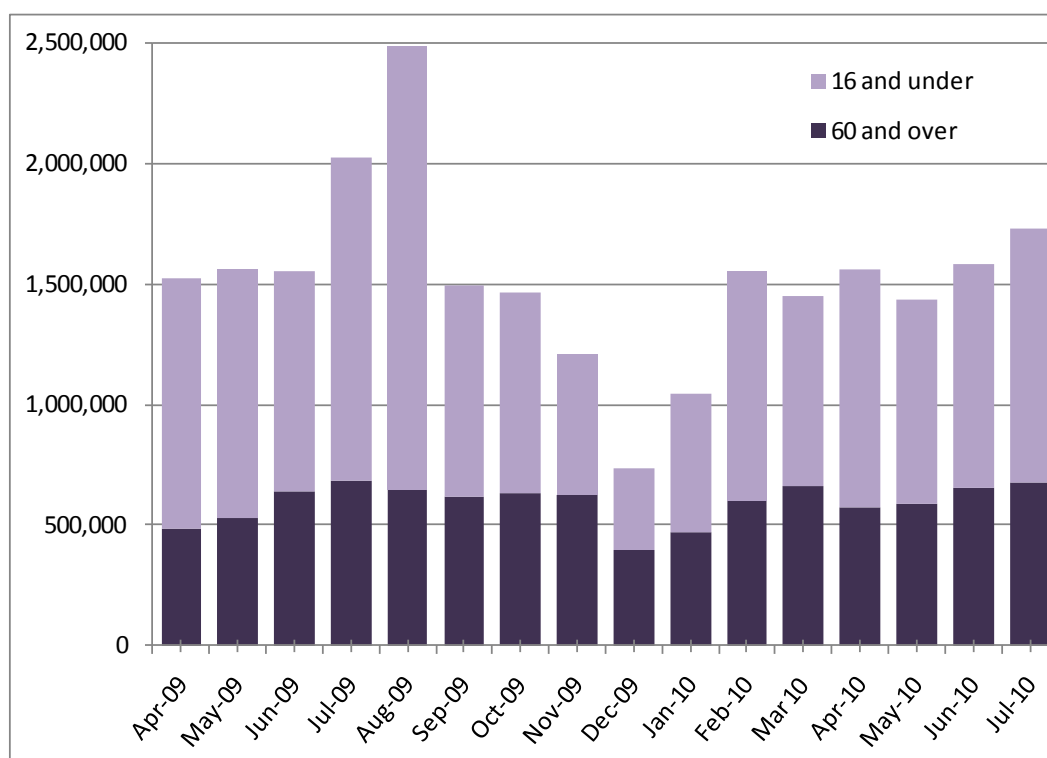
## Number of free swims in Quarter 1, Year 2 (April to June 2010)

- 2.76 million free swims were recorded for the 16 and under age group in Quarter 1 of Year 2 (i.e. between April and June 2010).
- 1.83 million free swims were recorded for the 60 and over age group in the same period.
- In total, 4.59 million free swims were recorded across both target age groups in the same period.
- The local authorities reporting the most free swims in Quarter 1, Year 2 were Birmingham (123,040), Leeds (96,671) and Doncaster (91,062).
- The region reporting the most free swims in Quarter 1, Year 2 was the North West (740,514).

## Total number of free swims to date

- Over the period of the Programme from April 2009 to July 2010, 14.91million free swims were recorded for the 16 and under age group, 9.53 million for the 60 and over age group – a total of 24.44 million free swims across both target groups.

