

Chapter 24

United Kingdom



Fiona Reid and Lindsay Findlay-King

Abstract Within the United Kingdom (UK), sports volunteering is understood broadly as willingly giving up one’s free time to assist others in sport for no payment. It involves a very wide range of activities, contexts, and roles which are outlined in the chapter. It is widely accepted that volunteers are the “lifeblood” of sport, and approximately 15% of people in England (6.7 million) volunteered in sport at least once during 2016. The main context for sports volunteering is the sports club or community sports association (75% of sports volunteers). Sports event volunteering is becoming more visible but remains just a fraction of the overall volunteering activity in sport (1.3%). Overall volunteers are the main decision-makers in sport in the UK, although a professionalization agenda has increased the number of paid staff in larger, national organizations.

24.1 Meaning and Understanding of Sports Volunteering

Sport in the United Kingdom (UK) has depended on volunteers since its inception¹. Volunteers are repeatedly referred to as the “lifeblood of sport” (for example, Sport England 2003, p.2), facilitating almost all sport activities. There is no legally binding definition of volunteering in the UK; the compact (agreement between government and the voluntary and community sector) defines volunteering as “an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the

¹A comprehensive review of sport volunteering in the UK has recently been provided in Nichols (2017) which is a source of much of the information in this chapter.

F. Reid (✉)
Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, UK
e-mail: Fiona.Reid@gcu.ac.uk

L. Findlay-King
Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK
e-mail: lindsay.findlay-king@northumbria.ac.uk

environment or individuals or groups other than (or addition to) close relatives” (European Commission 2010a, p.54).

While this chapter describes the UK, the organization of sport and sport policy is devolved to the home nations of Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and England. The devolved administrations also have responsibility for volunteering, but each national agency defines volunteering slightly differently (European Commission 2010b, p.3-4):

“the giving of time and energy for the benefit of individuals, groups, communities, or the environment. It is undertaken by choice and is the largest single means by which individuals engage actively with their communities. It is intrinsically linked to civic engagement, social justice, lifelong learning, and community regeneration” (Scotland);

“an important expression of citizenship and is an essential component of democracy. It is the commitment of time and energy for the benefit of society and the community and can take many forms. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain” (Wales);

“the commitment of time and energy, for the benefit of society and the community, the environment or individuals outside (or in addition to) one’s immediate family. It is undertaken freely and by choice, without concern for financial gain” (Northern Ireland).

In the UK an estimated 27.6 million people volunteered informally at least once in 12 months, and 14.5 million people volunteered regularly in 2016/2017 (NCVO 2018). However, such estimations are extrapolated from data on volunteering in England only, and there is a wide spectrum of volunteering participation rates across the UK: from a high of 41% in England to a low of 27% in Scotland (volunteering formally once in a year; Volunteer Scotland 2017).

National surveys evidence that sports volunteering is a popular form of volunteering in the UK. In England, the Community Life Survey (Cabinet Office 2017) showed that the largest volunteering context was sport and exercise, with 57% of those who volunteered formally in the last 12 months doing so in this context. In contrast in Wales 17.2% and 16% in Scotland of volunteering was in sport and exercise, and other volunteering contexts were more popular (3rd ranked in Wales and 4th ranked in Scotland; Welsh Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) 2016; Volunteer Scotland 2017). Certainly, sport is an important context for volunteering, but the data for England may be an overestimate of this, due to measurement methods. There are inconsistencies within the definition of the sport and exercise context in the national surveys of volunteering participation. The scorecards used as prompts in the survey methodologies vary from Scotland, “sport/exercise (coaching or organizing)”; England, “sport/exercise (taking part, coaching, or going to watch)”; and Wales, “sport/exercise (coaching, etc.)” (Northern Ireland does not use a scorecard). As Volunteer Scotland (2017) observed in a UK volunteering review if “taking part” and “going to watch” (activities which are not volunteering) are included as prompts, then the volunteering participation data for England may be exaggerated.

In sport, the term “volunteer” has only relatively recently been used as almost everyone involved in sport, sport delivery, and sports organization was a volunteer.

