

# Evaluation of the Impact of Free Swimming

Year 1 Report - Executive Summary



This is an independent evaluation report carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP and commissioned by the funders of the Free Swimming Programme:

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Department of Health

Department for Children, Schools and Families (now Department for Education)

Department for Work and Pensions

Communities and Local Government

Sport England

Amateur Swimming Association

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

### Terms of reference

Following the announcement of the Free Swimming Programme (FSP) in June 2008, PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PwC) was commissioned by Sport England in April 2009 to undertake a two year evaluation of the FSP in England. The aim of the evaluation is to assess:

- The impact of the FSP, specifically the extent to which it has increased the number of swims and the number of swimmers;
- The lessons learned, in particular evidence of what works, how, in what context and for whom; and
- The benefits and value for money of the FSP, focusing on the health and consequent economic benefits of swimming participation.

This executive summary assesses the impact of the FSP during its first year between April 2009 and March 2010.

## Context

The FSP is one of the ways in which the Government plans to deliver the objectives of its Legacy Action Plan (LAP) for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Specifically, it focuses on the objectives of getting more adults active and providing young people with more physical education and sporting opportunities.

The Programme is funded by five government departments: the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department of Health (DH), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (now the Department of Education (DfE)), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). It also benefits from investment and resource from Sport England (SE) and the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), which manages a team of County Swimming Coordinators (CSCs).

The £140m funding for the FSP over the two year period is divided into four 'pots'. These consist of revenue funding for those aged 60 and over (£15m per year), revenue funding for those aged 16 and under (£25m per year), capital funding for dissemination in Year 1 (£10m) and further capital funding for dissemination through a bidding process in the two year period (£25m per year). In addition, some local authorities (LAs) have contributed additional funding to ensure delivery of the FSP.

Over the first year of the Programme, 261 LAs took up the Programme, including five which have no pools: 197 LAs have offered free swimming to those aged 60 and over and to those 16 and under, and a further 64 LAs have offered free swimming only to those aged 60 and over.

## Context

Evidence from the Active People Survey (APS) shows that, whilst swimming remains the most popular sport with 3.2 million adults (7.6% of the population) taking part in at least one

30 minute session of at least moderate intensity per week, the level of participation has tended to decline over the last three waves of the APS, which started in October 2005. This is despite evidence from the APS showing that latent demand for swimming is the highest of all sports: around 5.4 million adults (12.9%) said that they would like to participate in swimming, or participate more often.

The DH recommends that adults undertake 30 minutes of physical activity a day on five days of the week to unlock the health benefits of physical activity and that children and young people should spend at least 60 minutes a day, every day of the week<sup>1</sup>. Evidence from the Health Survey for England 2008 suggests that the level of physical activity undertaken by both age groups falls short of this<sup>2</sup>: only 39% of men and 29% of women aged 16 and over reach the recommended level and only 32% of boys and 24% of girls aged between 2 and 15 achieve the Department's recommended level of physical activity.

## Approach

Our approach to the evaluation has involved collection and analysis of evidence through a range of mechanisms:

- Collation of monitoring data on the number of free swims undertaken in each LA at each participating centre by those aged 60 and over and those aged 16 and under;
- Analysis of data from the APS;
- Two waves of an online survey (undertaken by Research Now) of 4,000 members of the population in the two target age groups to assess participation in and attitudes towards swimming and free swimming;
- Two rounds of case study visits, based on LAs and CSCs throughout England, which explored four themes: marketing of the FSP, the financial impact of the Programme, the impact of CSCs and free swimming lessons;
- A programme of interviews with non-participating local authorities to understand the reasons behind their decision not to participate and their views of the FSP; and
- A literature review to assess the health impacts of exercise and the associated economic impacts.

## Impact of the Free Swimming Programme

### *Awareness of the Programme*

Levels of awareness of the FSP play a role in driving participation in the FSP and, therefore, its net impact. Figure 1 shows levels of awareness of the FSP. Those aged 60 and over were most aware of the FSP whilst those aged 16 were least aware of the Programme.

### *Participation in the Programme*

Evidence from the monitoring data submitted monthly by each LA shows the number of free swims which have been taken throughout England. The APS also provides a basis for estimating the overall number of free swims undertaken as well as the number of (free) swimmers<sup>3</sup>. The results of both analyses are summarised in Table 1. Despite differences between the two sources, they show a similar seasonal pattern, and that more free swims have been undertaken by people aged 16 and under than by those aged 60 and over.

