



Free Swimming 2016-17

A national analysis of Free Swimming in Wales

November 2017

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Executive summary

Free public swimming in Wales 2016-17¹

- ❁ In 2016-17, there were fewer than 150,000 free public swims for the 16 and under age group and just over 650,000 free public swims for the 60 and over age group.
- ❁ There has been a 33% and 36% fall in participation in free public swimming respectively amongst males and females aged 16 and under, compared to 2015-16.
- ❁ The number of under 8 year olds, 8-11 year olds as well as 12-16 year olds who are swimming has fallen by 38%, 34% and 32% respectively since 2015-16.
- ❁ The 60 and over age group has seen a 2% rise in free public swimming participation, compared to 2015-16.
- ❁ The number of free public swims amongst males and females (60 and over) has risen by 1% and 3% respectively over the last year.

Paid swims in Wales 2016-17

- ❁ There has been a 16% rise in paid swims during school holidays for the 16 and under age group, compared to 2015-16.

Free structured activities in Wales 2016-17¹

- ❁ In 2016-17, there were 47,000 free structured activities for the 16 and under age group and 73,000 free structured activities for the 60 and over age group.
- ❁ During the last year, there has been a 19% fall in participation in free structured activities for people aged 16 and under.
- ❁ Participation in free disabled structured sessions has risen by 2% for people aged 16 and under during the last year.
- ❁ There has been a 9% fall in participation for free structured activity for the 60 and overs, compared to 2015-16.
- ❁ There has been a 12% fall in participation for free disabled structured sessions for the 60 and overs during the last year.
- ❁ During the last year, participation in Aquafit/Therapy for people aged 60 and over has fallen by 10%.

¹ During the reporting period Cardiff transferred the ownership and management of its swimming pools to a third party. As a result of this transition, accurate data was not available for the final period of 2016-17 (February/March). Therefore, annual figures for both Wales and Cardiff do not include this final period of data.

Background to the Free Swimming Initiative (FSI)

The Free Swimming Initiative (FSI) has been running in Wales since 2004, part of the scheme is to evaluate the impact and take-up of free swimming in Wales. The Data Unit have been involved in collecting, validating, analysing and publishing free swimming participation data from local authorities since 2008.

The data is reported every two months during the financial year, during school holiday periods for 16 and under and two-monthly periods for those aged 60 and over. Changes to the Free Swimming Initiative (FSI) minimum criteria² meant that the Data Unit were asked to collect participation information on weekend activities from local authorities. This includes 'dry-side' sports delivered as part of the initiative, as well those activities based in the swimming pool.

During the reporting period Cardiff transferred the ownership and management of its swimming pools to a third party. As a result of this transition, accurate data was not available for the final period of 2016-17 (February/March). Therefore, annual figures for both Wales and Cardiff do not include this final period of data.

This report provides an analysis of the data up to and including financial year 2016-17. The numbers are counts of people participating in

swimming in the two age groups (16 years and under; 60 years and over).

The data is sourced from the Data Unit from returns collected from the 22 local authorities in Wales.

Further information on local authority and pool level data can be found on the online Free Swimming Wales data portal:

<http://www.freeswimmingwales.net/>

This is the tenth annual report from the Data Unit analysing participation rates for the Free Swimming Initiative in Wales. It looks at overall participation numbers and rates and how these have varied over time. Sections of the report look specifically at participation in four areas:

- ✿ Free public swimming in Wales;
- ✿ Free structured activities in Wales;
- ✿ Free weekend activities in Wales; and
- ✿ Paid swimming in Wales.

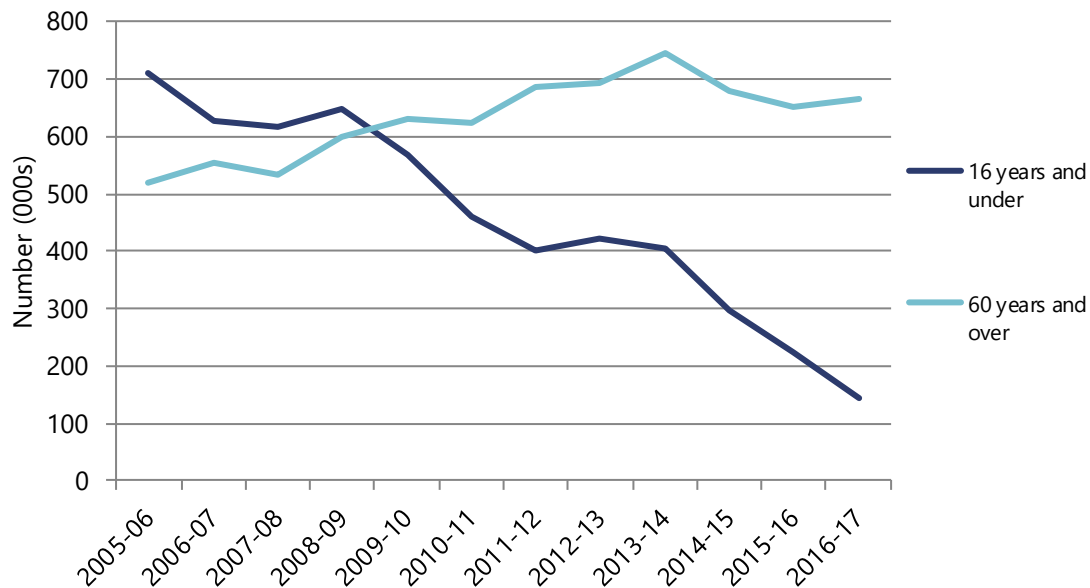
² For full details of the minimum criteria provision see Appendix 2 – Free Swimming minimum provision.

Free public swims in Wales

The number of people aged 16 and under participating in free public swims has fallen since 2005-06.

Figure 1 shows that **2016-17 saw a decrease** in free public swims for people aged **16 and under**³, participation **falling by 35% compared to 2015-16**. The number of free public swims for those aged **60 and over**³ **rose by 2%** compared to 2015-16.

Figure 1: Number of free public swims in Wales



Over 120 swimming pools in Wales have participated in the Free Swimming Initiative. Since 2004 several local authority pools have closed in Wales due to different reasons⁴.

Local authorities will occasionally need to temporarily close pools during the year for refurbishment and minor repairs. Both these factors will have an impact on the number of people able to participate in free swimming.

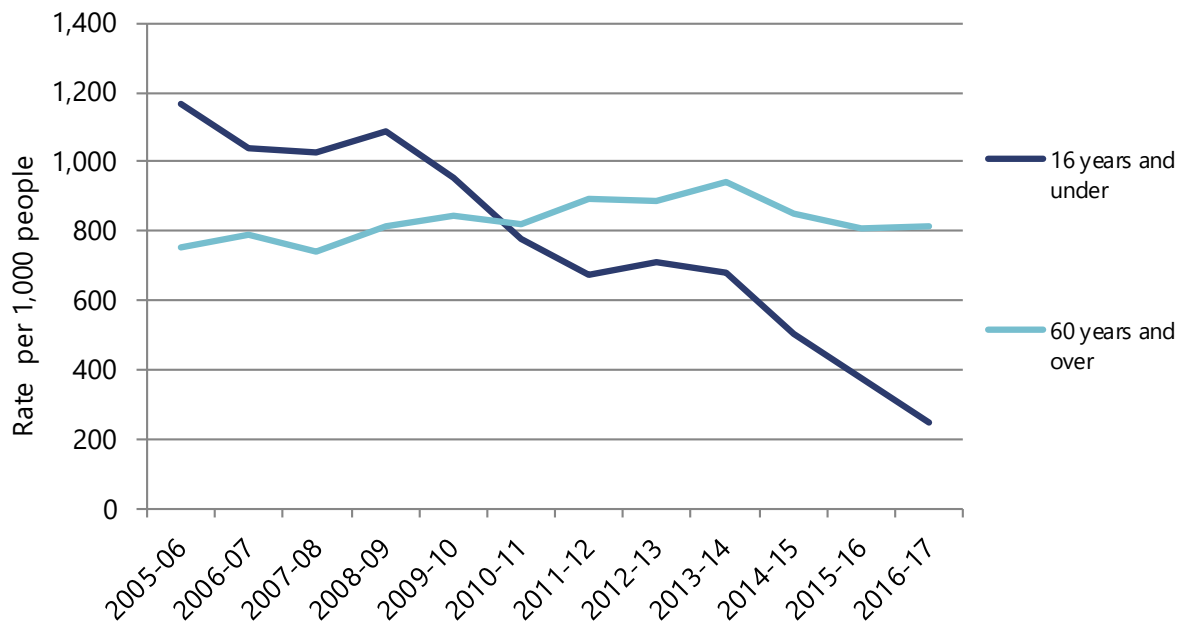
In contrast, during the Free Swimming Initiative, pools have also opened or been re-opened following refurbishment. For a map and details of pool closures see **Appendix 3 – Pool closures and openings**.

Participation rates, relative to the population, show a similar picture to the number of swims with **the rate of free public swims per 1,000 people aged 16 and under**³ **falling from 1,173 in 2005-06 to 245 per 1,000 people in 2016-17**. The 60 and over age group had shown a steady rise in the rate of participation per 1,000 people³ until 2013-14 where the rate began to decrease. However, 2016-17 has seen an increase since 2015-16, from 806 to 811 per 1,000 people, as shown in **Figure 2**.

³ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

⁴ For details on pool closures see Appendix 3 – Pool closures and openings.

Figure 2: Rate of free public swimming participation per 1,000 people in Wales



At a regional level, the rate of free public swims for the 16 and under age group per 1,000 people in Mid & West Wales was 271, Central South Wales⁵ was 242 and South East Wales was the highest at 305 per 1,000 people for 2016-17. North Wales shows the lowest rate at 165 per 1,000 people.

Figure 3 shows that the Central South Wales⁵ region has the highest rate of free public swims for people 60 and over with a rate 1,088 per 1,000 people in 2016-17. North Wales has the lowest rate in 2016-17 with 545 per 1,000 people.

