

Chapter 7

Sport Clubs in England

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7.1 Introduction

England is the largest of the *home countries* in the UK, with a population of 53.9 million out of 64.1 million in the UK as a whole. Despite a rich historic tradition in manufacturing industry, the economy is now dominated by services, which comprise 80 % of employment and 77 % of the nation's Gross Domestic Product. The South East of the country is recovering faster than any other European country from the economic crash of 2008, although recovery is very uneven across England as a whole. Although comparatively wealthy, England has one of the most unequal distributions of income of all the developed countries. Figures are available to compare sports participation and volunteering in the UK as a whole with European countries. Levels of formal volunteering are slightly below the European average, well below levels in the Netherlands, Germany and the Nordic countries. This is despite a strong tradition of volunteering, much of which takes place in the structure of organisations such as sports clubs, developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government, which came into power in May 2010, aimed to promote volunteering within a policy labelled as *The Big Society*. There is little evidence of volunteering increasing but it will have to if volunteers are to help deliver sports and other leisure facilities which local government is less able to maintain because of funding cuts. Levels of sports participation are relatively high, still below the Nordic countries, but on a par with the Netherlands and slightly above Germany and France. This reflects a strong

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sporting tradition, as described in the chapter below. However, levels of sports participation are static with a trend towards more individual participation, while obesity levels and associated illnesses climb rapidly.

The infrastructure of sport clubs in England is specific to its historical development and culture.

Traditionally opportunities to participate in sport in England have been categorised as being provided by the voluntary, public or commercial sectors, although the three overlap. For example, a cricket club run by volunteers may play on pitches hired from local government; use balls provided by a commercial sponsor; and socialise after the game in a local public house. This chapter focuses on the voluntary sector although all three components of the sporting infrastructure and their interrelationship have to be understood as reflecting the historical circumstances in which modern sport emerged in the nineteenth century. From this developed a large number of relatively small sport clubs run by volunteers, often focused on a single sport, with strong connections to a local community, and represented by national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) which had initially been established to codify *rules* of the games. The interventions of the public sector through local government direct provision of facilities were initially led by concerns for public health and promotion of dominant social values, characterised as *rational recreation*. The commercial sector in sport developed in response to demand, reflecting increasing income and leisure time from the second half of the nineteenth century but it was initially more concerned with consumption of a leisure experience (for example; gambling, professional football) than participation, although relatively recently it has grown considerably in the fitness industry.

Each of these sectors of sporting opportunities, and the relation between them, is changing in response to circumstances. In the voluntary sector an apparently stable infrastructure of clubs and facilities, supported by a tradition of volunteering, is having to adapt to trends towards more episodic and transactional volunteering, increasing competition in the leisure market for time, energy and enthusiasm, and a changed relationship with the public and commercial sectors. Since the early 1990s public sector leisure provision has become more market oriented, promoted by competition for contracts to provide services, reductions in public sector budgets and a more market-led attitude towards provision (Nichols and Taylor 1995). Since 2011 considerable reductions in local government budgets, as a consequence of national government policies to reduce public expenditure, have led to greater costs of public sector facility hire and greater competition for peak-time use, affecting the sport clubs that rely on these facilities.

Sport England's strategies (the government agency responsible for promoting community sport) have increasingly incorporated voluntary sector clubs as a means to achieving social objectives, such as increasing sports participation. NGBs need to balance Sport England's policy objectives, enshrined in performance indicators associated with public funding; with supporting and representing the needs of their clubs and the volunteers who manage them. Trends towards more individualistic sports participation have been reflected in a decline in importance of clubs led by volunteers for participation and an increase in commercial clubs—largely catering for the fitness market.

This chapter first reviews the history of sport and sport clubs in England, which is essential to understanding modern day structures and processes. It then provides evidence of participation in different types of sport clubs from a national survey, particularly for non-profit clubs largely run by volunteers, and for commercial fitness clubs. A review of the policy importance of sport clubs is followed by national evidence on their participants, demonstrating their societal embedding. Characteristics of sport clubs are summarised from another national survey, including clubs' human resources, finances, facilities used, community links and challenges faced. The chapter finishes with a specific focus on a contemporary issue for non-profit sport clubs in England—the formalisation of sport club management.

7.2 History and Context

Modern sport emerged in Britain from the experience of the industrial revolution. The historical context helps us to understand characteristics of the voluntary sector in sport today. This section can only identify the main historical factors in the development of sport and of volunteering; which are dealt with more comprehensively by Holt (1990) and Rochester (2013). The rapid movement of the population from a rural to an urban environment meant that previous forms of recreation, at least for the working class, had to be abandoned. An example was *folk football*, with whole villages competing against each other guided by no rules other than the need to place an object corresponding to the modern ball in a *goal* defined by local tradition. Folk football was forcibly restrained by police and troops as it was seen as a threat to public order.

