



A SUMMARY REPORT

# SPORTS VOLUNTEERING IN ENGLAND IN 2002

RESEARCH



Summary Report of the findings of the  
Sports Volunteering Study commissioned  
by Sport England from the Leisure Industries  
Research Centre, Sheffield, October 2003



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# FOREWORD

How often have we heard the phrase ‘volunteering is the lifeblood of English sport’? This research, commissioned by Sport England and carried out by the Leisure Industries Research Centre, provides the hard evidence to support this contention. It demonstrates the breadth and depth of support given by people across the country, who provide freely of their time and who rarely look for any reward beyond the personal satisfaction they get from the opportunities they provide for others to participate and achieve in sport.

Voluntary contribution to sport is of such a scale that when quantified it outstrips all other voluntary activity and dwarfs the amount of paid employment in sport. The research suggests, however, that we take this voluntary support for granted at our peril. Sport is dependent on volunteers but there are increasing pressures within society that threaten the sustainability of volunteering at the levels we currently enjoy.

Despite its scale and importance, volunteering in sport has not received the recognition and support from Government it deserves. It is the ‘poor relation’ of the voluntary sector and yet the benefit it brings both to those volunteering and to those who take part with their support should not be underestimated. Sport and active recreation with a revitalised voluntary sector can make increasingly vital contributions to the health of the nation, community regeneration and cohesion, community safety and educational attainment.

The evidence provided by this research makes the case loud and clear for volunteering in sport to be taken more seriously. The outcomes reinforce Sport England’s continuing commitment towards raising the profile of volunteering and working with Government and others to provide the kind of support it needs to help it flourish. Take the volunteers out of sport and we effectively take the sport out of England.

Patrick Carter  
CHAIR, SPORT ENGLAND

# HEADLINE FINDINGS

## volunteers are a hugely important resource to sport in England:

- there are **5,821,400 sports volunteers**, representing nearly 15% of the adult population;
- they contribute **1.2 billion hours** each year to sport, equivalent to 720,000 additional full time paid workers;
- the **value of the time contributed** by sports volunteers in England is estimated at over **£14 billion**;
- the volunteers **help to sustain** over **106,400 affiliated clubs** in England, serving over **8 million members**;
- the sporting sector makes the single biggest contribution to total volunteering in England, with **26% of all volunteers citing "sport" as their main area of interest**.

## sport in England is dependent on its volunteers, as the following quotes bring to life:

- *"It remains the bedrock of opportunity in many sports"* (Sheffield Research Team)
- *"Without volunteers there would not be so many choices for people to participate in sport"* (Young Volunteer)
- *"Without them all the activities we do would fail"* (Local Authority Sports Development Officer)
- *"Without volunteers, our clubs would not exist"* (Badminton Club Member)
- *"Without them we wouldn't survive, there wouldn't be any provision"* (Local Authority Officer)
- *"There is no economic substitute for volunteers in sport"* (Sheffield Research Team)

## however, they face a growing number of pressures:

- recruiting volunteers remains difficult for many sports, with many people not knowing what might be required of them as volunteers;
- retaining volunteers is increasingly difficult, and currently there is one "lapsed" volunteer for every two active volunteers;
- pressures from other commitments are squeezing the time available for volunteering at the same time as the workload is growing;
- new rules and regulations are bringing more pressures, especially linked to child protection and health and safety obligations;
- core volunteer roles are becoming more demanding and officials are being given less and less respect;
- changing expectations from sporting institutions, players and parents also translate into a need for a greater "professionalism" that matches other providers of sport;
- older volunteers dominate the key roles, which may constrain opportunities for younger volunteers.





**as a result the Study concludes that voluntary sports clubs need more support from central and local government agencies.**

**for the future, the priorities should be:**

- to consult with voluntary sports organisations **to agree ways to facilitate organisational change** and development without imposing additional burdens on already hard-pressed volunteers;
- to recognise that **the way in which "professionalisation" is promoted** needs to be varied, simple and sensitive to the different cultures in clubs;
- to promote the advantages of a **volunteer co-ordinator** and volunteer strategies;
- for better-organised clubs, to **extend the services provided by external agencies to include assistance in development initiatives**, such as support for juniors, women, veterans, new events, school-club links and other community partnerships;
- to accept that **any assistance is screened to ensure it is couched in an appropriate language** that is more compatible with informal, social organisations, than with businesses;
- to recognise that **the payment of staff** for previously voluntary roles needs to be handled with caution, because it may reduce the morale and recruitment of volunteers;
- to ensure that **key volunteers are not overloaded by the need to meet the latest requirements** from the Government, sporting agencies or their national governing bodies, otherwise their capacity to respond to assistance will continue to be severely constrained.

**the professional sports development sector must make the most of the volunteer ethos in English sport without at the same time stifling its contribution and alienating its volunteers, young and old. Volunteers need to be better supported to enable them to continue to contribute time and effort.**

## INTRODUCTION

**1.** *“The combined picture of volunteering demonstrates the extent and depth of volunteering for sport in England. It remains the bedrock of opportunity in many sports”.* These are the concluding comments of the Research Team in their Full Report on Sports Volunteering in England in 2002<sup>1</sup>.

**2.** And yet the current work being carried out by The Henley Centre<sup>2</sup> on behalf of sport in England identifies the role of “volunteers and professionals”, and their inter-relationship, as one of the seven key themes that may drive *down* future participation rates unless action is taken. The Henley analysis notes that volunteers are facing increasing burdens driven by other forces in society. The trend towards a more litigious society has meant that volunteers need to have access to insurance, there are concerns about child safety legislation, and the bureaucracy faced by volunteers is increasing. The number of volunteers could decline in the face of these pressures. Further, the Henley analysis shows some indicative evidence that the 18-30 generation may be more reluctant than their predecessors to contribute their time to helping run clubs and their facilities.