⁵ Central South Wales region level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Figure 3: Rate of free public swimming participation per 1,000 people, by region, 2016-17⁶

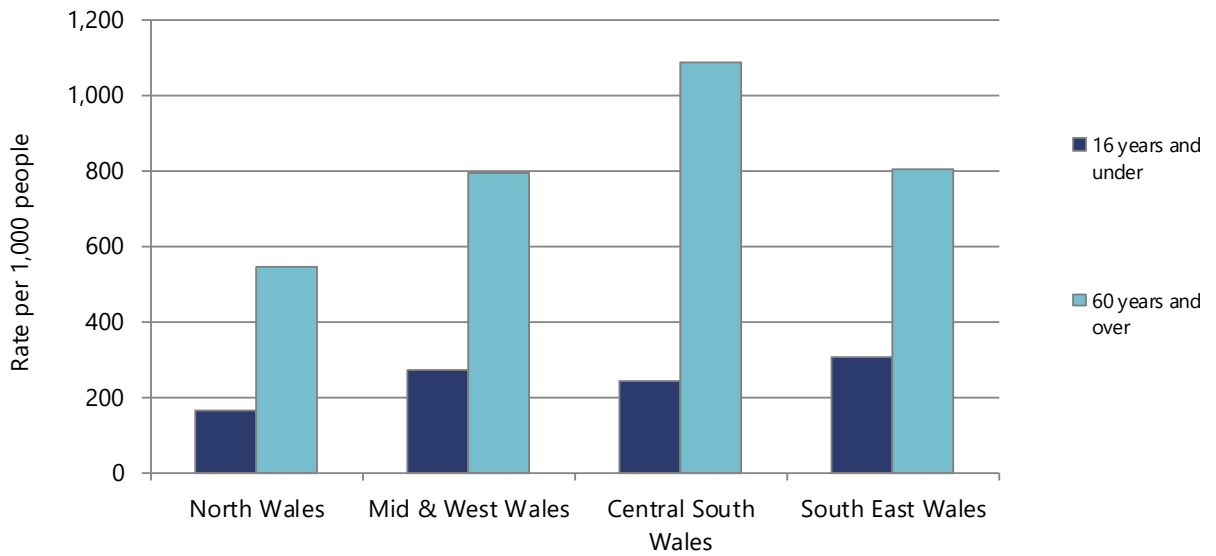
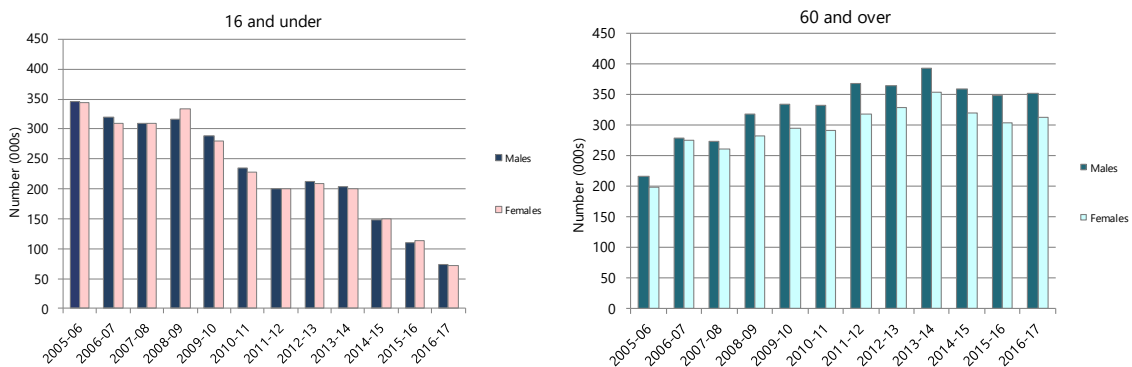


Figure 4 shows that since 2005-06, free public swimming⁷ has generally been more popular amongst males in the 60 and over age group. For 2016-17 this is still the case for the 60 and overs. For the 16 and under age group, 2016-17 has seen more males than females participating in free public swimming.

Figure 4: Number of free public swims for people aged 16 and under and 60 and over in Wales⁷

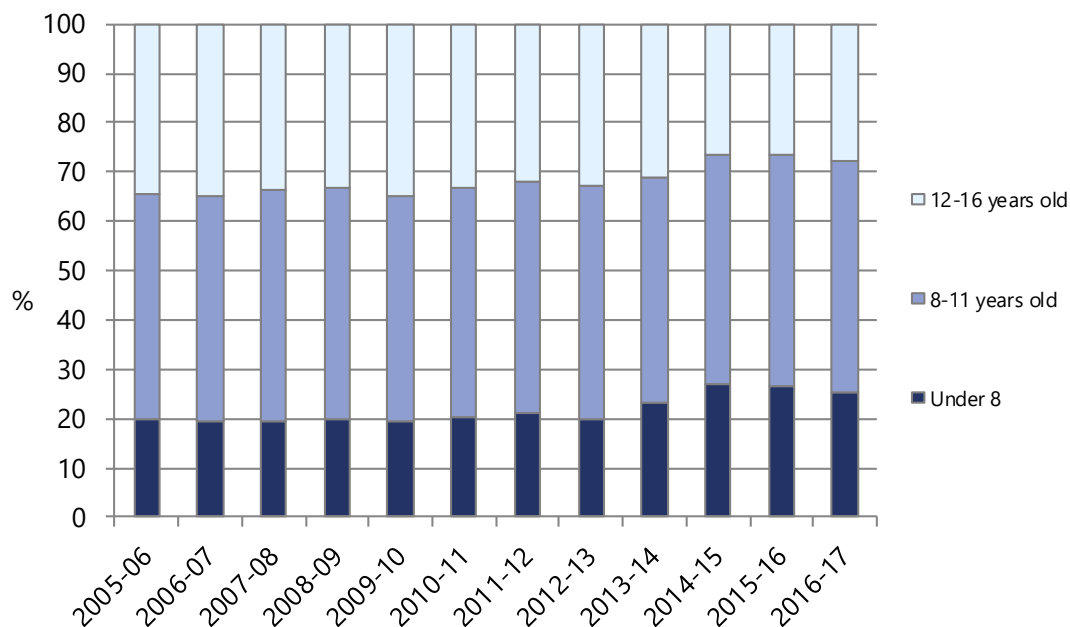


⁶ Central South Wales region data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

⁷ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

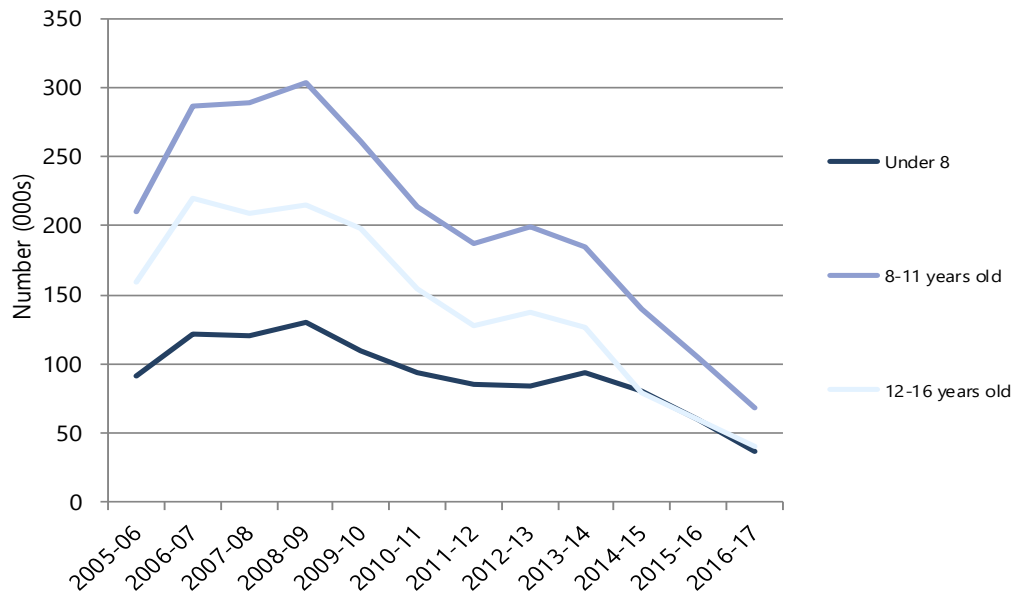
Figure 5 shows that 47% of free public swims⁸ for the 16 years and under age group were aged 8-11, this age group has had the highest proportion of participation since 2005-06. The proportion of free public swims for 2016-17 for each age group has remained similar to 2015-16.

Figure 5: Percentage of free public swims, by age, in Wales⁸



As seen in **Figure 6**, the number of free public swims⁸ for people aged 8-11 and 12-16 has showed a general decrease since 2008-09 with the under 8 age group falling at a slower rate. Between 2015-16 and 2016-17, all age groups saw a decrease.

⁸ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Figure 6: Number of free public swims, by age, in Wales⁹

Free public swims per week for each holiday period¹⁰ for the 16 years and under age group are shown in **Figure 7** and **Figure 8**. While historically, the summer holiday has had the highest swims per week, 2016-17 saw more swims per week in both Whitsun and February half term holidays. The average number of swims per week in the summer holidays decreased from 21,000 in 2015-16 to 12,000 in 2016-17. The Christmas holiday has consistently had the fewest public swims per week, where many pools may temporarily close for refurbishment or generally there are fewer people visiting pools.

⁹ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

¹⁰ Wales level data for February half term excludes data for Cardiff.