However, a set of circumstances in the second half of the nineteenth century promoted the emergence of modern forms of sport. The reduction of working hours to allow a half day off on Saturday provided the time for both participation and spectating. Common rules needed to be established for sport, particularly for public, fee paying schools to play each other, and for former school boys to continue to compete at university. The prominence of sport in the curriculum in the public schools reflected a movement termed *muscular Christianity* which emphasised the role of sport in promoting desirable moral values. A concern with the moral condition of the urban poor led to the 'rational recreation movement' (Holt 1990, p. 136) which developed in the third quarter of the nineteenth century and reflected the values of evangelical Christianity. As part of this movement, organised sport was reintroduced to the urban population by men who had attended the public schools. This reflected a philanthropic tradition which has been identified as one of the roots of voluntary action (Rochester 2013). For example, football clubs were formed based on factories (e.g. Woolwich Arsenal, founded 1886) and religious missions (e.g. Aston Villa, a Methodist chapel, 1874). Holt attributes the embracing of football by the working class at this time not only to its simplicity, but also to its ability to express a local sense of community that had been lost in the move from a rural environment to the amorphous mass of the city.

A flourishing of sports teams reflected a second main impulse of voluntary activity, *mutual aid*—collective action to meet a shared need. Hoggett and Bishop (1985) describe it as *organising around enthusiasms*. A third but relatively neglected root of voluntary activity is the promotion of *conviviality* (Rochester 2013) in which socialisation is an end in itself, explaining the association of many teams with social facilities, such as pubs.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the development of professional sport was facilitated by the expanding railway network and newspapers, allowing the working class to follow the fortunes of their favourite team by travelling to games or through the press. Increased time and wages provided the demand for professional sport, especially football and rugby. This contrasted with a strong ethos of amateurism prominent in the Victorian era. A sample of NGBs was founded on the following dates:

- Football Association 1863
- Rugby Football Union 1871
- Bicyclists Union 1878
- Amateur Athletic Association 1880
- Amateur Boxing Association 1880
- Amateur Rowing Association 1882
- Amateur Swimming Association 1886
- Lawn Tennis Association 1888

This not only illustrates the dates at which the rules of modern sport were established but also the prominence of amateur in the title. Football and rugby both had to adapt to professionalism which initially came about as working class players were compensated for time away from paid work—termed *broken time*. Within rugby this led to a split in 1894 between the Northern version of the game, Rugby League, which accepted professionals; and the Southern version, Rugby Union, which was amateur. Sports maintained different traditions and as late as 1961 the score card at Lords distinguished the status of amateur and professional cricketers by their initials preceding or following their surname, respectively. There is an umbrella, representative organisation for NGBs, established in 1935 and now called the Sport and Recreation Alliance.

7.2.1 Origin of Sport Clubs

This brief historical overview helps us to understand the following characteristics of sport clubs in England, illustrated in more detail later:

The large number of sport clubs, which are mainly single sport and relatively small, and with a strong identity and connection with a locality (Allison 2001). This explains, for example, why the Lawn Tennis Association has found it difficult to persuade small clubs to merge.

The role volunteers take in all the tasks required to make the clubs function; reflecting a mutual aid tradition of organising around enthusiasms. An alternative conception of grass roots volunteer led organisations is as meeting an unmet need in *the market* (Nichols 2001; Gratton and Taylor 1991).

Within the mutual aid tradition there is an ethos of equality, an antipathy to distinctions of power embodied in a formal management structure, and the same volunteers will take roles of governance and delivery. This, combined with the objective of providing conviviality and a pleasant social experience, means that management practices in different types of organisations will not be appropriate and will need to be adapted (Schulz et al. 2011; Rochester 2013). A tradition of amateurism may also engender an antipathy toward formal management practices.

Along with many other associational forms of group-based leisure with roots in the nineteenth century, the clubs have a strong sense of independence, history and tradition. This explains a degree of scepticism to policies of local or national government, if the club is an older and more permanent institution.

The clubs regard their NGBs as existing to represent their interests, rather than the interests of national government. This explains a tension in NGBs' positions as they balance representing the clubs affiliated to them with meeting the conditions of Sport England grants.

The expectation that local government will take a positive view towards volunteer-led sport clubs reflects the values of the rational recreation movement but there is a tension between this and a more recent market oriented approach to providing local government services and the significantly reduced ability of local government to support sport, which is a non-statutory service.