**3.** The detailed research findings presented in this Summary Report could not, therefore, be more timely. It brings us up-to-date with the scale and value of volunteering, the characteristics of those people who volunteer, and the issues and challenges that they face. It looks at how the next generation of volunteers might see things in the future and how new approaches might be needed to support volunteers to get the maximum benefits for sport.

**4.** Moreover, its conclusions point us towards the future in a positive manner. If the Henley analysis is correct, getting sports volunteering “right” will be one of the most important challenges for English sport over the next 10 years. Where better to begin than with a clear picture of the present.



# AIMS AND METHODS OF THE RESEARCH

**5.** The Research Team<sup>3</sup> was asked to address five basic aims:

- to quantify the contribution made to English sport by volunteers, building on previous research carried out in 1995 (although for methodological reasons it has been accepted that direct comparisons and measures of 'increase' or 'decrease' between the two surveys would not be possible);
- to identify the nature of volunteering in sport in England and the challenges faced by volunteers and volunteer managers;
- to identify and evaluate the support provided to sports volunteers and volunteer managers;
- to identify the benefits associated with sports volunteering;
- and, in particular, to address the issues faced by young volunteers.

**6.** The investigation covered over 100 sports in England and a common definition of volunteering is employed throughout the work, although two important sub-groups are recognised:

"Volunteering" in sport is defined as *individual volunteers helping others in sport and receiving either no remuneration or only expenses*. This includes those volunteering for organisations (*formal volunteers*) and those helping others in sport, but not through organisations (*informal volunteers*). However, it does not include *time spent travelling*, which may represent significant additional time inputs.

**7.** Four primary research methods were used to achieve the specific research objectives that are set out in Appendix 2:

- questions on volunteering in sport were included in a national Omnibus survey, conducted by BMRB International with 8,458 adults selected to be representative of the national population;
- 1,005 telephone interviews were carried out with a cross-section of representatives from national governing bodies of sport (NGBs), regional/county sports associations, sports clubs, schools, universities and colleges, major sports event teams, youth organisations, disability organisations and local authorities;
- 72 focus groups were carried out in sports clubs with existing volunteers (51 groups, 308 respondents) and with young people (21 groups, 94 respondents) representing 12 major sports, selected because they were among the most important sports for volunteering<sup>4</sup>. Half the young people attending were volunteers, the other half were club members;
- additional questionnaire surveys were completed with the 308 sports volunteers and 94 young people in the focus groups, administered before the qualitative discussions.



<sup>3</sup>Details of the membership of the Research Team are given in Appendix 1

<sup>4</sup>The 12 sports were athletics, badminton, bowls, cricket, football, gymnastics, hockey, netball, rugby union, sailing, swimming and tennis

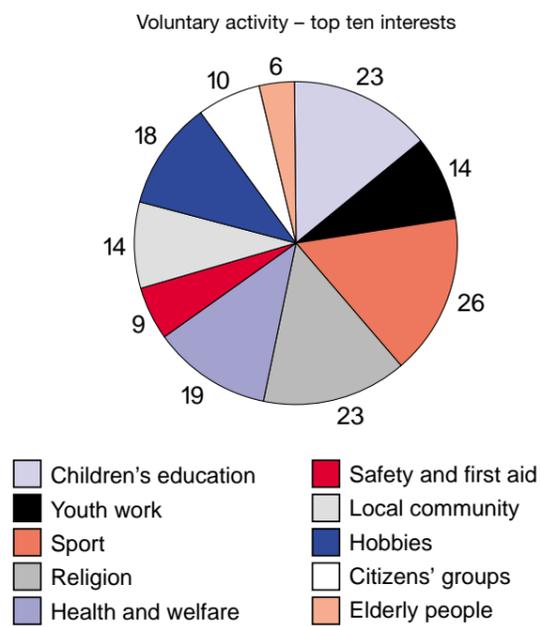
# THE SCALE OF SPORTS VOLUNTEERING IN ENGLAND IN 2002

8. Results from the national population survey show that 14.8% of adults aged over 16 in England volunteered for sport in 2002, each contributing an average of just under 208 hours in the year (approximately 4 hours each week). This is broadly in line with the National Surveys of Volunteering in Great Britain<sup>5</sup> in 1991 and in 1997 that both recorded 13% of adults volunteering in sport, indicating that the levels of volunteering have remained reasonably consistent throughout the past decade.

9. This 14.8% figures translates to nationally estimated figures of:

- **5,821,400** volunteers contributing to sport in England;
- **1,209,566,500** hours of sports volunteering in the year, which equates to 720,000 additional full time equivalent, paid workers in sport. This compares with the “paid” labour force in sport in England in 2002 of about 400,000 full time equivalent workers<sup>6</sup>;
- the value of the time contributed by sports volunteers in England is estimated at over £14 billion (£14,139,832,000), based on the average hourly earnings for all industries for 2002 of £11.69. This is the value of the hypothetical cost of replacing all the sports volunteers with paid labour. This £14 billion is a sum of money which could not be found from alternative sources and the Research Team conclude that “there is no economic substitute for volunteers in sport”;
- the volunteers help to sustain over **106,400** affiliated clubs in England, serving over **8 million** members.

**FIGURE 1**  
Distribution of voluntary activity in 1997



Source: 1997 National Survey of Volunteering.  
Percent of all people interviewed (709)

10. In addition, the sporting sector makes the single biggest contribution to total volunteering in England, with **26% of all volunteers** citing “sport” as their main area of interest (Figure 1). This figure is also likely to be an under-estimate, since “children’s education” and “youth work” interests are also likely to include elements of sports volunteering, as outlined in the paragraphs below.

11. The majority of sports volunteering is through formal organisations, but *informal volunteering*, helping friends and family, is a significant minority of sports volunteering, producing at least 22% of the total in the national population survey.

12. Sports clubs dominate formal volunteering in sport, with 75% of *formal volunteers* and over 80% of formal volunteer hours. Not surprisingly, the largest sports for volunteering include those that are large in participation. Football dominates in both the number of volunteers and the hours of volunteering, with over 400,000 volunteers and nearly 100 million volunteer hours contributed each year. Cricket is second on both measures, but only generates 28 million hours.