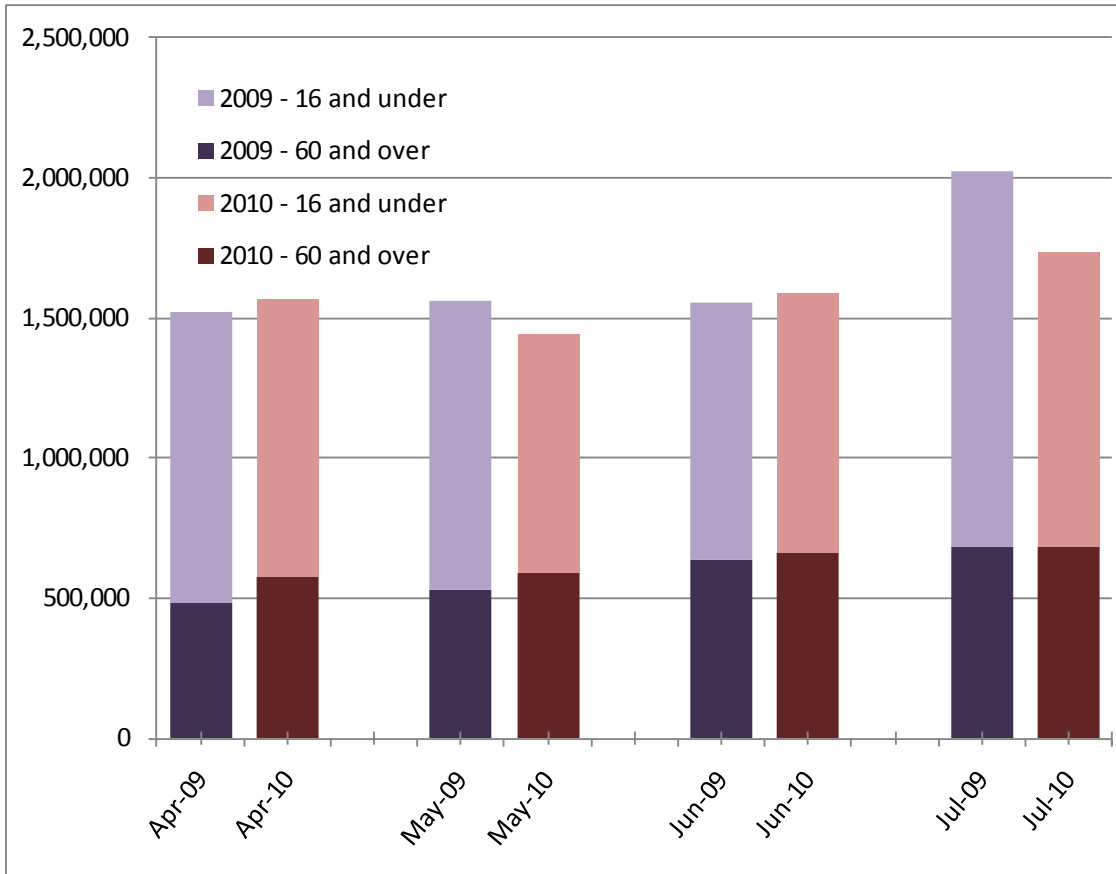
## Total free swims: April 2009 to July 2010



### Seasonal pattern of free swims

- As the chart above illustrates, the pattern of free swimming has been seasonal, in particular for the 16 and under age group. This pattern is also observed more generally for swimming and in other free swimming programmes like the Welsh Assembly Government's Free Swimming initiative. The chart above shows all swims recorded within each age category in each of the 16 months of the programme.

### Total free swims: April 2009 to July 2009 compared to April 2010 to July 2010



- The chart above illustrates the total number of swims recorded for the months shown for each age group. All data provided has been included. Therefore, where the chart shows an increase from the first year to the second year of the Programme (April and June), this is partly due to the fact that some Local Authorities joined the scheme late and as a result reported free swims in April-July 2010 but not in April-July 2009.

## Changes in the number of free swims

This 'change' section compares only areas that participated in the programme for the whole period and submitted complete data for both sets of months being compared. This shows how the number of free swims has changed between the first four months of the second year (April to July 2010) of the Programme and the same period in the first year (April to July 2009).

- The number of free swims undertaken by those in the 16 and under age group between April and July 2010 was 16% less than in the same period in 2009: 0.68 million fewer free swims were undertaken by this age group between April and July 2010 than in the same period in 2009.
- The number of free swims undertaken by those in the 60 and over age group between April and July 2010 was 7% more, an additional 0.17 million, than in the same period in 2009.
- Overall, July 2009 to July 2010 was the month which recorded the biggest decrease, with 0.32 million fewer free swims. This could be due to the announcement to cease the programme on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2010 which may have had some affect on the number of free swims taken in July 2010.

The table below provides more details of the change in the number of free swims between the first and second years of the Programme.

### Summary table comparing only areas which submitted data for the comparison period

		April 2009 - April 2010	May 2009 - May 2010	June 2009 - June 2010	July 2009 - July 2010	Quarter 1 Year 1 to Quarter 1 Year 2	April to July 2009 to April to July 2010
<b>16 and under</b>	<b>Change</b>	-110,165	-224,972	-24,431	-316,716	-366,425	-675,382
	<b>% Change</b>	-11%	-22%	-3%	-24%	-12%	-16%
<b>60 and over</b>	<b>Change</b>	89,374	58,622	19,606	125	167,602	167,885
	<b>% Change</b>	18%	11%	3%	0%	10%	7%
<b>All</b>	<b>Change</b>	-28,363	-171,404	-8,358	-318,044	-214,296	-524,592
	<b>% Change</b>	-2%	-11%	-1%	-16%	-5%	-8%

The change in the number of free swims recorded by local authorities has only been calculated for those local authorities which participated in the Programme throughout the period and which have provided data on the number of swims for all the period. For example, April 2009 – April 2010 only includes areas that were in the programme in April 2009 and April 2010, and submitted data in April 2009 and April 2010.

## Swims per 1,000 target population

A key difference between the local authorities that participated in the Free Swimming Programme was 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 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, especially during holiday periods.
- Proximity of pools to local authority boundaries - authorities with pools located close to boundaries with authorities which did not participate in the Programme (or who were participating in the Programme but had 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.
- Number of pools - different authorities involved in the Free Swimming Programme had different numbers of pools, which influences the number of free swims per 1,000 target population. The extent to which the population of the local authority is dispersed or concentrated (urban vs. rural) may also have influenced this measure.
- Income distribution – while the Free Swimming Programme removed entry price as a barrier to swimming for the target age groups, background levels of sports participation may have been 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 have been 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 means that users should not draw firm conclusions from small differences between local authorities on this measure.