Figure 7: Number of free public swims per week for people aged 16 and under, by holiday period, in Wales¹¹

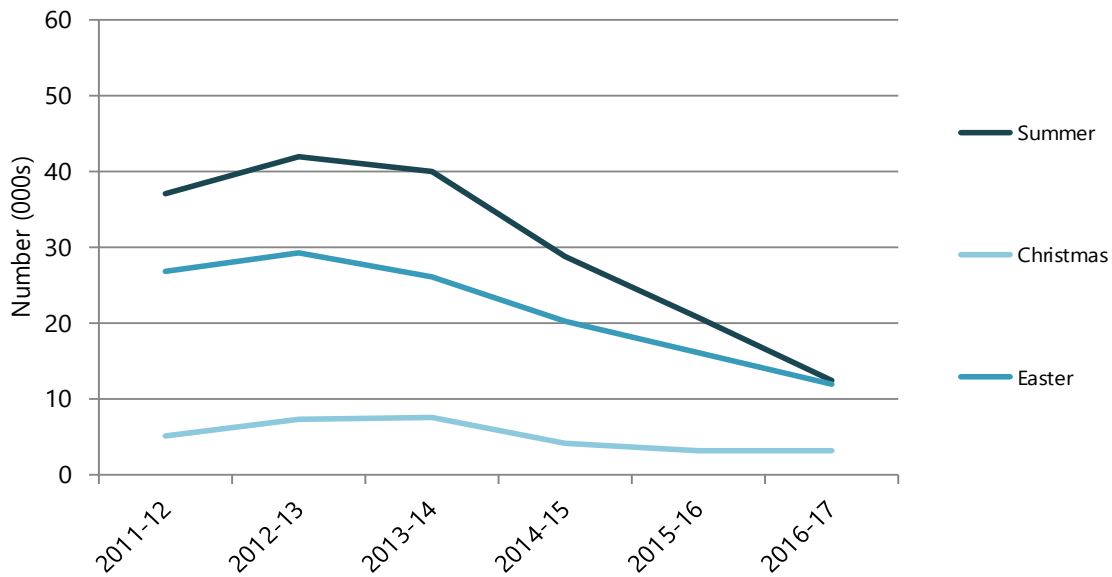
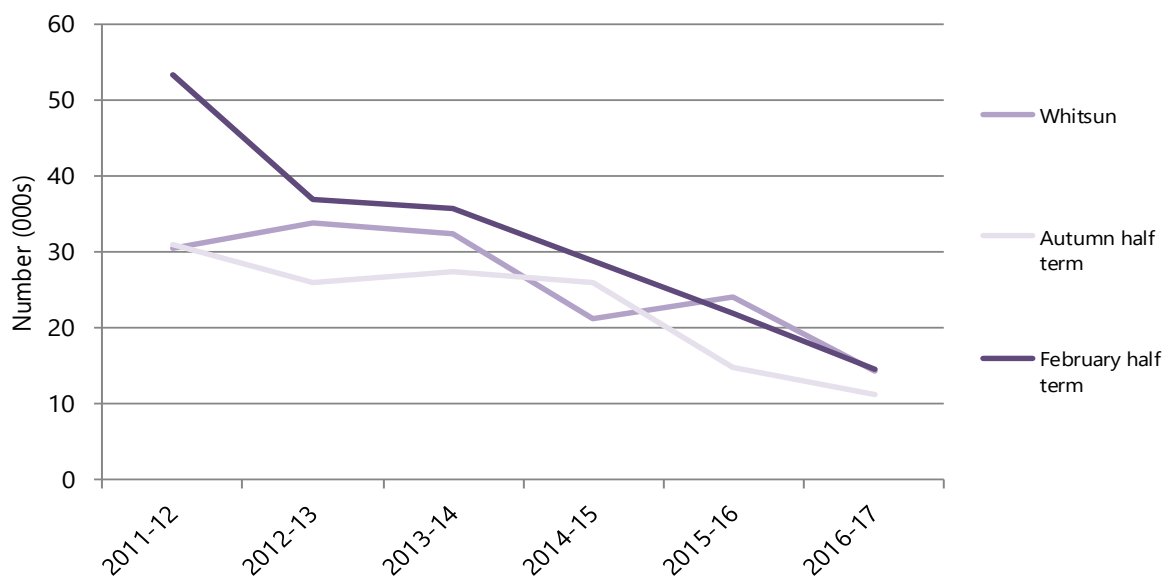


Figure 8: Number of free public swims per week for people aged 16 and under, by half term holiday period, in Wales¹¹



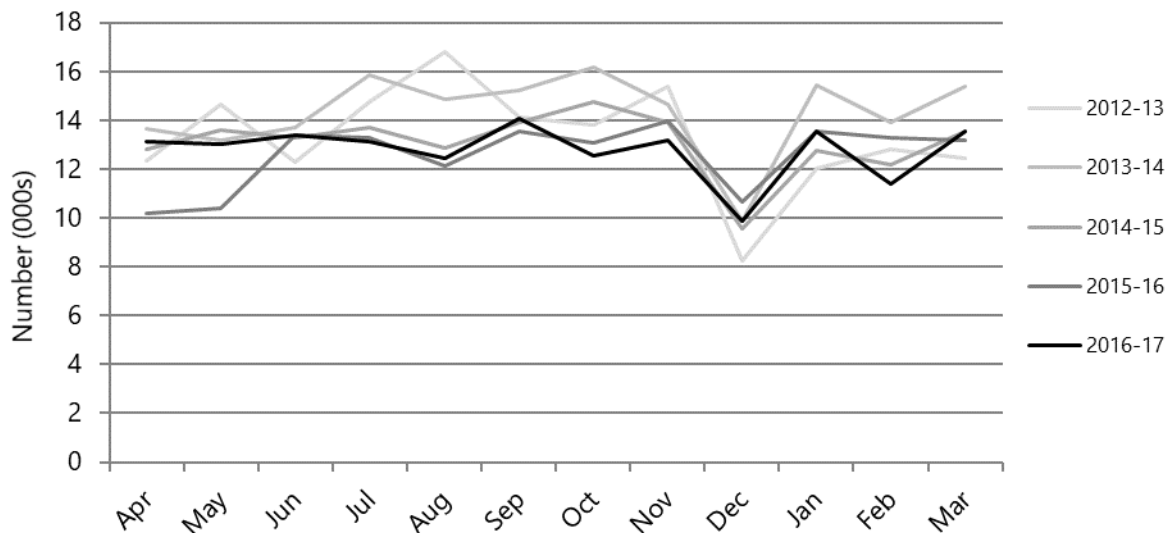
Free public swims per week for people aged 60 and over¹² show a different trend, this is shown in **Figure 9**. During 2016-17, free public swims peaked during September 2016. Historically, December

¹¹ Wales level data for February half term excludes data for Cardiff.

¹² Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

has shown the fewest free public swims per week for this age group, and this is the case for 2016-17. February 2017¹³ saw the largest decrease in swims per week for people aged 60 and over, while April 2016 saw the largest increase in swims per week. By overlaying the years, it shows the general decrease in the number of free public swims per week for people aged 60 or over compared to previous years.

Figure 9: Number of free public swims per week for people aged 60 and over, by month, in Wales



For individual authorities, **Figure 10** shows that in 2016-17 the rate of free public swims per 1,000 people aged 16 and under¹⁴ ranged from 28 in Flintshire to 522 in Denbighshire.

¹³ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

¹⁴ Annual figures for Cardiff exclude period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Figure 10: Rate of free public swims per 1,000 people aged 16 and under, by local authority, 2016-17¹⁵

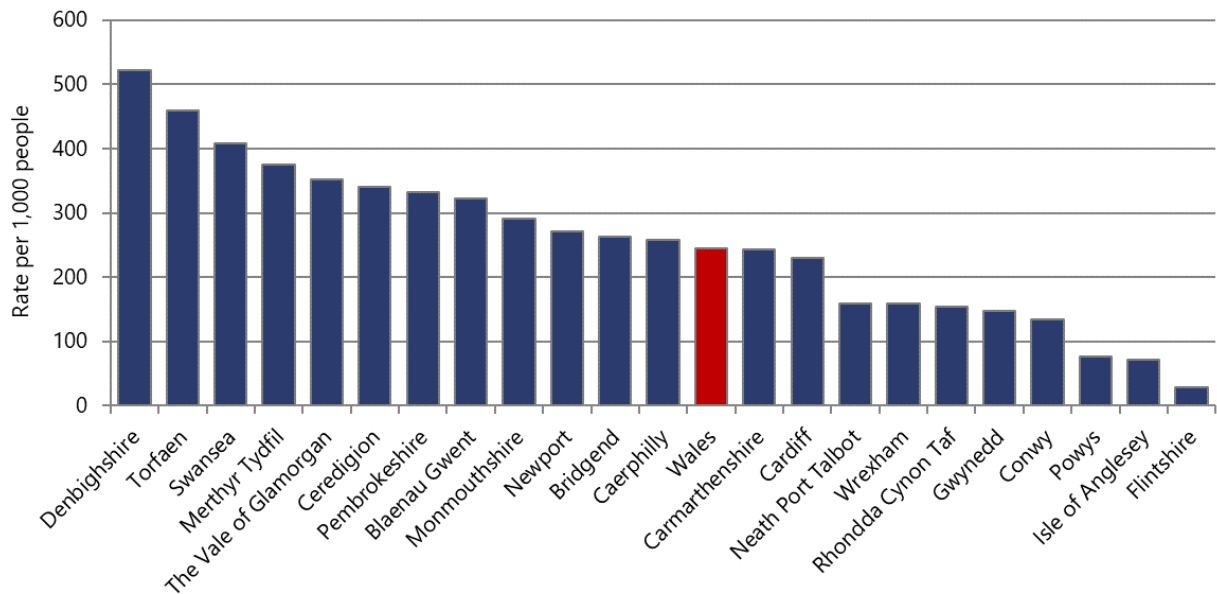
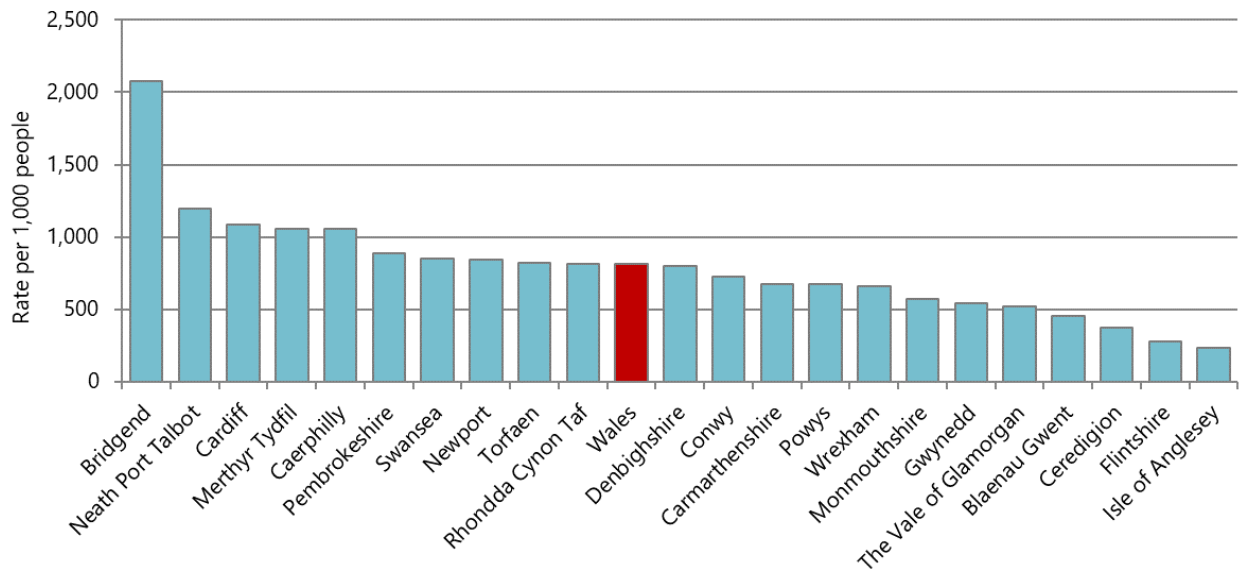


Figure 11 shows that the rate of free public swims per 1,000 people aged 60 and over¹⁵ ranged from 231 on the Isle of Anglesey to 2,076 in Bridgend.