13. However, some sports that are not among the largest in participation are large in terms of their volunteer support base, with notable examples being competitive swimming and motor racing in terms of the number of volunteers, and shooting in terms of the volunteer hours. (Table 1).

<sup>5</sup>The 1997 National Survey of Volunteering. Institute of Volunteering Research, 1998

<sup>6</sup>The value of the Sports Economy in England. Final Report. Sport England, 2003

**TABLE 1****Ten largest sports for volunteers and volunteering hours**

	Volunteers (000s)		Hours per year (millions)
Football	431	Football	96
Cricket	238	Cricket	28
Bowls	135	Bowls	15
Rugby Union	82	Rugby Union	12
Swimming	61	Swimming	7
Motor Racing	61	Shooting	6
Hockey	57	Athletics	4.5
Golf	43	Motorcycling	4.5
Equestrian	40	Sailing	4.4
Athletics	30	Hockey	4.4

Source: national aggregation based on telephone interviews



**14.** Outside of formal sports clubs, other formal volunteering contributions in sport are made in schools, universities, young person's organisations, disability organisations, and supporting major sports events.

**15.** The majority of volunteers and hours contributed to **sport in schools** are at the primary school level. However, some schools are reporting an increasing difficulty, or even disinclination, in recruiting volunteers because of child protection legislation and the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) procedures that now have to be undertaken. **Universities** feature prominently in young people's voluntary contribution to sport, with an average of 47 voluntary sports clubs and 157 volunteers per university. However, this culture of volunteering in sport in English Universities is not present at Further Education colleges where there are very few volunteers in sport.

**16.** The Scouts and Guides are the largest **young person's organisations** in terms of volunteering for sport. However, the estimates of volunteering for sport in these organisations must be treated with care because the programmes of activity, although they include sport, are much broader than sport and are very variable. Estimates of sports volunteering in **disability organisations** are dominated by two organisations: 'Riding for the Disabled', and 'Mencap Gateway', although in the case of the latter the estimates must again be treated with care because sport is typically only an element in a much broader programme.

**17.** One event, the Commonwealth Games, dominated sports volunteering at **major events** hosted in England in 2002. In total it is estimated that 10,500 volunteers contributed a total of 1,260,000 hours at these Games alone. This represents 40% of the volunteers and over 80% of the hours of volunteering across 15 major events hosted in England. At the other end of the scale, the World Tchoukball Championship involved just 25 volunteers. However, to put the scale of total volunteering at major events into perspective, despite its size and importance the Commonwealth Games involved just 0.2% of the total number of volunteers in sport in England in 2002.

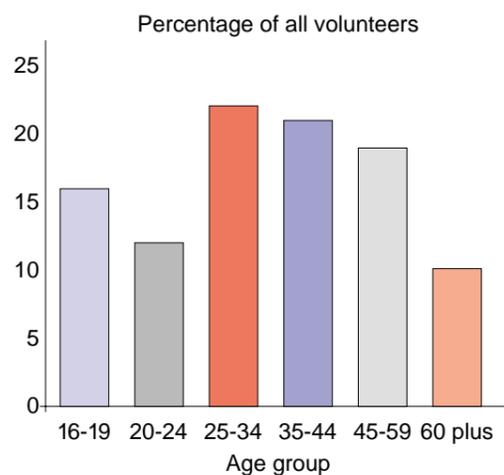
# THE PROFILE OF SPORTS VOLUNTEERS

## Adult volunteering

**18.** The profile of sports volunteers shows that twice as many men volunteer in sport as women. The age group 35-59 years provides 40% of sports volunteers. Despite concerns as to their motivation, young adults aged 16-24 years provide 28% of all sports volunteers. (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2**

### Age of sports volunteers



Source: BMRB national population survey, 2001

**19.** Most of the people who volunteer do so alongside other commitments, with 70% of sports volunteers being in some form of paid employment and 15% also volunteering for non-sporting causes or organisations. This could go some way to explaining why 43% of all volunteers record an average of less than one hour a week volunteering. Their contribution, whilst valuable in total, is fairly peripheral to the overall activities of sports organisations. However, amongst those committing more of their time there is also a clear pattern of "loyalty" with, for example, over 40% of the club volunteers giving their support to the same club for 10 years or more.



**20.** Despite there being a significant number of younger volunteers generally in sports clubs, it is the older volunteers who dominate the key roles. The longevity of these key volunteers provides continuity and experience to their roles, but it may also constrain opportunities for younger volunteers. As one young tennis player put it "*older people have been here for years and they don't think it's right that younger people should come in... If we wanted to get on the committee I don't think that would ever be on*"

**21.** Giving some credence to the view that people are "dropping out" of volunteering is the fact that seven per cent of the adult population surveyed had volunteered for sport in the past, but were no longer involved on a voluntary basis. This represents one "lapsed" volunteer for every two current volunteers. The reasons for stopping were varied, but the principal ones given were lack of time, age and conflicting demands from family and paid work. These factors between them account for approximately seven out of every 10 lapsed volunteers in sport.

**22.** In contrast, just over four per cent of the adult population surveyed who were not currently volunteering for sport had considered doing so. This would equate to over 1.5 million potential volunteers. Again the most common reason given for deciding not to volunteer was the lack of time. However, it is an indication of a lost opportunity for sport that 14% of these potential volunteers were "lost" either because they did not know about how to volunteer, or because no one had ever asked them.

### Young people and volunteering

**23.** A total of 94 young people aged 16 to 24 years, from 12 major sports, participated in the focus groups and completed questionnaires. Half already volunteered for their club, the other half might be seen as those with the most potential to volunteer for their club: the young members.