Another confounding factor in the national survey data is that many sports volunteers do not see themselves as volunteers and therefore do not respond to the survey questions about volunteering positively. The very fabric of sport relies on individuals facilitating sports activities for no pay and for the benefit of others – that is something almost everyone in sport does and therefore is not a special “volunteering” activity. Perceptions of volunteering (and motivations) might be influenced by an individual’s cultural reality and circumstances, hence the observed difference between older people with more altruistic motives for sports volunteering (for example, giving something back) and younger people with more instrumental motives for sports volunteering (for example, to gain experience for their curriculum vitae; Adams and Deane 2009; Nichols and Ralston 2016). In fact, they suggest that even using the term volunteering for sporting facilitation may not be helpful as it is so different from mainstream “charitable” activities and as such has a much lower priority for support.

24.2 Volunteer Workforce in the UK

Volunteering in sport is the most popular context in the leisure, culture, arts, and heritage sector in England. The Taking Part survey 2016/2017 (UK Government 2017) showed that 32.9% of respondents had volunteered in the leisure sector, and within this 20% had volunteered in sport (compared to single figures in the other leisure sectors). Sport-specific surveys show that in England, 15% of adults volunteered in sport and physical activity at least twice in the last year, and this represents 6.7 million people in England (Sport England 2017, see Table 24.1). In contrast 10% of adults in Wales volunteered in sport (although this focused on sport club and

Table 24.1 UK’s volunteer characteristics

Characteristic	Status quo in the UK
Population size	65.6 million (2017) ^a
Official languages	English
Volunteer rates (year)	63% (2016 volunteered once in last 12 months in England) ^b
Existence of voluntary sports clubs	yes
List of large-scale events hosted in last 10 years	Olympic Games 2012, Commonwealth Games 2014
Sports volunteer rates	15% (2015 volunteered in sport once in past year in England) ^c
The word for volunteering	Volunteering
The meaning of the word	To willingly give unpaid help
Events/occurrences that have influenced volunteering	2012 Olympics – profile of volunteering

Sources: ^aOffice for National Statistics (2017); ^bUK Government (2017); ^cSport England (2017)

school settings only, whereas England's data includes event marshalling and stewarding; Sport Wales 2017).

Participation levels in occasional sports volunteering are higher than in regular sports volunteering. This is similar to volunteering more generally; while nearly two-thirds of adults in England (63%) reported volunteering in the past 12 months (52% informal and 37% formal), only around a fifth (22%) of adults had taken part in formal volunteering once in a month and 27% informally once a month (Cabinet Office 2017). Most of the measures available for sports volunteering in the UK in recent years focus on once or twice yearly volunteering. While participation in informal general volunteering is higher than formal, in contrast most sports volunteering is formal through clubs, groups, or organizations (74.4% within clubs and associations, 13.6% in youth organizations, 5% in schools, 3% governing body structures, 1.3% major events), and only 9.4% of sports volunteering was informal, helping outside an organization (Taylor et al. 2003). Across the UK the highest concentration of sports volunteering is within sports clubs (there are an estimated 72,117 sports clubs in England affiliated to National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs); Shibli and Barrett 2018). In contrast, only a small proportion of sports volunteers are event volunteers – for example, in 2002 just 1.3% of sports volunteers were at sports events (and 40% of those were for the 2002 Commonwealth Games; Taylor et al. 2003). However, major events do involve large numbers of volunteering at the same time, for example official estimates suggest that there were 70,000 volunteers for the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG 2012) and 12,500 at the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games (Commonwealth Games Federation 2015).

In the last 15 years, there have significant sports events in the UK: the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games, the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games, and the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games. These events led to increased sports volunteering in the planning and delivery years, although some of these volunteers were already volunteering elsewhere in sport or other contexts. While Londong Olympic Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG, 2013) claimed that 40% of applicants were new to volunteering, research into the Games Makers, volunteers in London 2012, found that only 20% of respondents were volunteering for the first time (Dickson et al. 2014). Nichols and Taylor (2015) explored contradictions in the data on Olympic volunteer legacy and noted an increase in formal volunteering in the 2012 hosting year and clubs reported an increase in numbers of volunteers (particularly in Olympic and Paralympic sports). However, they also observed that 73% of clubs reported that no volunteers joined them in the two months immediately after the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Another challenge to the concept of volunteering in the UK is the requirement to undertake unpaid work. This is contrary to the principles within the definition of volunteering relating to “freely undertaken” and “by choice” and has been termed “voluntold” (Kelemen et al. 2017, p.1239). It can be where an employer requires a candidate to undertake unpaid experience before being given paid work or the requirement can be as part of gaining an award or qualification in sport. This is

often (although not solely) focused on those working toward coaching qualifications (it is a compulsory part of the United Kingdom Coaching Certificate (UKCC) framework to gain mentored coaching experience) or leadership awards (such as Duke of Edinburgh's Award). Another large number of young people volunteer in sport as part of their further or higher education where volunteering placements can be required in order to graduate, and it is debatable whether this is really volunteering (Holdsworth and Brewis 2014).