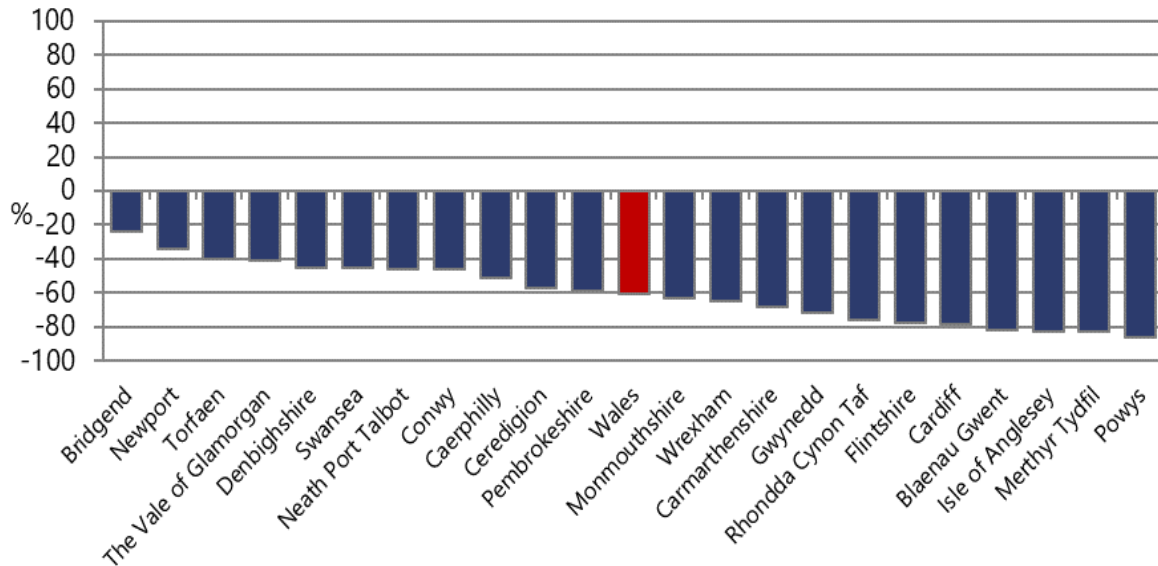
Figure 11: Rate of free public swims per 1,000 people aged 60 and over, by local authority, 2016-17¹⁵



¹⁵ Annual figures for Cardiff exclude period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

The percentage change in the rate of free public swims per 1,000 people aged 16 and under¹⁶ from 2013-14 to 2016-17 is shown in **Figure 12**. The highest percentage decrease between these years was in Powys (87%), and the lowest percentage decrease was in Bridgend (24%). Overall, the rate for Wales¹⁷ decreased by 61% over the same three year period.

Figure 12: Percentage change in the rate of free public swims per 1,000 people aged 16 and under, by local authority, 2013-14 to 2016-17¹⁶

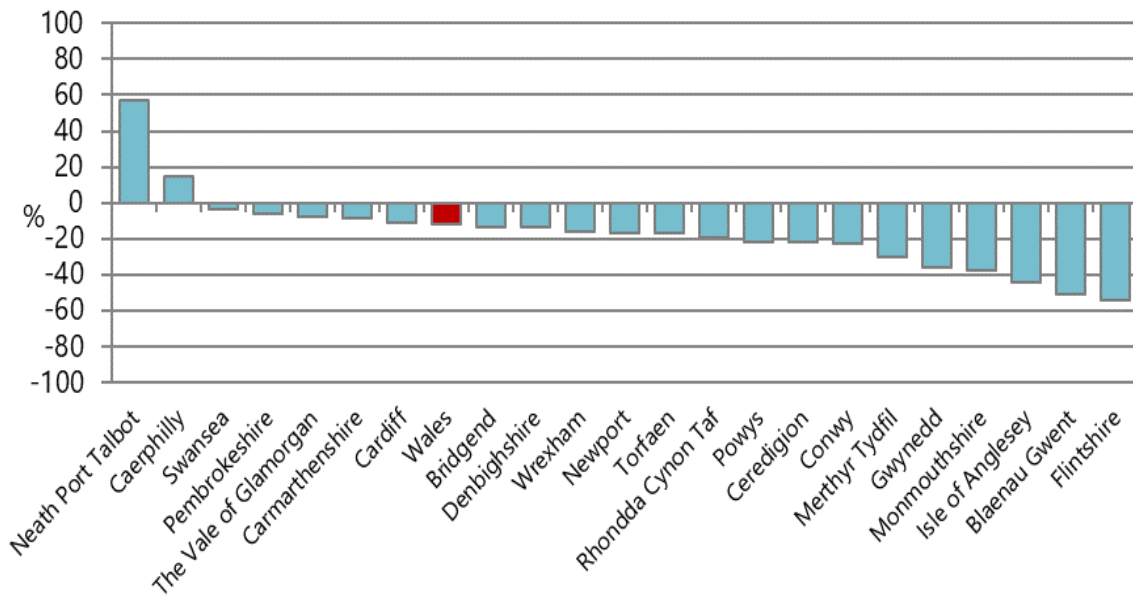


For people aged 60 and over the percentage change in the rate of free public swims per 1,000 people¹⁶ from 2013-14 to 2016-17 is shown in **Figure 13**. The highest percentage decrease between these years was in Flintshire (54%), and the highest percentage increase was in Neath Port Talbot (57%). Overall, the rate for Wales¹⁷ decreased by 12% over the same period.

¹⁶ Both Cardiff and Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

¹⁷ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Figure 13: Percentage change in the rate of free public swims per 1,000 people aged 60 and over, by local authority, 2013-14 to 2016-17¹⁸



¹⁸ Both Cardiff and Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Free structured activities in Wales

The number of people aged 16 and under participating in free structured activities¹⁹ peaked in 2009-10 at 94,000, while for those aged 60 and over, 2013-14 saw a peak of 105,000. **2016-17 saw the numbers for both age groups decline for a third consecutive year.** 2016-17 saw the number of people aged 16 and under participating in free structured activities fall by 19% to 47,000 and the number of people aged 60 and over participating fall by 9% to 73,000 as shown in **Figure 14**.

Figure 14: Number of free structured activity participation in Wales¹⁹

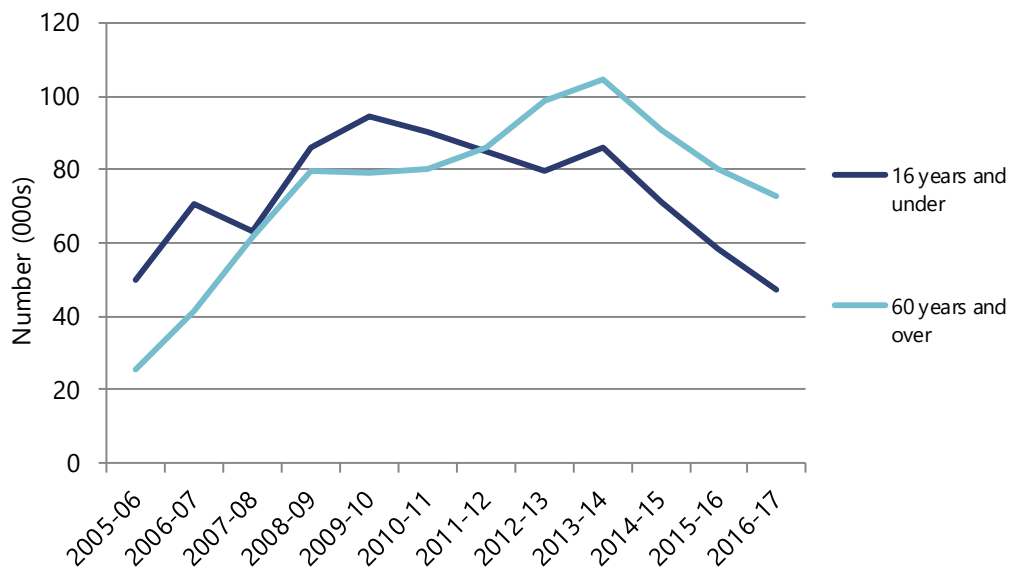
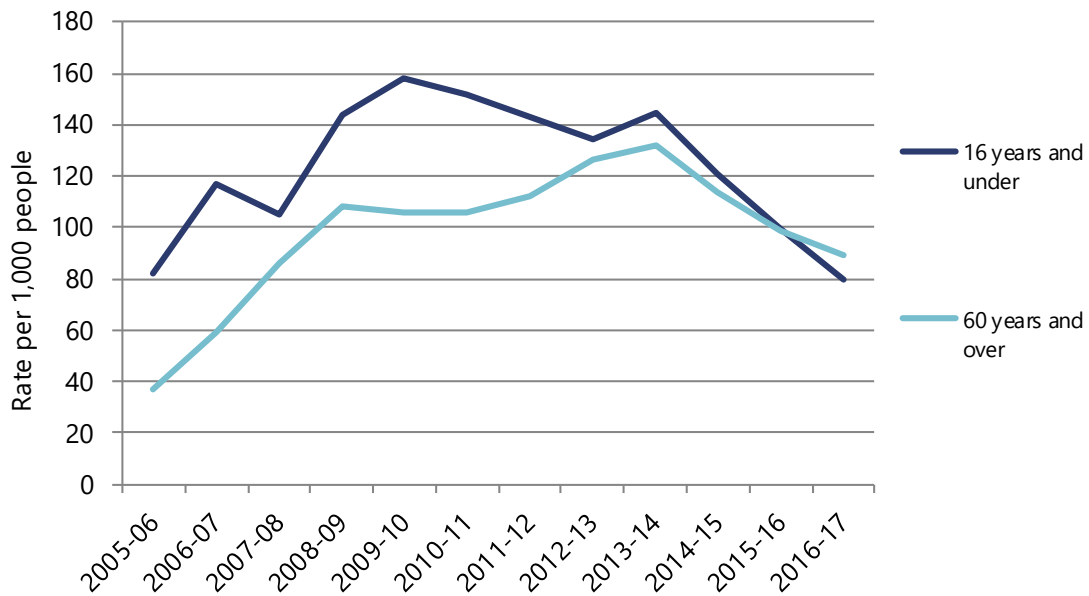