**24.** As mentioned earlier, most young volunteers typically contribute to minor activities such as helping to run events (e.g. marshalling), fundraising and helping with refreshments. Another common contribution in some sports is assisting with junior coaching or 'sports leadership', but in a university setting young volunteers take on a wider variety of normal "club volunteering" functions, such as Chair, Treasurer, Secretary and so on.

**25.** The extent of young people's volunteering can vary considerably, both between sports and within sports. A lower proportion of young volunteers (22%) than young members (35%) also volunteer for other organisations, which may suggest that a reason for not volunteering at their sports club for some young members is that they are already volunteering elsewhere.



**26.** There is also some evidence that the young members see volunteering only in the context of the major, official positions within the club and not as the casual help that they are perhaps more willing to provide. Many young people believe that to volunteer requires regular and considerable commitment in a recognised role. This is a belief that may act as a barrier to volunteering by this age group, because these more committed roles are often seen as relevant only to older volunteers. Again, one young yachtsman summarised this common view. *"No one explains what they've got to do, so they just think 'Oh no, its going to be really difficult, they're going to expect so much from me.'"*

**27.** However, the young people largely reflect their adult counterparts when it comes to reasons for not volunteering. The common view was that young people were prevented from volunteering because they are "too busy" (51%), including references to conflicts between volunteering and participating, and also with their education and their employment (e.g. part-time jobs). Some felt that because they *knew* there was a shortage of volunteers, there was a greater reluctance to volunteer. It was perceived as too onerous, a need for a long-term commitment and too time consuming. However, as with the adults, 43% said that they hadn't been asked and that they were not aware of volunteering opportunities.

### Sports volunteers' motivations and management solutions

**28.** The most commonly identified motivations for current volunteering amongst adults are intrinsic (e.g. a desire for social benefits; wanting to put something back into the club) and extrinsic (e.g. wanting to help as a parent). The most common motivations for young volunteers are personal and altruistic (e.g. interested, helping club needs) with material motivations (e.g. future work) and social reasons (e.g. making friends) less common. All of these motivations are an important context against which to position the challenges faced by volunteers and potential management solutions. It could be argued that motivations such as friendships and enjoyment are not as compatible with pressures to become better organised as motivations such as parental interest and wanting the club to do well.

**29.** One theme that emerges from the research is the different perceptions of the 'degree of formality' with which the management of volunteers should be conducted. Some volunteers only associate the term 'management' with paid work, and look on their volunteering as helping out, with limited organisation of this help required. As one volunteer put it, *"you've got to make it fun and not a chore...not something you feel you've got to do"*



**30.** Other volunteers accept a more managerial mode of operation, possibly related to gaining external funds. These differing perceptions relate directly to the challenges and motivations of volunteers. In particular, the importance of shared enthusiasm and social benefits from volunteering can militate against a 'managerialist' approach, whilst motivations concerned with helping a club improve or 'giving something back' are more compatible with formal approaches to volunteer management.

**31.** Within many of the focus group clubs, there is a real pride in their 'informality' in the organisation of volunteers. This philosophy leads to a co-operative, intuitive system that has evolved with few formal procedures. There is an implicit objective to minimise bureaucracy and an explicit, almost ideological, objection to the concept of 'management' in connection with volunteers. This informal system of management does not necessarily mean that it is ineffective, although one or two clubs have suggested that greater formality would be good for them.

**32.** However, several clubs in the focus groups acknowledged more readily that the lack of formality in volunteer management was a weakness. This was expressed in various ways, including:

- poor communication;
- weak succession planning for key posts;
- the deterrence to potential volunteers of the open ended and extensive commitment and skill of long time volunteers;
- poor awareness of the potential to volunteer among members;
- and weak conversion of any expressions of interest in volunteering into actual volunteering.



**33.** In other clubs in the focus groups there were clear signs of much greater 'formality' in the organisation of volunteers at club level. These aspects included:

- formal audits of members' willingness to volunteer;
- mentoring of volunteers;
- clear job descriptions;
- delegation and line management;
- a disciplinary code to remove errant volunteers from posts;
- training opportunities for administrators;
- funding for training and qualifications (usually for coaching and officials);
- and, at three clubs and two disability organisations, a volunteer co-ordinator.

**34.** The degree of 'management' of young volunteers was as varied as management in clubs generally. Those less 'managed' felt comfortable with the hands-off culture. They felt that the way volunteers were organised in their clubs was flexible, relaxed, social and not too pressured. However, as with the older volunteers interviewed, young people identified a range of measures by which the management of young volunteers could be improved, most of which involved greater formalisation. These include planning, task rotation, better briefing/training, shadowing by younger volunteers, job descriptions, and a volunteer co-ordinator.

**35.** Many of the suggestions for improving the management of volunteers in the focus group clubs also recognised such formal processes. To these suggestions can be added a straightforward one - a more systematic method of asking new (or existing) members and parents to volunteer. As already noted, in both the national population survey and the young person's research a significant minority of potential volunteers simply did not get asked to help.

**36.** Despite these forward-looking suggestions, several clubs expressed reservations about increasing formalisation in the management of volunteers. Partly this reflects one of the key findings from the population survey that sports volunteers are nearly always "multi-taskers". On average, they have fulfilled a staggering 4.65 different voluntary roles in the previous year. Partly this reflects the decreasing number of volunteers willing to take on tasks. One badminton club member commented that "*jobs tend to get amalgamated as you get fewer and fewer volunteers*".

**37.** However, many clubs felt that multi-tasking was a good thing and the fear amongst some of these clubs was that future management regimes could be too structured, not only reducing the opportunities for this multi-tasking, but also leading to more paperwork and professionalisation. In the view of these clubs, 'volunteering' was in danger of becoming more like paid work, but without the pay.



### The benefits from volunteering

**38.** Volunteering has benefits for three different sets of people: the volunteers themselves, the organisations they help, and the communities they volunteer in.