# Guide to data included in this release

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This statistical release presents the number of free swims recorded by all 256 local authorities participating in the Free Swimming Programme. The release includes data for the first five quarters of the programme – firstly for April, May and June 2009 (Quarter 1, Year 1), then for July, August and September 2009 (Quarter 2, Year 1), then for October, November and December 2009 (Quarter 3, Year 1), then for January, February and March 2010 (Quarter 4, Year 1) and finally for April, May and June 2010 (Quarter 1, Year 2). It also includes data for the last month of the Programme, July 2010.

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 number of free swims per thousand people in the target population for the 16 and under and 60 and over age groups.

Each table includes the following information:

- Local Authority Name: The name of the local authority that participated 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 it 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 that participated in the Free Swimming Programme is located.

- **Region:** The name of the region within which the local authority that participated in the Free Swimming Programme is located.
- **Offer:** 'Both' signifies a local authority that offered 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 only offered 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 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 participated in the Free Swimming Programme, but did not have any public pools of their own. These authorities worked with neighbouring authorities to support the national free swimming offer.

This release includes two maps which present the data in Report 10 (the average number of free swims per thousand population between April 2009 and July 2010). 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. local authorities have been divided into four equal groups based on the number of swims per 1,000 target population). For each age group, the lower, second, third and upper quartiles are calculated by ordering the data from the 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 which participated in the Free Swimming Programme for a given age group for less than the full 16 months covered by these data (having entered the scheme late) have been marked separately, as have the five local authorities that participated in the Free Swimming Programme, but did not have any public pools of their own.

This release also includes two further maps which present the change data in Reports 1 and 4 (percentage change between April to July 2009 and April to July 2010). One map covers the 16 and under group and the other covers the 60 and over group. The results are divided into four groups (decrease of more than 25%, decrease up to 25%, increase up to 25%, and increases more than 25%) based on the change in free swims from April to July 2009. Only local authorities which participated in the Programme throughout the period and which have provided data on the number of swims for the entire period are included in one of these 4 change groups.

# Supplementary data

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We appointed PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) to conduct a national evaluation of the Programme. They collected their own data via online surveys to supplement the throughput data. They also collated data from a number of other sources, and conducted 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 was published in June 2010. This assessed the economic and health impacts generated by the Programme over the course of the first year. A copy of the report is available from the DCMS website:

<http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications/7190.aspx>

Further data on swimming participation amongst adults are 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\\_4/aps4\\_quarter\\_2.aspx](http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey/active_people_survey_4/aps4_quarter_2.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)

There will be no further release of throughput figures for the Programme as it has now ceased.

# Methodology

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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 was 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 (Quarters 2, 3 and 4 in Year 1 and Quarter 1 and July 2010 in Year 2), the system for collecting throughput information on a monthly basis was operated by PwC. The system used was a secure web-based database, where data could be entered by each local authority. A guidance document was prepared for local authorities setting out instructions for entering data within the new system, and each local authority nominated data collection lead was provided with a personalised username and password. The overall guidance for local authorities, setting out the information which was required and how it should be reported remained unchanged.

The Free Swimming Programme website for data submission opened on the first working day of each month to allow local authorities to enter their data for the preceding month. Local authorities were invited to submit their data by way of an e-mail which was sent to each, providing details of the website and the data which should be entered. This was then followed up by a first reminder e-mail which was sent to all non-respondents, approximately ten days later. A final reminder e-mail was sent to any remaining non-respondents on the submission end date. Local authorities were then given around five days to submit their responses. Targeted telephone calls were made to local authorities which had not responded by the submission close date requesting that they enter their data as soon as possible. Late submissions could not be entered directly onto the website by the local authority. Instead, local authorities were requested to contact the PwC team which entered the data on their behalf. The data were entered in an override format, and a comment was added to the data entry to note that the submission was late.

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

4. Any apparent errors in the data picked up by PwC or Sport England for which no satisfactory explanation was provided were 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-2009 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 was estimated for those local authorities which participated in the Free Swimming Programme since its launch.

7. Four local authorities (Cornwall, Ealing, Mid Suffolk and West Lindsey) submitted data relating to Year 1 of the programme after the deadline for the Q4 official statistics release. The relevant figures have been added in this release, with a net effect of increasing the total number of free swims for Year 1 by 39,323. In addition to this, some Year 1 figures have been revised for three other authorities (Southampton, East Hertfordshire and Mansfield) due to inaccuracies identified in the data previously reported. The net effect of these revisions was to decrease the number of free swims recorded for Year 1 by 10,019. Taken together the net effect of the late submissions and the amended submissions has been to increase the total number of free swims recorded for Year 1 of the programme by 29,304 since the last official statistics release.

8. For enquiries contact:

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