Figure 15 shows that the rate of participation in free structured activities per 1,000 people¹⁹ has followed a similar pattern since 2005-06, with the rate of those aged 16 and under being consistently higher than the participation rate of those aged 60 or over. However, in 2016-17, for the second consecutive year, the rate of participation in free structured activities per 1,000 people for those aged 16 and under is below the participation rate of those aged 60 or over. **Between 2015-16 and 2016-17, structured activity participation rates decreased to 80 per 1,000 people for those aged 16 and under and 89 per 1,000 people for those aged 60 and over.**

¹⁹ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Figure 15: Rate of free structured activity participation per 1,000 people, in Wales²⁰



In 2016-17, the rate of free structured activities per 1,000 people²¹ for the 16 and under age group was highest in Central South Wales²² at 118 per 1,000 people and lowest in South East Wales at 52 per 1,000 people, as seen in [Figure 16](#).

For the 60 and over age group, South East Wales was the highest at 129 per 1,000 people and the North, Mid & West and Central South Wales were 84, 76 and 83 per 1,000 people, respectively.

[Figure 17](#) shows, in pictorial form, the level of free structured activity participation for people aged 16 and under in Wales during 2016-17.

²⁰ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

²¹ Central South Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

²² For full details of the Sport Regions see Appendix 1 – Sport Wales regions.

Figure 16: Rate of free structured activity participation per 1,000 people, by region, 2016-17²³

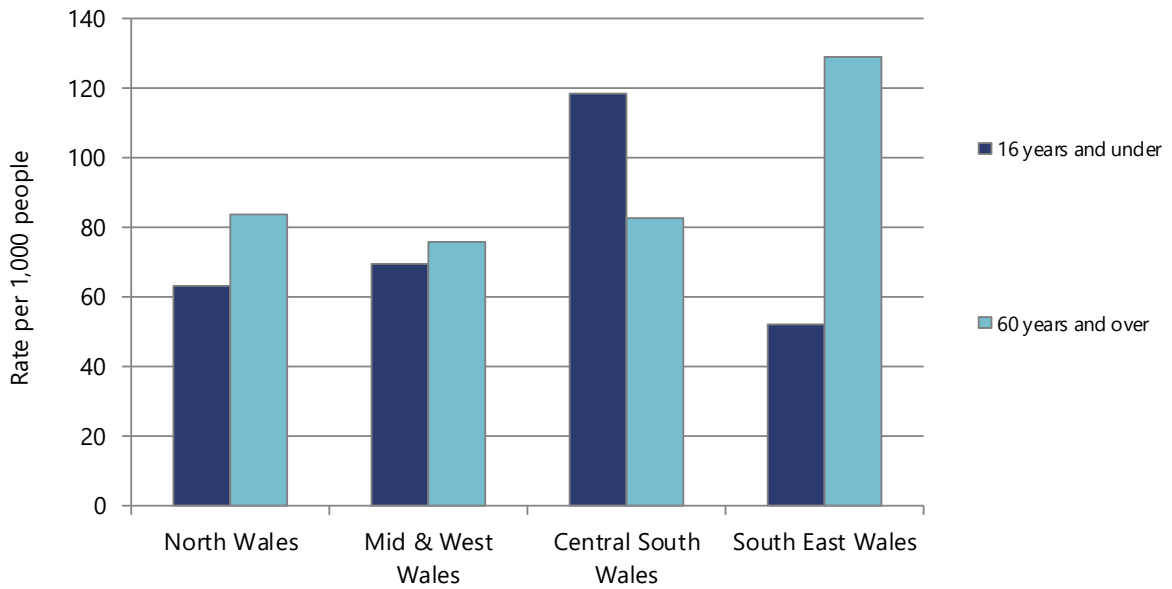
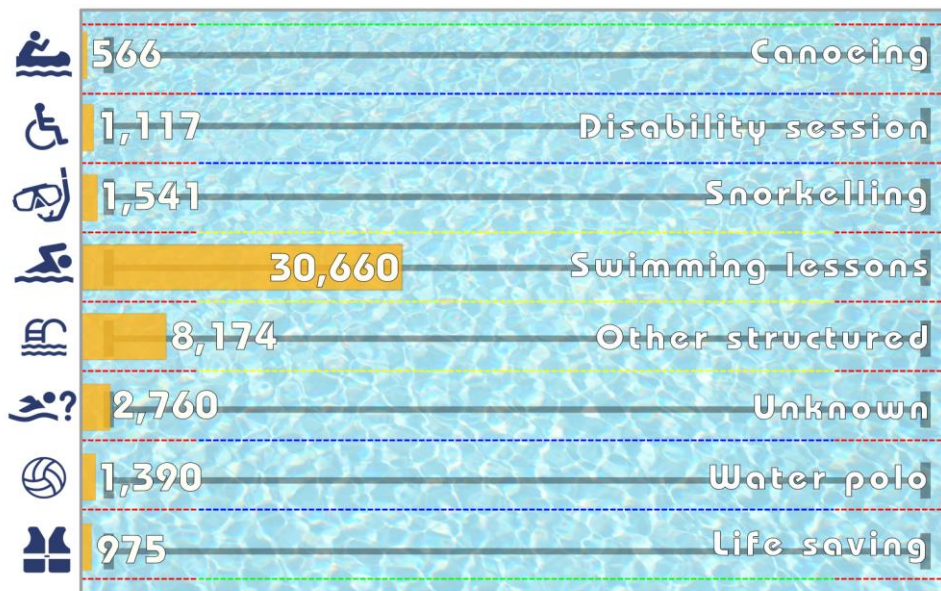


Figure 17: Number of free structured activity participation for people aged 16 and under in Wales, 2016-17²⁴

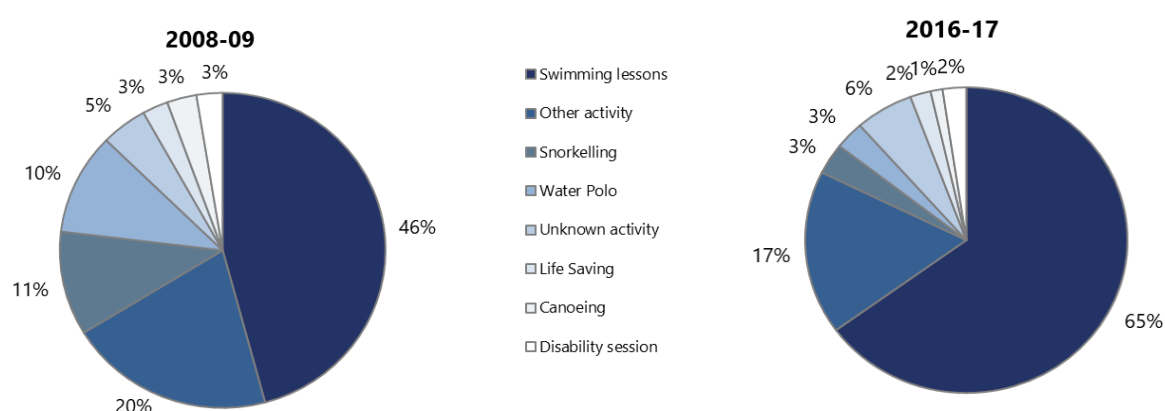


²³ Central South Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

²⁴ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Local authorities offer different types of free structured activity. Among the 16 and under age group, swimming lessons have had the highest level of participation since 2008-09. **Figure 18** shows that between 2008-09 and 2016-17, the proportion of structured activities that were 'swimming lessons' increased from 46% to 65%, 'snorkelling' decreased from 11% to 3% and 'water polo' decreased from 10% to 3%. The 'other' category includes activities such as diving, aqua scooters, paddle boats and water walkers etc. all of which have seen an increase since 2008-09 and are now 17% of participated structured activities for this age group. In 2016-17, authorities are unable to report a category for 6% of free structured activities, these have been captured as 'unknown activity'. Participation in 'disabled sessions' for people aged 16 and under has increased by 21% (1,099 to 1,117), between 2015-16 and 2016-17.

Figure 18: Percentage of free structured activities for people aged 16 and under, in Wales, 2008-09 and 2016-17²⁵



For the 60 and over age group, 'Aquafit/Therapy' has the highest level of participation and has done since 2008-09. Between 2008-09 and 2016-17, the participation proportions (shown in **Figure 19**) in Aquafit/Therapy increased from 52% to 67%. Between 2008-09 and 2015-16 swimming lessons decreased from 24% to 12%, 'other' activities decreased from 14% to 10% and 'disability sessions' increased from 3% to 6%. In 2016-17, authorities were unable to report the category of 6% of participation in free structured activities in this age group, these have been captured as 'unknown activity'.