**39.** For **individual club volunteers**, it is the 'social benefits' that people get from volunteering that are dominant, with the related concept of 'enjoyment' being the second most cited benefit. These top two benefits for individual volunteers are important to acknowledge in the context of increasing pressures on volunteers in sports organisations to 'perform' more professionally in their voluntary roles. Greater efficiency in voluntary sports organisations should not threaten the primary motivations of the core volunteers running most of these organisations. Another worry here is that players are showing less and less respect for officials and the enjoyment is going out of refereeing, umpiring and judging. One hockey club commented "umpiring is a very unloved position and over the last three years it has got a lot worse... umpires don't get the camaraderie, no one talks to them afterwards"



**40.** Enjoyment is closely followed by a set of satisfactions that are more altruistic in nature, including satisfaction from 'giving something back' (a common phrase used by volunteers which we have mentioned earlier), from helping the club do well and from keeping the club going. As noted above, these satisfactions may be more compatible with developments in the efficiency of voluntary organisations, but they also interact with the social and enjoyment benefits. People very seldom "volunteer" for any one reason alone.

**41.** For young people the benefits from volunteering differ in two key respects from adult volunteers. First, young people are much more likely to acknowledge the functional benefit of volunteering to their CVs and qualifications. Second, volunteering can help young people gain a degree of empowerment and recognition.

**42.** The benefits of **volunteering to their clubs** perceived by both adult volunteers and young people are very straightforward. The main response emphasises the obvious but important point that without volunteers, clubs would not exist. Some focus groups perceptively linked volunteering with participation, either through the lower costs that translate to reasonable membership fees, or through the attraction of young people to a club that had young volunteers.

**43.** The benefits to **the local community** most commonly cited by club volunteers are similar to those claimed to represent the value of sport to society as a whole. Most commonly mentioned was the obvious, but again important point that without volunteers there would not be so many opportunities for people to participate in sport. The opportunities for young people to participate were felt to be particularly important to local communities, and this is often connected with the second most commonly cited benefit: keeping kids off the streets.

**44.** Given the recent health concerns about inactive children, it is perhaps no surprise that the health benefits afforded to communities by sports participation in voluntary clubs also comes high on the list. This can be couched as of most relevance to a focus on young people, but it also impacts favourably on all ages. Another perceived benefit is that volunteers are seen as custodians of sports facilities for future participants.

**45.** From a different source, the survey of Local Authority officers revealed benefits to their communities from volunteers in sport similar to those identified by the clubs themselves. The most common response by far (38 out of 50 authorities) is that they are the main providers of sporting opportunities to their communities. As one Local Authority officer put it, "take away the volunteers, take away half the sport". Forty of the 50 local authority officers interviewed worked in sports development and a measure of their dependence on working with voluntary clubs were their views on the volunteers involved with them. Such phrases as "invaluable", "without them all the activities we do would fail", "without them we wouldn't survive, there wouldn't be any provision" speak volumes for the value of volunteers to sport in our wider communities.



# VOLUNTEER SUPPORT PROGRAMMES AND STRATEGIES

**46.** Given the value of volunteers outlined above it is not surprising that the Government's strategy for delivering its sport and physical activity objectives (Game Plan) published at the end of 2002 concludes that "it is crucial that the role of volunteers in sport is fully supported".<sup>7</sup>

**47.** In recent years, this support has focused on "external" support programmes, linked to Sport England's Volunteer Investment Programme (VIP) and its Running Sport training resources. However, there are also "internal" support mechanisms linked to the establishment and implementation of 'volunteer strategies' (i.e. a written plan of how to recruit, organise and develop volunteers) within the clubs themselves.



**48.** Somewhat surprisingly, voluntary sports organisations make less use of **volunteer strategies** than volunteer-using organisations generally. The research disclosed that just 12% of NGBs had a volunteer strategy. At the level of individual clubs, only 1% of clubs interviewed claimed to have formulated a volunteer strategy. Only one of the 20 Universities surveyed had a written volunteer strategy, and no schools, colleges, young person's organisations or disability organisations had any form of strategy. In the survey of 50 local authorities, only eight had a strategy for developing sport volunteers, but many more had built 'volunteers' issues' into their overall sports development strategies.

**49.** In the telephone interviews, 10% of NGBs claimed to have a **volunteer co-ordinator** operating at national level. At the club level only 3% of clubs claimed to have a volunteer co-ordinator and only two of the 12 disability organisations interviewed claimed to have such a post, although not with that job title. No schools, colleges, young person's organisations or disability organisations had anyone working in this capacity. Universities are the organisations most commonly using volunteer co-ordinators, with 12 of the 20 surveyed having either a co-ordinator specific to sports volunteering or a co-ordinator covering volunteering for the whole university.

**50.** And the picture is not any more encouraging as far as **accessing external support** is concerned. Although the level of awareness of Sport England's VIP opportunities is quite high among NGBs (70% of the telephone interview respondents who answered this question were aware of VIP), just 25% of NGBs had actually made use of VIP. At the regional/county level of volunteering, 46% of volunteers interviewed were aware of VIP, but again only 12% were making use of it. At the sports club level, just over a quarter of those interviewed were aware of VIP, but even fewer were making use of it at this level - just 5%

**51.** It is not unusual for those who have heard of VIP, but not used it, to refer to it being "good in principle, but a step too far" for over-stretched volunteers. Perceptions of the VIP among the local authorities surveyed ranged from very positive, through indifference, to negative, depending on their local experiences. VIP has been designed to be flexible so there is little doubt that some of the more negative opinions are, at least in part, based on misperceptions. Despite this, the criticisms point to the need for VIP to be more effective at giving a clear and simple message to prospective users, which in turn will require additional resources to market and promote the messages, linked to the recently launched Club Support programme.