People who volunteer in sport in the UK are more likely to be male, have higher levels of education, come from a higher socioeconomic group, be younger (with the exception of the age group 25-34), have no long-term disability, and be "white British" (as opposed to being black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) (Sport England 2016a). The number of children in the household also has a strong effect on the likelihood of sports volunteering (with the exception of children 0-5 years). Females; those aged 55+; those in lower socioeconomic groups; black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) people; and people with a disability are underrepresented in sports volunteering. The nature of sports and general volunteers is similar, with the exception that in general volunteering, women are more likely to volunteer than men and sports volunteering is more frequently done by younger adults and teenagers. However, the variation in levels of volunteering relating to ethnicity, disability, and socioeconomic status is more extreme in sports volunteering (Cabinet Office 2017).

Levels of volunteering in sport in the UK have remained relatively stable over time, although there has been a trend toward more short-term episodic volunteering, diversification of the types of sports organizations volunteered for, and changes in the type of people volunteering. Recently levels of volunteering in general decreased between 2013-14 and 2016-17, with the proportion of adults who had engaged in any volunteering in the last 12 months falling from 70% to 63% and the proportion who had engaged once a month falling from 44% to 39% in this period (Cabinet Office 2017). Yet in sport, this is not the case, as the 2015-16 Active People Survey (Sport England 2016a) reports that 15% English adults volunteered in sport; this shows an increase as in the last four years, the level had dropped to 12%, down from 14% in 2011-12 to 13.6% in 2010-11. Nonetheless while sports volunteering rates remain stable, within this there is some evidence of a trend toward more episodic volunteering. For example, Women in Sport (2017) and Sport England (2016b) encourage providers to offer flexible opportunities to volunteer; the successful Park Run recruits volunteers each week, rather than expecting regular commitment, and agencies recruiting for sports events offer "micro" opportunities to volunteer. Anecdotally we can observe the effects of increases in episodic volunteering, as clubs have reported finding it more difficult to recruit regular volunteers and 20% of volunteers in such clubs contribute about 80% of the work (Nichols 2005). Identifying this type of noncontinuous volunteering is more difficult when we look at the survey data, as there is no standout trend toward this. However, the levels of occasional volunteering remain higher than levels of regular volunteering. In England there have been slight increases in some years in the percentage of the population volunteering at least once in the previous 12 months but a more static rate of regular volunteering, defined as at least once a month for the last 12 months

(Cabinet Office 2017). In recent decades, sports organizations have been required to professionalize themselves and also professionalize their volunteer “workforce” using increasingly work-like methods and having work-like requirements of the volunteers. There is sometimes confusion when the term professionalization is used interchangeably between employing paid staff and working in a more professional way (whether paid or unpaid). This has changed the environment for volunteers, including involvement of paid volunteer managers and operations managers to “manage” the volunteers and take on the more responsible tasks (while a voluntary board maintains overall control). This has also impacted on sports club and NGB Boards where volunteers are to be recruited based on their skills and abilities rather than their sporting knowledge or interest.

24.3 Volunteer Management in Sports

24.3.1 *Sports Volunteering Contexts*

Sport England (2003) reported that up until then volunteer effort in sport had gone mostly unrecognized, but by 2016 the Volunteering Strategy stated that most sport would not take place without the input of volunteers (Sport England 2016b). Five volunteering contexts are identified:

- Sports clubs
- NGB national and regional roles
- Education – schools and universities
- Other organizations – disability, youth organizations
- Major events

Sports clubs are the most important context for volunteering (75% of sport volunteers in England; Nichols and James 2018). However, the number of sports clubs appears to have declined since 2002. A comparison of surveys conducted in England in 2002, 2009, and 2015 shows up to a 40% fall in numbers of sports clubs in England between 2002 and 2015, but because of changes in measurement, it is difficult to be conclusive on this (Taylor et al. 2003; Taylor et al. 2009; Ecorys 2015 cited in Nichols 2017; Nichols 2017). In 2017, there appears to have been a slight increase in the number of sports clubs in England (Shibli and Barrett 2018). As mentioned earlier, more flexible sports volunteering is evident in the UK. Organizations such as Park Run and also the brokers of sports event or project volunteering, for example, Glasgow Sport Volunteer Bureau or Manchester Event Volunteers (Nichols 2017), offer micro, one-off, or regular volunteering opportunities. Sports clubs have identified issues with recruiting more volunteers and are encouraged to search for volunteers from outside the club as well as looking within (Nichols et al. 2013; Sport England 2011).