²⁵ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Figure 19: Percentage of free structured activities for people aged 60 and over, in Wales, 2008-09 and 2016-17²⁶

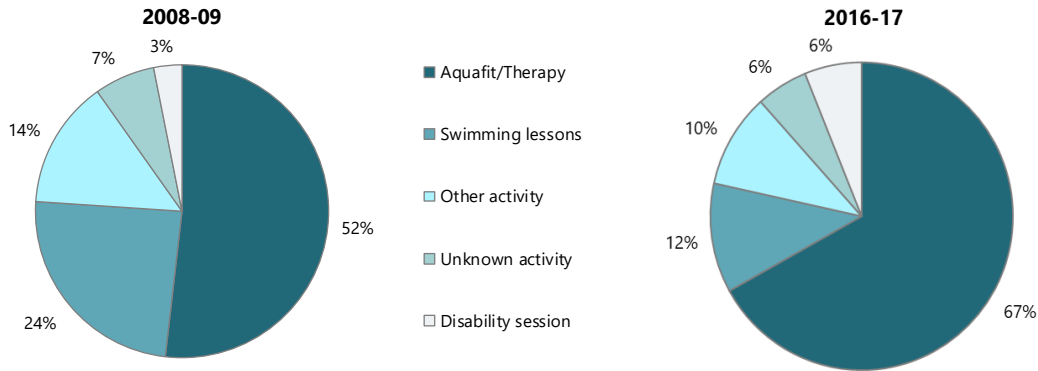
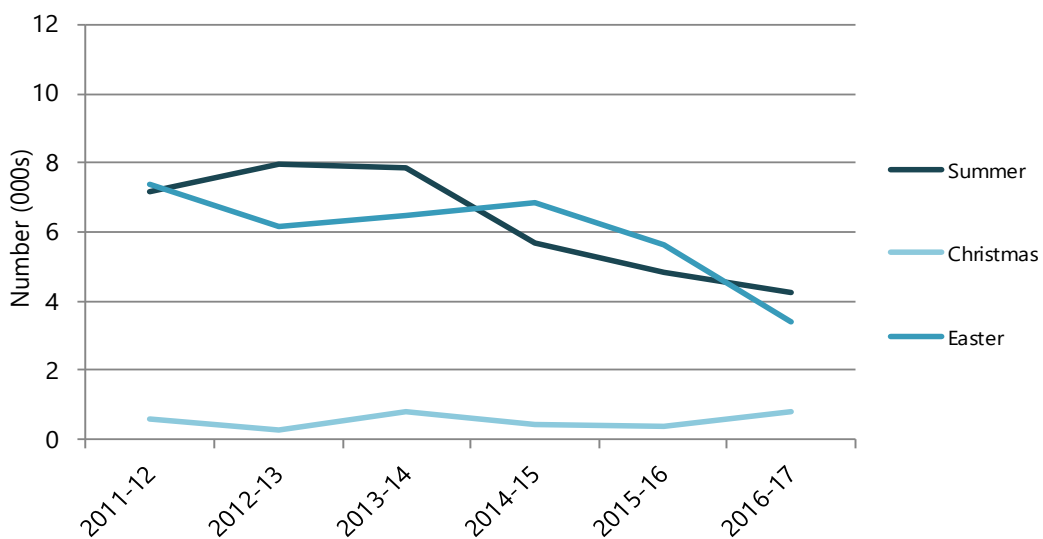


Figure 20 and **Figure 21** show the number of free structured activities per week for the 16 and under age group²⁶ from 2011-12 to 2016-17. For each of the last six years there has been fewer numbers participating in free structured activities during the Christmas holidays. This tends to be when pools close for refurbishments or generally there are fewer people visiting pools during the Christmas school holiday.

As shown in **Figure 20** while participation in free structured activities²⁶ for the 16 and under age group is usually highest in summer, 2016-17 saw a decrease to 26,000 (4,000 per week). Autumn half term and the Christmas holiday periods saw an increase in participation in structured activities, while all other holiday periods saw a fall in the number participating in structured activities per week, Whitsun saw the largest fall to 3,000 participants.

Figure 20: Number of free structured activities per week for people aged 16 and under, by holiday period, in Wales



²⁶ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Figure 21: Number of free structured activities per week for people aged 16 and under, by half term holiday period, in Wales²⁷

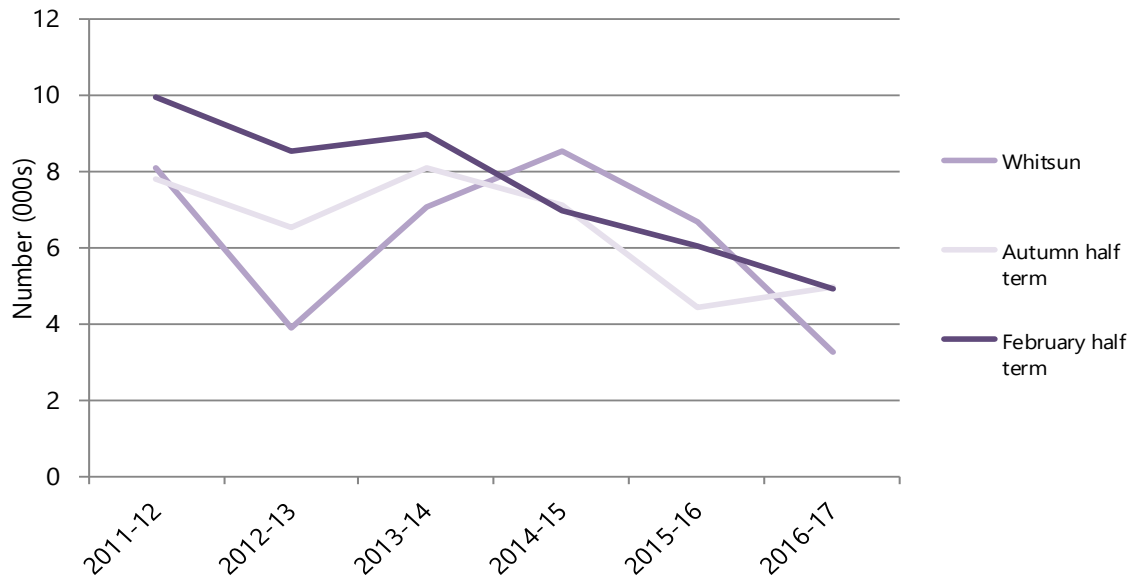
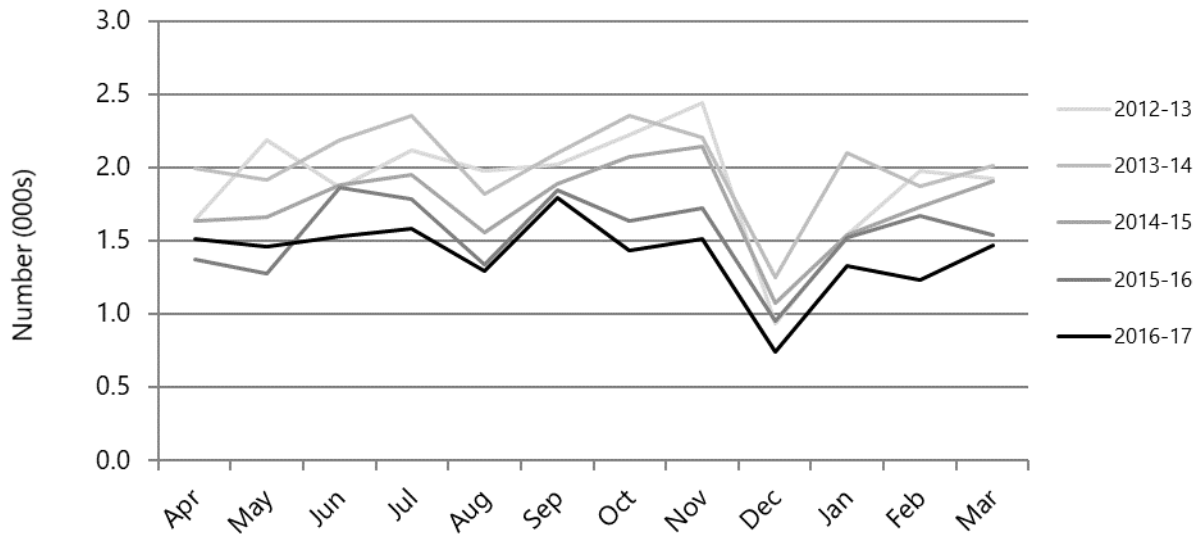


Figure 22 overlays the annual number of free structured activities per week²⁸ for people aged 60 and over by month to show the similar trends over the last five years i.e. peaks during September and troughs in December. 2016-17 saw a fall in the rate of free structured activity participation in October for the second consecutive year.

²⁷ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for February half term.

²⁸ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Figure 22: Number of free structured activities per week for people aged 60 and over, by period in Wales²⁹

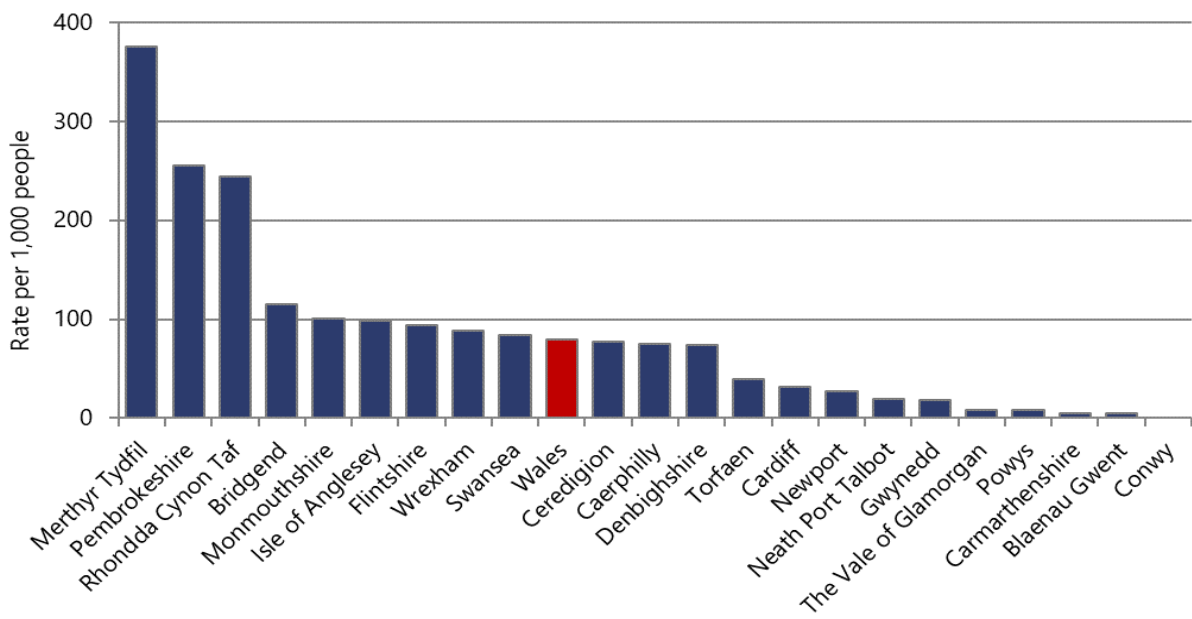


In 2016-17, **Figure 23** shows that for individual authorities the rate of free structured activities per 1,000 people aged 16 and under³⁰ ranged from 0 in Conwy to 376 in Merthyr Tydfil.