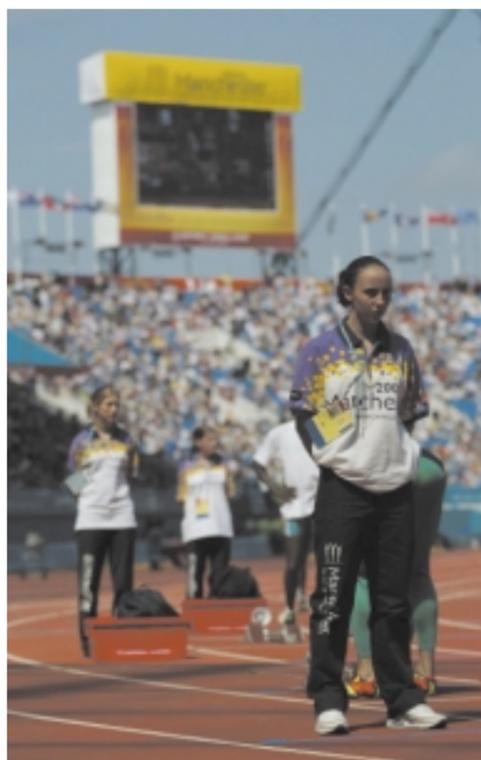
**52.** This will be important in the future, because the research showed a considerably greater 'openness' to external assistance than was evident in the 1995 research (one of the aspects where direct comparison is possible). A quarter of NGBs and 12% of clubs were aware of support for volunteers from Sport England. Twelve percent of NGBs and 16% of clubs were aware of support for volunteers from their local authorities. The main source of support for volunteers in clubs is seen as their own NGBs, with 39% of clubs aware of such support and 21% having already benefited from it. It must be remembered, however, that this type of assistance by the NGBs can be a 'double edged sword', bringing increased workload for volunteers at regional/county and club levels. The most commonly cited guidance for volunteers by NGBs was on child protection, legal liability, insurance, health and safety, first aid, and sponsorship and fundraising.

**53.** All 50 local authorities surveyed stated that they worked with voluntary sports clubs in their areas and provided assistance to them. The most common forms of assistance for volunteers are club development support (e.g. sport development planning, 'Running Sport' courses, help with club accreditation), coach education courses, and advice and support regarding funding opportunities. Less common assistance included developing club-school/college links, and helping clubs with volunteer recruitment. Some local authorities have very proactive schemes to encourage and develop volunteers in sport. However, the majority of local authorities surveyed suggested they were constrained by limited resources.

# ISSUES AND CHALLENGES FOR SPORTS VOLUNTEERS

**54.** The three main challenges identified by NGBs and sports club volunteers were shortages of volunteers; a problem in recruiting new volunteers; and consequently the loading of the required voluntary tasks on to fewer people. Some 70% or more of the club volunteers surveyed acknowledged these issues. Other challenges, cited by around a quarter of volunteers surveyed, were that work as a volunteer increasingly requires specialist skills, that there was little time left after paid work, and a conflict with family commitments. More club volunteers cited some of these problems in 2002 than in 1995, supporting the Henley analysis that there are increasing pressures on volunteers in sport.

**55.** The most commonly acknowledged issues for young volunteers are the same as those identified by volunteers generally. These are a shortage of young volunteers, the consequent higher loading on existing volunteers, the sheer lack of time, and within this factor, competing demands on their limited leisure time.



**56. Volunteer shortages and recruitment difficulties** are not, however, universal in voluntary sport. A mixed picture emerges from the research in terms of changes in numbers of volunteers, with respondents in 40% of the sports covered in the telephone interviews claiming falling volunteer numbers in the last five years, whilst 40% gave impressions of increasing volunteer numbers. Similarly, 34% of NGBs and 36% of clubs surveyed indicated volunteer recruitment difficulties, but this leaves the majority of NGBs and clubs contacted indicating no real problems with volunteer recruitment.

**57.** However, issues related to **time and workload** are more common, with respondents in 69% of the sports covered in the telephone interviews reporting increased time inputs from their volunteers. In a substantial proportion of these an increased workload was the key factor, rather than just a shortage of volunteers. This was particularly the case with 'middle' level volunteers in counties and regions. As one put it *"the county team manager work has definitely gone up – the job description has doubled. Netball is getting more professional and with that comes more things to do."*

**58.** There is some encouragement from a sports development standpoint that the most commonly cited reasons for increased workload were actually positive ones (i.e. increasing numbers of members and new activities, such as juniors, females and veterans sections, and more events). However, there is a real danger of a time lag between the increase in members and that in volunteers. Furthermore, these newer members may not yet be as willing to volunteer as more established club members.

**59.** Another regular reason for increased volunteer workload was more stringent NGB procedures. These include more complex registration and coach licensing arrangements, more detailed risk assessments, equity policies, and child protection or CRB checking procedures. At club and middle levels the impacts of NGB or Sport England policies tend to be seen as directives. Nearly three-quarters of the volunteers who reported an increasing workload were from the middle level of volunteering. There are some examples, although fewer, where clubs reported a reduction in demands on their time due to changed procedures of the NGBs, (e.g. simplified registration systems).

**60.** Not surprisingly, given the increased workload, volunteers in nine of the 12 focus group sports felt that potential volunteers perceived certain **core volunteer roles** as too demanding. There was felt to be either a fundamental fear or a real inability by potential volunteers to commit on the regular basis required to fulfil these roles. Some sports clubs identified an increasing complexity of tasks, related to the increased expectations of members and resource developments, which just adds to the problem for key roles. Others noted that the tasks were not something that could be easily taken on by new volunteers. An athletics club summarised this dilemma well: *"the nature of the additional work means that it isn't an easily identifiable package that somebody could necessarily take up, so the work is subsumed into the roles that people have traditionally done"*.



**61.** In addition, a related problem in many clubs is the low turnover of core volunteers, leading to an ageing volunteer force. Add in the implications of the multi-tasking culture and the common merging of key positions to overcome recruitment difficulties and the workload pressures become greater and greater.