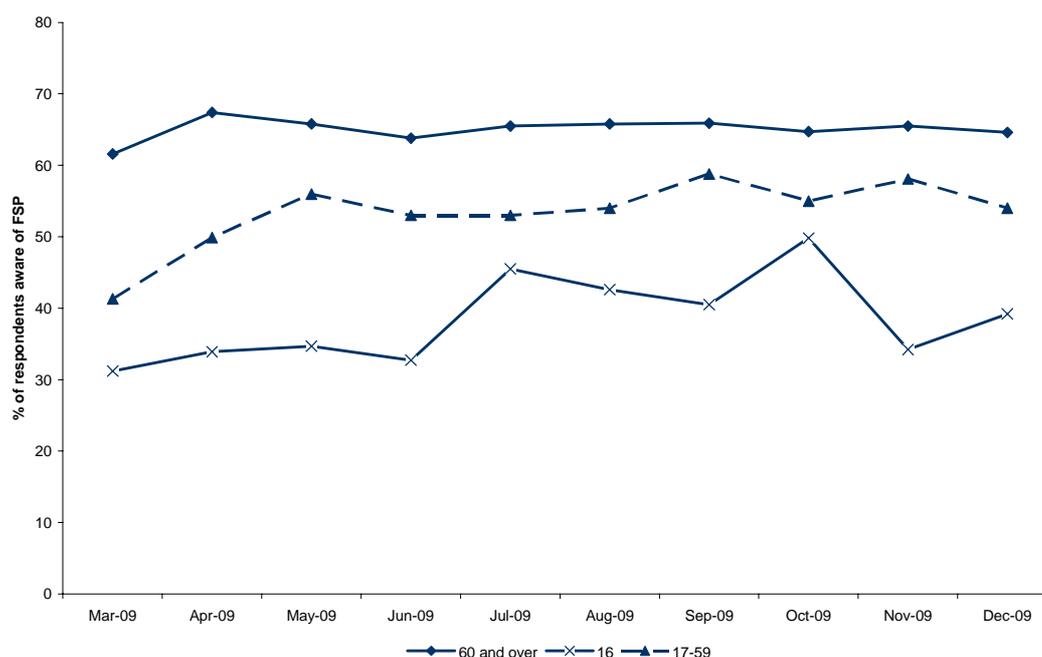
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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health, (2004) *At least five a week*, [Online] London: Department of Health. Available at: [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_4080994](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4080994) [Accessed 18 October 2009].

<sup>2</sup> The NHS Information Centre (2009) *Health Survey for England 2008*, [Online] England: The Health and Social Care Information Centre. [http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/HSE/HSE08/HSE\\_08\\_Summary\\_of\\_key\\_findings.pdf](http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/HSE/HSE08/HSE_08_Summary_of_key_findings.pdf) [Accessed 11 January 2010].

<sup>3</sup> We have also used the online survey to estimate the number of free swims undertaken by each swimmer as a basis for inferring the number of free swimmers from data on the number of free swims.

**Figure 1: Levels of awareness of the Free Swimming Programme**



Source: Analysis of data from APS 3 and APS 4

**Table 1: Number of free swims undertaken in participating pools (millions)**

	APS 3 (Q3)	APS 3 (Q4)	APS 4 (Q1)	APS 4 (Q2)
<b>60 and over</b>				
Number of free swims (monitoring data)	1.65	1.95	1.66	1.73
Number of free swims (APS data extrapolated to population level) <sup>4</sup>	1.43	2.26	2.07	n/a
<b>16 and under</b>				
Number of free swims (monitoring data)	2.99	4.06	1.74	2.29
Number of free swims (APS data extrapolated to population level) <sup>5</sup>	3.73	6.75	5.48	n/a

Source: Local authority monitoring data/APS

### Net impact of the Free Swimming Programme

Our assessment of the net impact of the Programme uses the findings from the two waves of the online survey to assess the scale of each element of additionality. Our findings are summarised in Table 2 for each of the two target age groups. Our analysis shows that the level of additionality varies between age groups: for those aged 60 and over, we estimate additionality at 21.4% whereas for those aged 16 and under additionality is greater (49.8%). The main reason for the difference is that free swimmers aged 16 and under are more likely to be accompanied by other (paying) swimmers, although these swimmers are not all in the target age groups. In both age groups, nearly 90% of free swimmers indicated their intention to continue swimming.

<sup>4</sup> Based on a population of 11,324,200 people aged 60 and over and 12,364,400 people aged 16 and under– 2008 mid-year population estimates.