²⁹ Both Cardiff and Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

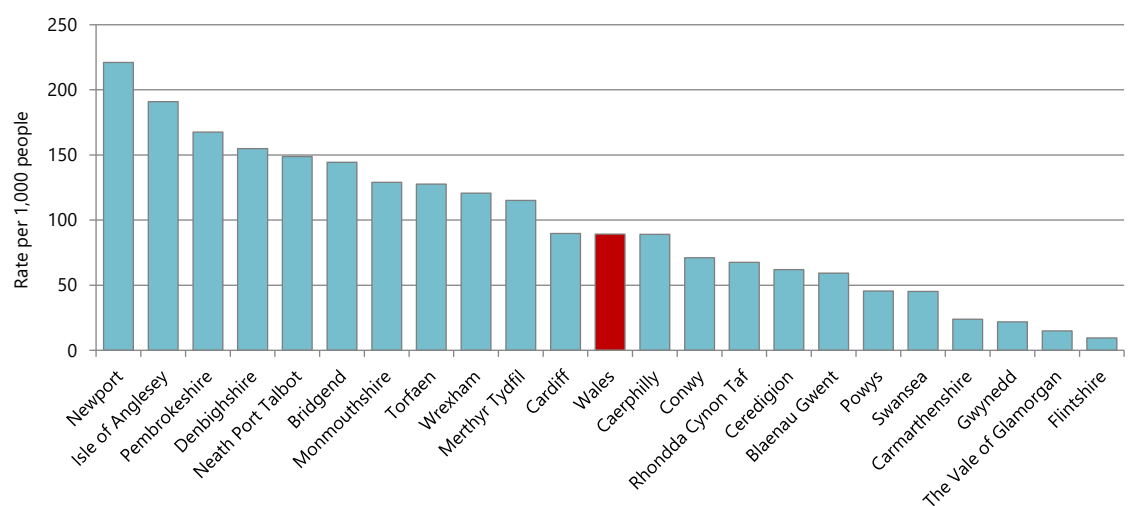
³⁰ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Figure 23: Rate of free structured activities per 1,000 people aged 16 and under, by authority, 2016-17³¹



For the 60 and over age group, **Figure 24** shows the rate of free structured activities per 1,000 people³¹ ranged from 9 in Flintshire to 221 in Newport.

Figure 24: Rate of free structured activities per 1,000 people aged 60 and over, by local authority, 2016-17³¹

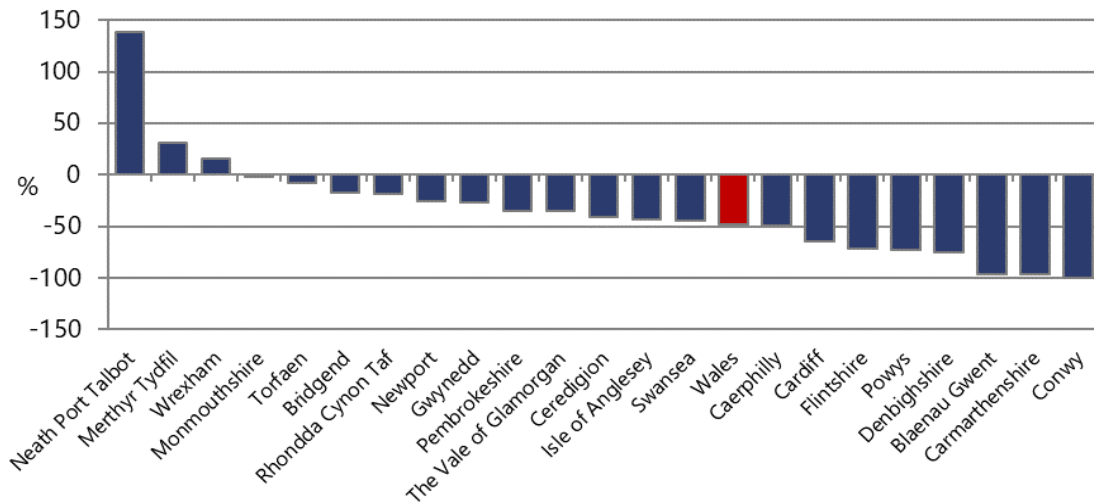


The percentage change in the rate of free structured activities per 1,000 people aged 16 and under from 2013-14 to 2016-17 is shown in **Figure 25**. The highest percentage decrease between these

³¹ Both Cardiff and Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

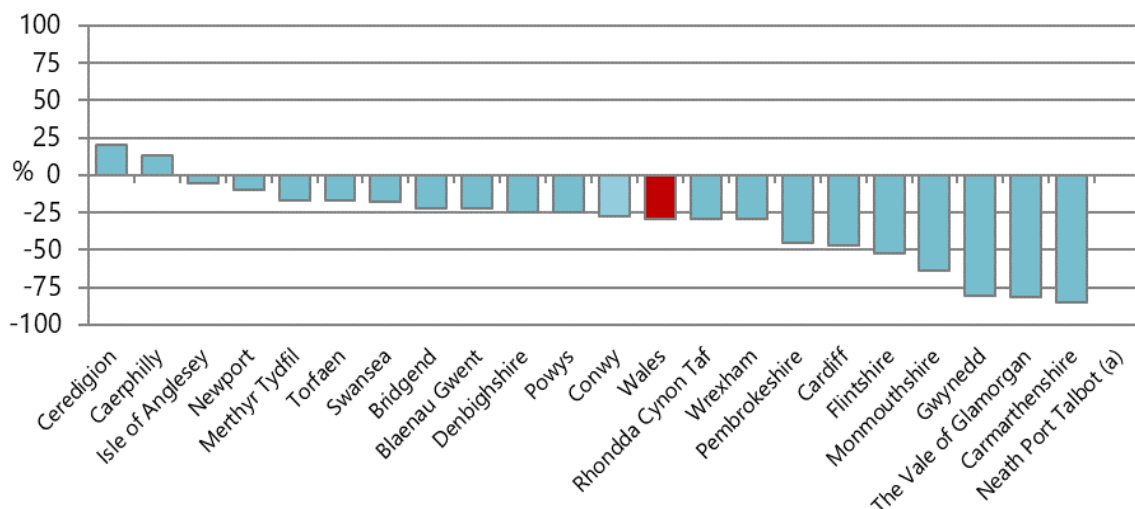
years was in Conwy (100%), and the highest percentage increase was in Neath Port Talbot (139%). Overall, the rate for Wales³² decreased by 48% over the same period.

Figure 25: Percentage change in the rate of free structured activities per 1,000 people aged 16 and under, by local authority, 2013-14 to 2016-17^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}



For the 60 and over age group the percentage change in the rate of free structured activities per 1,000 people³³ from 2013-14 to 2016-17 is shown in **Figure 26**. The highest percentage decrease between these years was in Carmarthenshire (85%), and the highest percentage increase was in Ceredigion (21%). Overall, the rate for Wales³² decreased by 29% over the same period.

Figure 26: Percentage change in the rate of free structured activities per 1,000 people aged 60 and over, by local authority, 2013-14 to 2016-17³³



(a) not available

³² Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

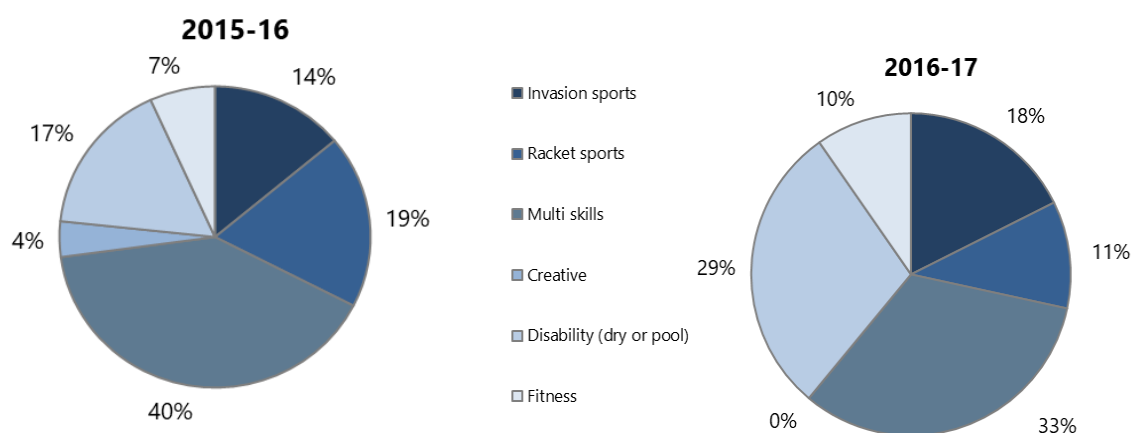
³³ Both Cardiff and Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

It should be noted that the difference in the change in the rate of participation in free structured activities could be down to the ability of the authority to record and report on the data rather than a true reflection of what is offered.

Free weekend activities in Wales

In 2010-11, when the minimum criteria changed for the 16 and under age group, local authorities were asked to report on the weekend activities which are delivered as part of the initiative. The criteria allowed authorities to deliver non-aquatic 'dry-side' activities. **Figure 27** shows that between 2015-16 and 2016-17, 'multi skills' decreased its proportion to 33%, while 'disability (dry or pool)' increased its proportion to 29%. The proportions of the activities in 2016-17 were 18% 'invasion sports'³⁴, 11% 'racket sports', 33% 'multi skills'³⁵, 0% 'creative'³⁶, 29% 'disability (dry or pool)' and 10% 'fitness' activities.

Figure 27: Percentage of 'dry-side' weekend activities for people aged 16 and under, in Wales, 2015-16 and 2016-17³⁷



³⁴ Invasion sports include basketball, football, rugby, hockey, netball, dodgeball, volleyball and lacrosse.

³⁵ Multi-skills activities include co-ordination, movement, thinking and body awareness.