**62.** Clearly it is easier to recruit occasional volunteer roles that require little commitment and skills, but even in this respect many of the focus groups raised the issue of changing attitudes to volunteering by either members or parents of junior members. The more critical pointed to a 'pay and play' mentality increasingly apparent among members, and a 'childminding' attitude by parents who drop their children off at the club and pick them up after the activity. On the other hand, in some sports, (e.g. swimming) parents are a major source for recruiting new volunteers, becoming involved in volunteering because of their child's participation and there may be 'good practice' lessons to be learnt from these sports.

**63.** A small minority of the research respondents identified an **increased inclination to seek payment** for volunteering as an important issue. The juxtaposition of paid staff and volunteers was seen as a threat to voluntarism and this is also reflected in the Henley analysis. An influx of professional staff is most obviously associated with the World Class Performance programme, but professional staff were also apparent in schools competing for pupils, especially fee paying schools. In the survey of local authorities, five interviewees expressed concern about the long-term effects on volunteering of national initiatives that appear to encourage and promote the paying of coaches and instructors.

**64.** Other issues mentioned by a minority of respondents were **pressures to gain external funding**, and also **information technology (IT)** issues, which were seen by some respondents as an extra burden and others as a means of easing their communication requirements.



**65.** The **future role of more young volunteers** is largely seen as a positive move. Representatives of most sports organisations in the research, even sports dominated by older members, felt that in principle it was a good idea to involve young people as volunteers. Many, though, expressed this in a passive way, such as “we would welcome them” or “a great idea”, rather than being able to demonstrate any active history or desire to promote young volunteering. This echoes one of the barriers identified above by young people; they are seldom asked to help. However, it is the time pressures on young people that are the biggest limiting factor. One young swimmer was clearly experiencing these issues: *“everyone tells you that you should be doing “x” amount of exercise each week to lead a healthy lifestyle and now it seems we’re expected to volunteer as well, along with everything else such as working and studying; you can’t do it all”*



**66.** This pressure also partly reflects the most commonly cited problem from NGBs and clubs, again echoing that of the young people outlined earlier. They saw it as inevitable that there would be a conflict between young people competing in and, at the same time, volunteering for their sport. Another significant problem identified is that young volunteers are far more likely to leave the “club”, because of moving areas to find new jobs or attend university or college. Many clubs are concerned about the implications in terms of getting a return on their investment in volunteer training for the young people concerned. One unknown consequence of losing actual or potential young volunteers to university or new jobs is whether or not they return to volunteer elsewhere later; a gap in the current knowledge base.

# CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE WORK WITH VOLUNTEERS

**67.** The 2002 Study largely confirms the position found in the 1995 work. It re-emphasises the fact that volunteers are critical to sport in England and sport remains the largest single field of volunteering in the country, providing a large and often unrecognised resource. Volunteers sustain the sporting involvement of over eight million members in voluntary clubs. It is clear that without volunteers, the sporting infrastructure in England would collapse. However, volunteers cannot be taken for granted. They all face the problems and pressures highlighted in this Report.

**68.** Three major sets of pressures affect voluntary sports organisations – competition for time and people, institutional pressure to ‘perform’ better, and a composite of technical and legal changes.



## Competition

**69.** The voluntary sports organisation has to compete for time, expenditure and enthusiasm in an increasingly competitive leisure market. The need to compete for participants, with encouragement from Government and NGBs, means that volunteers have to provide a ‘service’ that is more ‘professional’. It needs to compare favourably with that offered by the alternative providers. Changing expectations by members and parents also translate into a need for a greater professionalism that inevitably leads to a greater workload. One club commented that *“the attitude of competitors seems to be changing so that an amateur organisation (and the attendant mistakes) is not acceptable”*

**70.** A time squeeze affects both participants and volunteers. The groups most associated with volunteering in sport have been those most affected by increases in hours at work and increasing time spent on childcare. Thus the core volunteers experience the greatest time squeeze. However, young people also feel time pressures. These pressures of time in particular feed directly into the main challenge for many voluntary sports organisations; shortages of volunteers and recruitment difficulties.

### Policy objectives

**71.** Government and key agency policy objectives, national and local, affect sports volunteers who want to gain support or funding for their organisations, because it is often conditional on actions to implement these objectives. These voluntary clubs and organisations are increasingly accountable for delivering Government objectives that, in turn, increase volunteers' workloads. For some clubs this is an unacceptable position: *"at the end of the day we are a competitive swimming club. We are not a community or social group...we will train people that want to train, but we cannot be used as a social service organisation"*

**72.** In addition, some requirements of NGBs receiving Exchequer funding are common, irrespective of the size of NGB, and therefore these will be a relatively greater burden for smaller sports. A particular point of pressure in the cascading of administrative requirements down through sports is identified at the middle level, where regional and county volunteers are hard pressed to cope.



### Technology, risk and legislation

**73.** As technology advances there is pressure to embrace it just because it makes more things possible and because competitors use it. The use of e-mail and Web sites are the most pervasive examples. The pressure for volunteers to use this new IT is great, but the impact on time is probably at best neutral, providing both improvements in communication, particularly for club secretaries, but also a greater workload for many.

**74.** Society is becoming more averse to certain types of high profile risks, in particular sporting injuries or other dangers to young competitors. This leads to legislation conditioning organisations and their activities. Examples of new legislation that has created more work for volunteers are child protection and food hygiene. This is compounded by an increasing tendency to take legal action against organisations or individuals deemed to be 'negligent'. As noted above, risk aversion and fear of litigation applies especially to sports where young people are involved.



### The responses to the pressures

**75.** Responses to these three sets of pressures among voluntary sports organisations are varied. Broadly speaking there are two extremes evident in the research. At one extreme is what might be termed 'the traditional organisations', where the informality of their structure is a proud culture and professionalisation is seen as a fundamental threat to this culture. At the other extreme are organisations that have wholly embraced the need for professionalisation as a response to the pressures. They are more formal and managerialist in approach, but often do not 'see it' in this way and they claim many of the same motivations and benefits as their peers in the more traditional organisations. These organisations are not immune to the problems brought about by the pressures reviewed above, but they are more likely to adopt formal procedures for dealing with them. However, the research shows that most voluntary sporting organisations at all levels do not lie at one extreme or the other, but somewhere in between and this needs to be fully appreciated when looking to provide support for them in the future. An understanding of the culture of individual organisations should influence the approach to supporting them.