7.2.2 *Sport Clubs Within the National Sport Structure*

The national sport structure in England comprises three sectors: the public sector, including facilities and services provided by, or on behalf of, national and local government; the private commercial sector; and the private non-profit sector—often termed the *third sector*. Sport clubs contribute mainly to the private non-profit sector, although commercial fitness clubs are a major part of the private commercial sector in sport and many non-profit sport clubs use facilities provided by the public sector.

Evidence on sports participation for the adult population of England (16 years +) is contained in the Active People Survey (Sport England 2014a, b). This includes the participation rates in clubs and in different types of club—health and fitness clubs are largely commercial; sport clubs are largely voluntary; social clubs are largely charitable; and other clubs include multipurpose clubs. Table 7.1 shows the percentages of the adult population participating in sport at different types of club at least once in the previous 4 weeks.

There are two main features of this evidence. First, the proportion of adults participating in health and fitness clubs is larger than in sport clubs, which reflects a

Table 7.1 Participation in sport through different types of clubs in England, 2009/10–2012/13 (Active People Survey)

	Weighted sample	Any type of club	Health and fitness clubs	Sport clubs	Social clubs	Other clubs
		<i>% of adult population who have been a member of a club in order to participate in sport in the previous 4 weeks</i>				
2012/13	46,914	22.1	10.2	9.2	2.9	1.6
2011/12	84,706	22.8	10.5	9.5	3.6	1.6
2010/11	164,026	23.3	10.7	8.8	3.4	2.4
2009/10	186,376	23.9	10.8	10.4	3.2	0.8

trend in favour of individualised, time-flexible fitness activities, and against more time inflexible, team sports, which occur mainly at voluntary sport clubs. Second, over the 4 years of data there is a declining proportion of adults participating at clubs overall, with the largest decline over the 3 years for which data is available being in voluntary sport clubs. However, it should be noted that the sport clubs' numbers in the table only includes active participants; it does not include social and other non-active members which, according to the Sport and Recreation Alliance (2013), comprise 28 % of all adult members of sport clubs. This emphasises the social as well as sporting purpose of voluntary sport clubs.

In practice it is difficult to define a club run by volunteers. A club may be regarded as one or more of: just one competitive team; a club with several teams—possibly divided by age and gender; a session in a sports centre led by a coach; a group of friends that maintain a regular booking in a facility but with no formal arrangements; or a multi-sports club with sections for each sport. The only practical way to estimate the number of clubs is to ask for figures from the NGBs of the number of affiliated clubs. One source (Erewash Sport 2014) lists 137 NGBs. Such a method will exclude clubs who do not affiliate as they do not want to compete in a league structure or see little benefit in affiliation. It will thus exclude the more informal and smaller groups which will become increasingly important if, as has been suggested, there is a trend towards more informal participation as group activities are harder to co-ordinate with individuals' increasingly fragmented lifestyles (Coalter 1999; Gratton et al. 2011). Figures from NGBs may include some clubs run by professionals for a profit although these only accounted for 2 % of clubs in a 2009 survey (Taylor et al. 2009). Relying on NGB records and identifying trends is complicated by differences in NGBs' club definitions and changes in this over time. NGBs also vary in their national boundaries (NGBs in the UK may cover any of England, Scotland, Wales and N. Ireland); their merger of NGBs for male and female participants, and there are other inconsistencies in recording. The list of 137 NGBs referred to above (Erewash Sport 2014) includes many that are British, some that are UK, and some that are English. It refers to 16 sports for which there is no recognised NGB, and at the other extreme one sport, bowls, with ten NGBs. Further, NGBs or clubs may amalgamate, so fewer clubs or NGBs does not necessarily correspond to fewer club members.

Studies conducted in 2002 (Taylor et al. 2003) and in 2009 (Taylor et al. 2009), both attempted to estimate the number of clubs by direct contact with NGB officials and NGB published reports. These methods produced figures of 106,423 clubs in England in 2002 and 85,000 in 2009. A fall in the number of clubs is consistent with a trend towards more informal participation, and has been supported by analysis of clubs in one sport (hockey) in one county, using local association handbooks (Barrett et al. 2014).

Mintel (2013) estimate the number of health and fitness clubs in England to be 3,520 in January 2013. This total comprises 2,330 gymnasia/fitness suites (largely in the local government public sector) and 1,190 private sports and leisure centres. Mintel estimates that the number of health and fitness clubs in England grew by 13 % between March 2011 and January 2013. Mintel also estimates a total membership of 5.4 million for the UK as a whole in 2013, which is 4.2 % higher than the total membership for 2007. These Mintel estimates, however, are inconsistent with the slight decline in participation in such clubs according to the Active People Survey in the table above. Nevertheless, the health and fitness club industry has proven very resilient in the post financial crash environment, partly because of the emergence and growth of budget clubs.