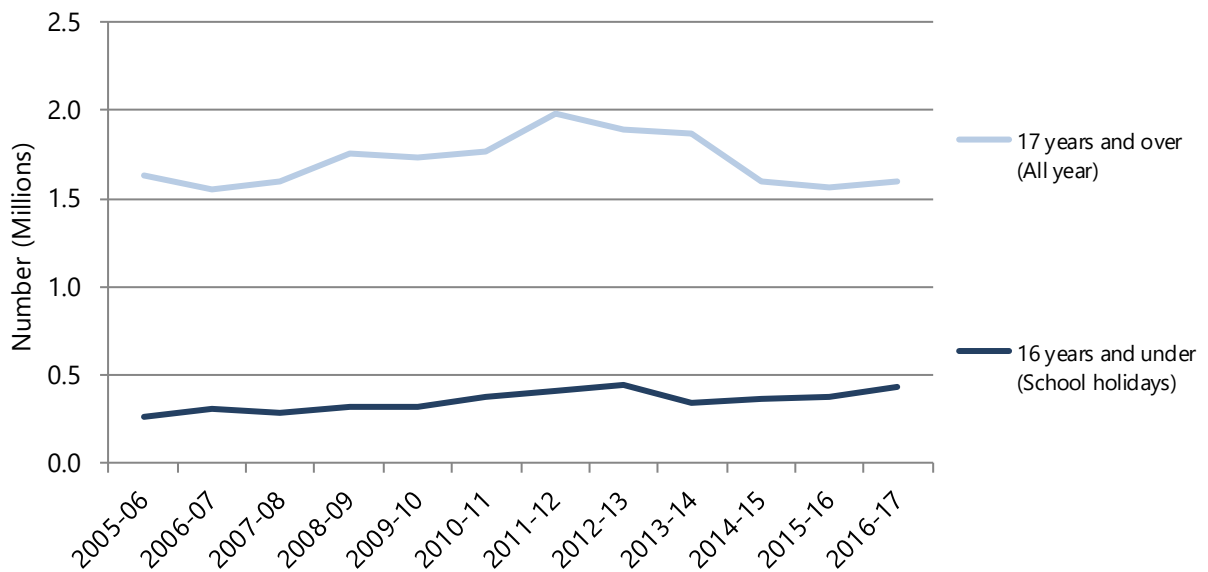
³⁶ Creative sports include gymnastics, dance, cheerleading, trampolining and street dance.

³⁷ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Paid swims in Wales

Paid swims are collected as general comparison to the free swimming data. **Figure 28** shows the trend over time for the number of paid swims³⁸ for both people aged 16 and under and 17 and over. Paid swims for the 17 and over is collected all year round and peaked in 2011-12 at almost 2 million; 2016-17 has seen an increase of 2% compared to 2015-16. Paid swims for the 16 and under age group peaked most recently in 2012-13 but have remained fairly steady, with 2016-17 seeing an increase of 16% on the previous year.

Figure 28: Number of paid swims in Wales³⁸



³⁸ Wales level data excludes data for Cardiff for period 6 (February/March) of the collection.

Appendix 1 – Sport Wales regions

For the purposes of this report the Welsh local authorities have been grouped into the following Sport Wales regions:

North Wales region - Isle of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham

Mid & West Wales region - Powys, Ceredigion, Pembrokeshire, Carmarthenshire, Swansea and Neath Port Talbot

Central South Wales region - Bridgend, The Vale of Glamorgan, Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taf and Merthyr Tydfil

South East Wales region - Caerphilly, Blaenau Gwent, Torfaen, Monmouthshire and Newport

Appendix 2 – Free Swimming minimum provision

The minimum provision criteria for the two age groups are:

16 years and under

1. 14 hours of free swimming per week per local authority area during school holidays of which a minimum of seven hours would be a structured session.
2. One dedicated structured session for disabled children per week per local authority area during all school holidays.
3. Two hours of free (swimming/dry-side/aquatic) activity per weekend per local authority.

60 years and over

1. Free swimming for adults over 60 during all public swimming sessions outside school holidays.
2. A minimum of one hour per day per local authority and a minimum of one hour per week per pool, will be dedicated to a free structured activity.

Appendix 3 – Pool closures and openings

Figure 29: Participating swimming pools and closed pools

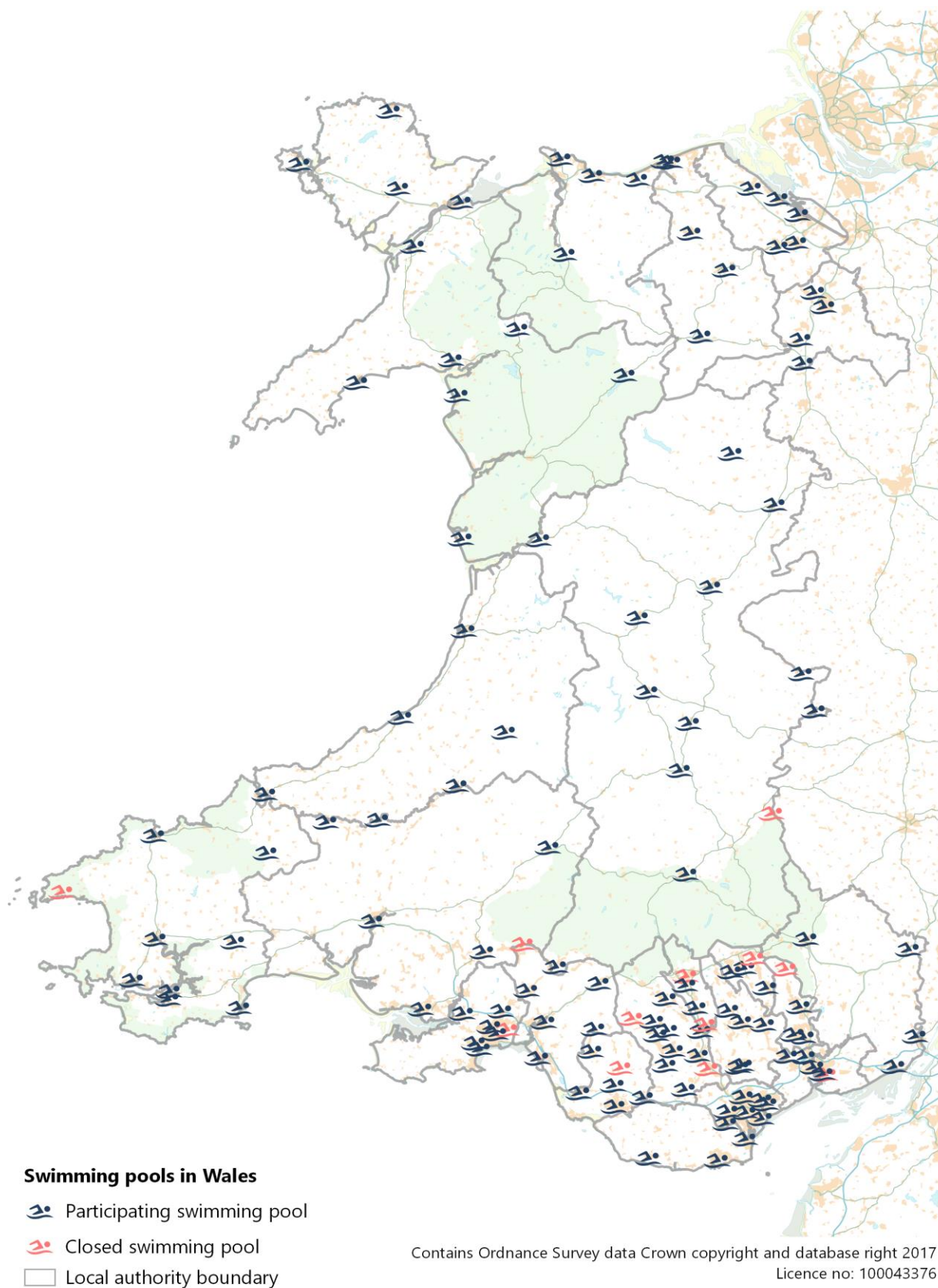


Table 1 shows a list of pools that have closed and when they closed since the start of the Free Swimming Initiative.

Table 1: Pool closures

Centre name	Where	Details
Llangeinor Pool	Bridgend	Closed in 2007
Blaenavon Pool	Torfaen	Closed in 2007
Edwardsville Pool	Merthyr Tydfil	Closed in 2008
Gwaunfarren Pool	Merthyr Tydfil	Closed in 2008
St David's Pool	Pembrokeshire	Closed in 2009
Afan Lido Leisure Complex	Neath Port Talbot	Closed in 2009
Treherbert Pool	Rhondda Cynon Taf	Closed in 2009
Lliswerry Leisure Centre	Newport	Closed in 2009
Brynamman Open Air Pool	Carmarthenshire	Closed in 2011
Cefn Hengoed Leisure Centre	Swansea	Closed in 2011
Hay Pool	Powys	Closed in 2013
Nantyglo Sports Centre	Blaenau Gwent	Closed in 2013
Nova Leisure Centre	Denbighshire	Closed in 2014
Plas Madoc Leisure Centre	Wrexham	Closed in 2014
Splott Pool	Cardiff	Closed in 2014
Cymmer Swimming Pool	Neath Port Talbot	Closed in 2015
Hawthorn Swimming Pool	Rhondda Cynon Taf	Closed in 2015

Table 2 shows a list of pools that have opened or re-opened following major refurbishment.

Table 2: Pool openings

Centre name	Where	Details
Buckley Leisure Centre	Flintshire	Opened in 2005
Fishguard Leisure Centre	Pembrokeshire	Opened in 2006
Ynysawdre Pool	Bridgend	Opened in 2008
Merthyr Tydfil Leisure Centre	Merthyr Tydfil	Opened in 2008
Llandudno Swimming Centre	Conwy	Re-opened following major refurbishment in 2008
Western Leisure Centre	Cardiff	Re-opened following major refurbishment in 2008
Aberavon Leisure and Fitness Centre (replacement for Afan Lido Leisure Complex)	Neath Port Talbot	Opened in 2016
Nova Leisure Centre	Denbighshire	Re-opened in 2016

Centre name	Where	Details
Cymmer Swimming Pool (renamed Afan Valley Swimming Pool)	Neath Port Talbot	Re-opened in 2016
Splott Swimming Pool	Cardiff	Re-opened in 2016

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