**76.** In one major respect, this research gives an incomplete picture; it has *not* researched the perspectives of the many non-volunteers and, therefore, it only provides the views of those who are heavily committed to volunteering. We do not know in detail how non-volunteers perceive their clubs and organisations and the prospect of volunteering for them. The research does provide a glimpse of possible answers in the reasons why young people and adults who had considered volunteering for sport did not do so. Time shortage was the major constraint, but as indicated previously, for a significant minority it was not knowing how to go about it, or simply not being asked, that stopped them from volunteering.

**77.** A more complete understanding of reasons for not volunteering, particularly among existing members and parents of young members, might help provide a more positive conclusion on how the voluntary sector could adapt to draw these non-volunteers in. The indications are that once they become involved their motivations will change, becoming stronger, and that they are likely to be willing to take on a greater role.

### Key implications from the research

**78.** One implication of the sheer scale and importance of sports volunteering is that sport should be at the forefront of any central or local government policy to promote volunteering and active citizenship. Sports clubs are the core of volunteering in sport, representing 45% of the organisations benefiting from sports volunteering (70% if school and university clubs are included). Yet volunteers in clubs face considerable pressures, summarised above, many of which are beyond their control. **Voluntary sports clubs therefore need support from central and local government agencies.**

**79.** It is necessary to promote increased formalisation and professionalisation in voluntary sports organisations, for both solving problems and facilitating development. However, **consultation with voluntary sports organisations is required to agree ways to facilitate organisational change and development** without imposing additional burdens on already hard-pressed officers. The principal agents for promoting change in voluntary sports organisations should, in principle, be Sport England, the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR), SportscoachUK, NGBs, the Youth Sport Trust through their school-club links work, and local authorities, particularly through their involvement with Sports Partnerships and Local Strategic Partnerships. The direct approach of VIP is a necessary complement to other agencies' support initiatives. The Government's Learning and Skills policy and the new Skills Active UK might also be able to embrace administrative and technical skills training for sports volunteers.



**80. The ways in which professionalisation is promoted needs to be varied, simple and sensitive to the different cultures in clubs.** It has to be accepted that, for many clubs, increased formalisation will be resisted. For the *more informal, mutual enthusiasm type of club*, helping with simple solutions to problems is the main selling point. Any external assistance offered needs to emphasise that it is designed to help them achieve their aims, reduce real threats to their survival, and to keep volunteers and members happy. For *more formally organised clubs*, potential assistance should include the same offers as above, because many such clubs face similar sets of problems despite their more formal approach. The offer to these clubs, however, can be extended to advice and training in more sophisticated management procedures and, in particular, **the advantages of a volunteer co-ordinator need to be promoted.** The better-organised clubs also present the most potential for development. The **services provided by external agencies should therefore extend to assistance in development initiatives**, such as support for juniors, women, veterans, new events, school-club links and other community partnerships.

**81.** However, language is very important in the promotion of assistance for the organisation of volunteers. It is important that **any assistance is screened to ensure it is couched in appropriate terms that are more compatible with informal, social organisations, than with businesses.** Any assistance offered to clubs and NGBs needs if possible to be 'smart' in the sense that it is designed where possible to save time and reduce workloads. Furthermore, clubs need to dip quickly and effectively into a menu of problems and solutions to identify assistance appropriate to their specific needs.



**82. The payment of staff for previously voluntary roles needs to be handled with caution,** because it may reduce the morale and recruitment of volunteers and it may not be sustainable if it is only a temporarily funded initiative. A contemporary trend in public sector funding is to reduce core funding and increase funding through special initiatives. However, this is incompatible with the major challenges facing volunteers in sports organisations. **If key volunteers are overloaded by the need to meet the latest requirements from the Government or Sport England, via NGBs, their capacity to respond to assistance to professionalise will continue to be severely constrained.** It represents the major challenge for the new Framework for community sport in England in the coming years. We must all ensure that the professional sports development sector makes the most of the volunteer ethos that represents the bedrock of sport, without at the same time stifling its contribution and alienating its volunteers, young and old.

## APPENDIX 1

### LEISURE INDUSTRIES RESEARCH CENTRE, SHEFFIELD

#### The research team

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## APPENDIX 2

### The specific objectives for the research study

The specific research objectives were to:

- estimate the total number of volunteers active in English sport;
- identify the demographics of sports volunteers;
- estimate the total number of voluntary hours being given to English sport;
- estimate this voluntary contribution to English sport in monetary terms;
- evaluate the awareness amongst sports volunteers, sports clubs and National Governing Bodies (NGBs) of Sport England's VIP programme and other related initiatives;
- identify (or estimate) the number of sports clubs, NGBs and local authorities that have a volunteer strategy in place;
- identify (or estimate) the number of sports clubs, NGBs and local authorities that have a volunteer co-ordinator in place.
- identify current issues / common problems facing sports volunteers and voluntary organisations;
- assess the attitudes of young people (16 – 24) to sports volunteering;
- assess the attitudes of sports clubs to accepting young people as volunteers;
- identify any barriers to sports volunteering;
- identify issues around sports volunteer management;
- identify and document best practice approaches to recruiting, managing and developing sports volunteers; and
- identify the benefits of sports volunteering - for the individual, the sports club, and the local community.

One further objective was to demonstrate the dynamics of volunteering in sport from 1995-2001 by making comparisons with the previous findings. Different methodological details severely constrain comparisons of the numbers of volunteers and their hours of contribution. More qualitative comparisons are possible, however, about the changing nature of problems/issues, the durability of problems/issues, and the medium term effects on clubs and NGBs if problems have persisted.