<sup>5</sup> Based on a population of 11,324,200 people aged 60 and over and 12,364,400 people aged 16 and under– 2008 mid-year population estimates.

**Table 2: Estimated elements of additionality associated with the Free Swimming Programme**

	60 and over age group		16 and under age group	
	Nov / Dec 2009	April / May 2010	Nov / Dec 2009	April / May 2010
Deadweight <sup>6</sup>	53.5% - 79.3%	82.5%	56.2% - 84.8%	72.9%
Displacement / substitution <sup>7</sup>	8.7%	6.3%	14.5%	8.2%
Wider effects (multipliers)	22.8%	30.4%	76.4%	100.0%
Net effect	19.8%-44.6%	21.4%	24.2%-69.8%	49.8%
Sustainability <sup>8</sup>	89.6%	89.6%	84.8%	88.6%

Source: Analysis of online survey data

Using the results in Table 2, we have estimated the number of net additional swims and swimmers for each of the target age groups (see Table 3). For those aged 60 and over, we estimate that there have been around 1.5 million net additional swims over the first year of the FSP by about 23,000 net additional swimmers. For those aged 16 and under, there have been around 5.5 million net additional swims and just under 115,000 net additional swimmers.

**Table 3: Estimated net number of free swims and free swimmers**

	60 and over	16 and under
Number of free swims reported from local authority monitoring data (million, Q1 – Q4)	6.99	11.09
Number of free swims undertaken per month ('000, Q1 – Q4)	582.3	923.9
Average number of free swims undertaken per swimmer per month based on online survey	5.42	4.03
Number of net additional swimmers based on online survey	21.4%	49.8%
Number of net additional swimmers per month ('000) <sup>9</sup>	23.0	114.1
Number of net additional swims (million)	1.49	5.52

Source: Analysis of online survey data and monitoring data

### **Impact of Free Swimming Lessons**

There is limited evidence of the impact of the free swimming lessons offered as part of the FSP. Data provided by the ASA show that, to date, applications have been received to deliver 48,661 new swimmers via free swimming lessons, including 20,000 swimmers from schools delivering Key Stage 3. By March 2010, 18,399 new swimmers were recorded as having taken part in free swimming lessons across the nine regions in England. Further swimmers are thought to have taken part over the first year of the Programme, but the monitoring data for these lessons has not yet been returned.

<sup>6</sup> The question used to estimate deadweight was amended between the first and second waves of the online survey so that respondents were asked to attribute a probability to the likelihood that they would have swum anyway in the absence of the FSP.

<sup>7</sup> The question within the online survey used to measure displacement / substitution was amended for the second wave of the survey so that the number of respondents who had completely stopped other physical activities due to increased swimming could be identified separately from those who had partially reduced their level of physical activity.

<sup>8</sup> Based on the number of respondents who expect to continue to spend as much time taking part in sports and recreational physical activities over the next 12 months.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that there is the potential for the same swimmers to keep swimming for free each month. Consequently, the level of net additional swimmers each month may be lower as the programme develops. We assume that those who identify themselves as swimmers are similar in background and characteristics to those who swam in previous months.

## Lessons learned

We have summarised the key conclusions and lessons learned from our qualitative research in Table 6.

**Table 4: Key lessons learned**

Thematic area	Conclusion or lesson learnt
Awareness of the FSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All LAs had a good level of awareness of the free swimming aspect of the Programme</li> <li>Non-participating authorities were not always aware of the availability of capital grants and grants for free swimming lessons when they made their decision on participation</li> <li>The timing of the initial decision making process was difficult and, in some cases, was adversely affected by non-availability of key staff over the summer holiday period</li> </ul>
Decision making process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The financial impact tended to be the key factor in the LA decision to participate in the FSP, although it was not the only factor</li> <li>Many LAs would have preferred an approach whereby grant funding was based on a targeted approach or on swimming pool usage figures</li> <li>Some non-participating LAs felt they would have participated if the requirements of the FSP could have been tailored further to suit local circumstances (e.g. being able to offer the FSP to those aged 16 and under only or to specific populations from deprived areas within the LA)</li> </ul>
Marketing activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAs highlighted a lack of specific guidance from central government departments with regard to promotion and marketing – this has led to a mixed approach to marketing and, in some areas, minimal activities</li> <li>There were some examples of good practice in marketing activities, including some that could be considered low cost options, however, this was not widespread. Consideration should be given to spreading such approaches to encourage further increases in participation in free swimming amongst the target groups by learning from good practice already developed by LAs to date</li> <li>In general, in areas where high levels of marketing activities had taken place, the increase in uptake of the FSP has been more pronounced</li> <li>Few LAs have specific plans for future marketing activities, although many would appreciate further guidance</li> </ul>
Dealing with unanticipated outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LAs have experienced a range of unanticipated outcomes as a result of participating in the FSP which they have had to be overcome</li> <li>These include higher than expected administration costs (including the cost of re-issuing free swimming cards), reduced demand for paid swimming lessons and some negative reports about children's behaviour</li> </ul>
Impact of CSCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Time is required in order to allow CSCs to build effective relationships with partners</li> <li>There is a need to focus on key areas in Year 2 where performance is behind target</li> <li>There is a desire to share best practice amongst CSCs and operators and also to plan effective exit routes from lessons to encourage ongoing participation</li> </ul>
Impact of free swimming lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Substantial time is required for planning and project management</li> <li>Lack of pool capacity for lessons can be an issue – in some areas demand has outstripped supply and waiting lists have developed</li> <li>A friendly approach is important to new learners</li> </ul>
Perceptions of the FSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CSCs, LAs and operators rated free swimming lessons higher (average of eight or nine out of ten) than the overall FSP (average of seven out of ten)</li> <li>Free swimming lessons were seen as providing a more effective method for targeting and increasing participation</li> </ul>