NGBs of sport are normally managed by volunteer boards. In the past these were groups of nominated volunteers from member clubs or regional associations who

volunteered at these higher levels in the sport structure. The hierarchical volunteer structure meant volunteers progressed from club to regional to national board members, within one sport and finally crossed to generic sport bodies after a time at the top of their own sport. This has been changing, and more recently board members are recruited according to their expertise and against criteria. The work of NGBs is carried out by volunteers at all levels and in all different roles, but NGBs are increasingly supported by professional (paid) staff who are employed using income from state and lottery funding, membership payments, or commercial activities. Management of the volunteers by paid staff or using employment management practices has resulted in some tensions for sports volunteers (Nichols and Ralston 2016).

In schools, sports volunteering undertaken by pupils as part of wider leadership programs and volunteering by adults to facilitate extra activities (Nichols et al. 2016). Universities provide a different type of sports club – where members are exclusively students and the university subsidizes their activities. However, the voluntary, nonprofit nature of sports clubs in universities is very similar to UK sports clubs in general.

The nature of the volunteering program at major events has altered radically over the past 20 years. For the 2000 Olympics, the volunteers were essential to the running of the event – and success was the delivery of a quality event through volunteers. Since then the role of the volunteers has progressively changed; thus at the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games, the volunteers were essential providers of the event, but benefits to the volunteers and a “legacy” of future volunteering were also policy aims. Birmingham’s bid document for 2022 Commonwealth Games highlighted the opportunities for training and qualifications that would be open to 12,500 volunteers.

While previous studies have suggested that volunteering at a mega event can result in a strong intention to volunteer at other events or in other contexts (Fairley, Gardiner, and Filo, 2016), there is no clear evidence that recent UK mega events have had any effect on subsequent volunteering levels (Koutrou et al. 2016; Lockstone-Binney et al. 2016; Woodall et al. 2016; Rogerson et al. 2018). The legacy impact of such events in the UK on volunteering has been limited according to whether further support and opportunities were planned. For example, in Manchester while a volunteering legacy was not initially planned, the Post-Games Volunteer Project capitalized on favorable media coverage of volunteers and bid for funding to build a continued volunteer program, the Manchester Event Volunteers (Nichols and Ralston 2012). In contrast, LOCOG did not have the remit, time, or capacity for volunteer legacy planning (Girginov 2016). However, despite there being no national strategy to convert the Olympic and Paralympic volunteers to future volunteering (Nichols and Ralston 2015), there were some new volunteer programs created. *Join In* was the official volunteering legacy program, while the *Inspire* program, *Team London*, and *Spirit of 2012* also benefited from brokering volunteering opportunities after the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Although there was criticism that the legacy program came too late after the event, that it was London-centric and that many programs were short term, the event brought positive publicity for volunteering, and anecdotally it has been suggested that there might be a demon-

stration effect; however there is no evidence of this (Weed et al. 2015). While there were issues around a delay in the use of the volunteer database post-event to offer the volunteers other opportunities, Nichols (2017) has questioned whether new volunteers mostly motivated by a “once in a lifetime” opportunity would have continued on a long-term basis even with support. Research into volunteering legacy at the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games found volunteers surveyed immediately after the event intended to continue to volunteer. But when this was followed up three years later, there had been no long-term changes in volunteering behavior, although there was a slight increase in the perceived social connectedness of volunteers (Woodall et al. 2016; Rogerson et al. 2018).

24.3.2 Remuneration for Volunteers in Sport

Concepts relating to remuneration and payment of volunteers present a constant challenge to sport volunteers and organizations relating to sport. Definitions of volunteering highlighted earlier rely on differing concepts of “unpaid,” “not for financial gain,” and for the benefit of others. Cnaan et al. (1996) considered remuneration to be one of the four key dimensions of a definition of volunteering. They placed level of financial reward on a continuum from none at all, none expected, and expenses reimbursed to low pay/stipend. Overall, they viewed the value of volunteering as a cost-benefit analysis where the higher the net cost to the individual, the more “pure” the volunteer, whereas the lower net cost or greater net gain to the individual was seen as less valuable to the society.

