

Free Swimming Programme: Basic throughput data by local authority

Statistical release - 27 October 2009

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 two quarters of the Programme. It covers the period from April 2009 to September 2009.

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 local authorities 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 the London 2012 Olympics. 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), 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

This statistical release presents the number of free swims recorded by all 259 local authorities participating in the Free Swimming Programme. The release includes data for the first two quarters of the programme – firstly for April, May and June 2009 and secondly for July, August and September 2009.

Key findings

10.37 million free swims were recorded across the two target age groups between April and September 2009. Across the two target groups, 5.86 million free swims were recorded between July and September, up from the 4.51 million recorded between April and June.

6.86 million free swims were recorded for the 16 and under age group between April and September 2009.

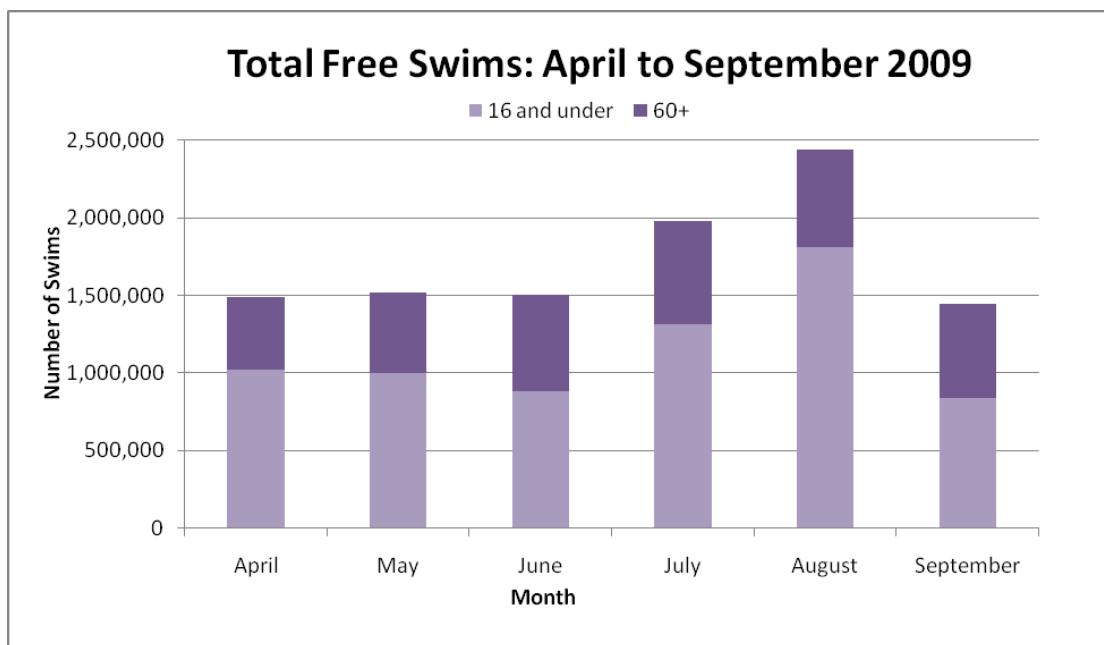
The number of swims in the 16 and under group decreased between April and June (from 1.02m in April to 0.88m in June), increased dramatically in July and August (1.81m in August) and then decreased again in September (0.84m in September). The increases in free swims for this age group coincided with school holiday periods.

3.51 million free swims were recorded for the 60 and over age group between April and September 2009.

The number of swims in the 60 and over group increased over the first four months of the scheme (from 0.47m in April to a peak of 0.67m in July) before decreasing slightly in August and September (0.63m in August and 0.61m in September).

The local authorities reporting the highest total number of free swims were Birmingham (280,039), Leeds (230,840), Doncaster (225,704) and Bradford (217,468).

The region reporting the highest total number of free swims was the North West (1,702,233).



Total Free Swims

	April	May	June	July	August	September	Year to Date
16 and under	1,017,535	999,545	882,801	1,313,606	1,811,091	835,992	6,860,399
60+	470,064	517,037	623,596	666,285	629,728	606,702	3,513,412
TOTAL	1,487,599	1,516,582	1,506,397	1,979,891	2,440,819	1,442,694	10,373,982

Guide to data included in this release

The data include 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 from 1 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.
- Type: The type of local authority participating in the Free Swimming Programme: unitary authority, London borough, metropolitan district and non-metropolitan district.

- Region: The name of the region within which the local authority participating in the Free Swimming Programme is based.
- 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 60+: This shows the total number of free swims as part of this scheme by people aged 60 and over across all the participating swimming pools in a given local authority in a given time period. It **is not** a measure of the total number of individual participants taking part in free swimming.
- Free Swims 16 and Under: This shows the total number of free swims as part of this scheme by people aged 16 and under across all the participating swimming pools in a given local authority in a given time period. It **is not** a measure of the total number of individual participants taking part in free swimming.
- Free Swims Total (60+ and 16 and under): This shows the total number of free swims as part of this scheme by people aged 60 and over and people aged 16 and under across all the participating swimming pools in a given local authority in a given time period. 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.

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 other sources and will be conducting case studies with local authorities, and a report is expected to be published in Summer 2010.

Next release of data

The next release of throughput figures will take place in early 2010 and will include data for the third quarter of the programme – October, November and December 2009.

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 from April to June 2009 (Q1), 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.

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). Where obvious errors were identified, clarification was sought from the local authorities concerned.

3. For the second quarter of the programme from July to September 2009 (Q2), PwC has operated a system for collecting throughput information on a monthly basis. The basic structure of this system has been similar to that used previously by Sport England except that it has used a secure web-based database to gather data which has been input by each local authority. In order to facilitate transition to the new system, a guidance document was prepared for local authorities which set out instructions for entering data within the new system. In addition, each local authority nominated data collection lead was provided with a personalised username and password.

For any given month, the Free Swimming Programme website for data submission opens on the first working day following the end of the month to allow local authorities to submit data. An e-mail is sent to each local authority inviting them to submit their data and providing details of the website and the data which should be entered. The first reminder e-mail is sent to all non-respondent local authorities approximately ten days later. A final reminder e-mail 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 by local authorities cannot be entered directly into the website by local authorities. Instead, local authorities are asked to submit their data to a member of the PwC team who enters the data on their behalf. These data are then entered into the database in an override format and a comment is added 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.

The system undertakes some basic checks of the data submitted by the local authority. In particular, the system determines whether the data provided are consistent with the local authority's offer and add to the totals: for example, where a local authority's offer covers both age groups, the system only regards a submission as being complete when data have been submitted for both groups. The system also checks to ensure that all relevant totals have been added correctly. Finally, the system identifies where there have been large changes in the number of swims in a local authority area from month to month: in these cases, checks are undertaken to establish whether a satisfactory explanation has been provided by the local authority.

4. For both quarters, any apparent errors in the data picked up by Sport England or PwC for which no satisfactory explanation has been provided have been excluded from this analysis. Missing data has been marked 'n/a' (not available) in this statistical release.

5. A number of local authorities identified errors or omissions in the data that they reported for the first three months of the programme after they were first published in July 2009. The relevant figures have been updated in this release, with a net effect of increasing the total number of free swims in the first quarter by 55,644. The local authorities affected are as follows: Birmingham, Chorley, Doncaster, Elmbridge, Hillingdon, Middlesbrough, Rushmoor, South Cambridgeshire, Stafford and Wigan.