Source: PwC analysis

## Benefits and value for money of the Free Swimming Programme

### Changes in levels of physical activity

The findings from the latest online survey showed positive changes in the level of physical activity undertaken by those who had participated in free swimming: amongst those free swimmers aged 60 and over, the proportion of respondents who undertook at least 30 minutes of activity a day increased from 66.2% before the start of the FSP to 78.4% since the FSP was introduced whilst amongst those aged 16 and under, the proportion of free swimmers undertaking more than 60 minutes of physical activities increased from 20.7% to 32.9%.

Whilst the increase in activity levels amongst these respondents may not be entirely attributable to the FSP, it is likely that some of it is.

### Cost effectiveness and cost benefits of free swimming

Table 5 sets out the cost effectiveness of the FSP over the first year. Our analysis compares the inputs from central government with the associated outputs and outcomes. Thus, it assesses the impact of the resources committed to funding free swimming for each of the two target age groups in Year 1 with the estimated net outputs presented in Table 5. Neither the costs of free swimming lessons and the capital funding programme nor any additional costs incurred by LAs (and other stakeholders) are included in the estimates.

**Table 5: Costs per net unit output**

	Number of net outputs delivered	Programme cost (£m)	Cost per unit of output (£)
<b>60 and over</b>			
Swims	1.49 million	12.3	8.23
Swimmers	22,971		535
<b>16 and under</b>			
Swims	5.52 million	19.6	3.55
Swimmers	114,068		172

Source: PwC analysis

Estimating the potential economic benefits of the FSP is fraught with a series of methodological difficulties. We have, nevertheless, sought to assess the potential benefits from Year 1 of the free swimming element of the FSP. We have focused on estimating the avoided costs to the health service and loss of productive days. The results of our analysis suggest that the benefit cost ratio of the programme for those aged 60 and over is in the region of 0.53:1 and for those aged 16 and under is in the region of around 0.82:1. These results do, however, need to be treated with caution.

### Areas for improvement

Our evidence to date suggests that although the FSP has made some progress towards its objectives in terms of generating both net additional swims and swimmers, there is scope to build on this success in Year 2. We have identified a number of ways in which improvements could be made to the FSP:

- Put in place initiatives to reduce the level of deadweight experienced to date: this may include targeting non-swimmers through free swimming lessons and also making facilities more attractive to lapsed swimmers through the delivery of capital improvement projects;
- Provide clear, concise guidance (with regards to what works well) to LAs and CSCs on a timely basis, including where there are expectations in terms of marketing activities and any other expectations so as to drive growth in swimming on a year on year basis;
- Share good practice amongst LAs and CSCs (including non-participating LAs) by encouraging sharing and adoption of good practice universally to further drive uptake of swimming inter and intra-regionally;
- Ensure support is provided for CSCs in terms of additional training where required, and that materials and information is provided to them on a timely basis;

- Continue to provide free swimming lessons on a scale that will enable key growth targets to be met, ensuring that mechanisms used for marketing and promotion of these lessons (and follow-on activities) are undertaken locally, regionally and nationally where possible; and
- Consider how the impact of the FSP should be sustained beyond the two year funding period set, communicating details on a timely basis to LAs to allow local plans to be developed in time for the current scheme ending in March 2011.

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