The key decision-makers in sport in the UK are volunteers. At the highest level, UK Sport is guided by a Board of Directors who are appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for a period of three years but are not employees of either the UK Government or UK Sport. These individuals are selected due to their expertise either in sport or in an aspect of business and are volunteers. They are given a daily allowance (218 GBP; UK Sport 2013) to attend events for UK Sport such as board meetings, panel meeting, or other activities up to a maximum of 24 days per year. Similarly, the agencies for sport in each of the home countries are managed by a board of volunteer directors who also receive a daily fee for each day spent on board business (165 GBP; Scottish Government 2017). These payments are more than “none at all” but mostly equate to low pay, given the business and sports experience and level of seniority the individuals on the board require to have.

Most NGBs of sport are managed by a volunteer board. However, this is not universal, for example, the Board of Scottish Gymnastics have approved an annual payment of 7,000 GBP to their chair for 2016-2019 but no payments for other board members (Scottish Gymnastics 2016). This is a reflection of the amount of time needed to be spent on the activities by the chair and is part of a wider shift to recognition of time and expertise of the leaders in sport (although normally not commensurate with the payment those individuals would receive as part of their formal employment).

This trend in NGBs is reflected at a local level with even quite small voluntary clubs offering either an “honorarium” of a few hundred pounds or a limited hours contract to key voluntary roles, for example, membership secretary, or treasurer. Again, this payment is rarely a reflection of the actual value of their work, more an appreciation of time and expertise. There is not a great deal of research on the interaction of volunteers either in the NGB or club setting examining the impact of these “honoraria” or partly paid roles. As well as some remuneration for volunteers and for tasks undertaken by volunteers, there is a sector of sports event volunteering and sport volunteer tourism where volunteers *pay* for the privilege of volunteering. Here the concept of the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999) can partly explain that where volunteering is a leisure activity undertaken for fun and enjoyment, there may be particular volunteering activities that are worth paying for – either because the experience will be so unique or because the benefits to the volunteer are so great. For example, at the 2014 Ryder Cup held in Scotland, volunteers were asked to pay 75 GBP for the experience. This was explained to volunteers as to pay for their uniform and those who paid the fee and received the other benefits – access to watch the golf for free when not on shift (tickets were expensive and also not available) and meal vouchers (Reid 2015).

24.4 Volunteering, State, and Civil Society

In the UK, there is a strong tradition of voluntary sector independence from the state. For example, in Scotland 34% of sports clubs were established before 1950 (19% before 1900; Allison 2001), and in England 72% of clubs were founded before 2000 (Nichols and James 2018). Government policies change, but the structure of sports clubs and NGBs was established in the 19th century in the UK and mostly remains in place today.

Recently the state has been very keen to promote volunteering and voluntary activity. A major policy initiative, the “Big Society,” was launched in England in 2010 encouraging citizens to work together to improve their local communities, but for many this was seen as an obscuring of the impact of cuts in public expenditure. Voluntary organizations are taking on sports management and facilities across the UK as the “austerity” agenda means that the state is spending less money. There has also been a change in policy from considering volunteering as a means to an end – providing sport coaching for children, for example, to considering the wider benefits to the individual volunteer. Thus, *Join In* (2016) valued the contribution of each volunteer to well-being (of themselves and those they helped to take part in sport) as 16,032 GBP. In addition, the economic value of volunteering to wider society remains unknown.

However, while encouraging volunteering, the state has also increased the regulatory framework around sports volunteering, and this has been identified as a barrier to volunteers and to sports clubs (Taylor et al. 2008). Research has shown that the types of people typically involved in volunteering are better off, better educated, and

in employment (Sport England 2015). While this is not shown to be a causal link, there are implications drawn from this data. The UK Government and devolved governments have included the use of volunteering to improve the life chances of individuals.

24.5 Conclusion

Volunteers are critical to the infrastructure of sport in the UK. They engage in every role across the provision of sport, from the very highest level of decision-making to carrying out essential tasks. Their importance in the UK is a consequence of the historical development of sport within the voluntary sector and the social construction of the idea of volunteering as predominantly altruistic and an expression of civic responsibility. Sports volunteering is most important in sports clubs although there are increasing levels of interest in occasional volunteering and in event volunteering.

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