An important part of the voluntary sports club structure in England is in universities. According to BUCS (2013), there were 3,704 student sport clubs in 103 higher education institutions surveyed in 2012. Although there were some non-responding universities, this was a British sample and Universities UK list 107 English universities, so an estimate of around 3,800 student sport clubs in England is reasonable. In a survey of students at 52 universities TNS (2013) identify that 39 % of students were members of clubs to participate in sport, whilst 4 % had taken part in one hour a week or more of sports volunteering. A recent study for BUCS (2013) has identified the importance of participating and volunteering in university sport clubs for enhancing the employability of students.

7.3 The Role of Sport Clubs in Policy and Society

Sport clubs play an important role in government plans to increase sports participation for its associated health benefits and other social benefits—particularly for the young, such as reducing crime and vandalism, and increasing educational achievements. The policy importance is recognised in the current and previous strategies of Sport England (2008, 2012). Sport clubs also play a significant role in identifying and developing talent in sport, as part of a system for producing sporting excellence for national teams and international competitions.

In England, sport clubs have been incorporated into government policy to promote sports participation through NGBs agreeing their *Whole Sport Plans* with Sport England (Green 2008; Nichols 2013; Sport England 2013a). Sport England provides funding for 46 NGBs, in most cases grants in exchange for agreeing to raise participation by specific levels in their sport over a set time period. These levels of

participation are measured through Sport England's annual Active People Survey. Funding of NGBs through Sport England is also conditional on the implementation of policies to promote participation by under-represented groups and to promote Sport England's (or an NGB equivalent) Clubmark accreditation (discussed in more detail below). The ability of Sport England to influence NGBs in this way has been greatly increased by its ability to distribute £2,777 m of funds from the National Lottery between 1995 and 2009; although the ability of money to buy the enthusiasm of volunteers who drive sport clubs is limited, as many clubs cherish their independence. There is thus a greater tension between NGBs' role as a policy instrument of government and their original purpose as a representative body of the clubs. The ability and willingness of sport clubs' volunteers to implement Sport England policies, or even to know what they are, has been questioned (Harris et al. 2009).

The importance of sport clubs for producing excellence in sport is that they feed their best players into their NGBs' systems for regional, national and international training and competitions. NGBs have systems of talent identification and development, which are part of their plans for Sport England and also the subject of separate funding agreements with UK Sport—the latter being entirely focussed on the development of high performance sport. At the time of writing, 36 Olympic and Paralympic sports' NGBs receive funding from UK Sport 'to protect and enhance medal prospects for Rio 2016 and Tokyo 2020' (UK Sport 2014a, b).

7.3.1 National Data on Sport Club Participation

Secondary analysis of the Active People Survey data identifies the demographic structure of participation in sport clubs of different types. This helps to identify the extent to which clubs cater for different parts of society. We compare the characteristics of the two main types of clubs with non-club participants in Table 7.2, which again relates to participation at least once in the previous 4 weeks and only to active sports participants, not to non-active members of sport clubs. The population structure of England is also provided in the last column, so that the representativeness of the different modes of sports participation can be judged.

There are some key differences in the participants' characteristics of sport clubs, health and fitness clubs, and those who do not participate in clubs. Sport clubs and non-club participants have majorities of male participants, whilst health and fitness clubs have a majority of female participants. Sport clubs have higher proportions of participants who are young (16–19) or old (65+), and correspondingly who are students or retired, than either health and fitness clubs or non-club participants. Health and fitness clubs and non-club participants have a stronger representation of non-White ethnic groups. In terms of educational qualifications, income, car availability and children in the household, the two main types of clubs have similar profiles. There are obvious differences in the activities participated in at the two types of club—the highest proportions of sports club participants participated in football (18 %), golf (15 %), rugby union (6 %) and cricket (5 %), none of which are likely at health and fitness clubs.

Table 7.2 Participation demographics for different types of clubs in England, 2011/12 (Active People Survey)

	Sport clubs	Health and fitness clubs	Non-club participants ^a	England population
Gender	<i>% of participants</i>			<i>%</i>
Female	28	56	47	51
Male	72	44	53	49
Age				
16–19	21	11	11	6
20–24	10	10	8	8
25–29	8	11	10	8.5
30–34	8	11	11	8
35–44	13	19	19	17
45–64	26	31	32	31
65+	15	8	10	20
Ethnicity				
White	93	88	89	85
Mixed	2	2	2	2
Asian	3	6	6	7
Black	2	3	3	4
Other	1	1	1	1
Chinese	0.1	0.4	0.3	0.7
Work status				
Employed	59	69	68	62
Unemployed	4	5	6	4.5
Retired	16	11	12	14
Other econ. Inactive	2	4	4	11
Student	19	12	10	9

Some subsections sum to > or < 100 % because of rounding

^aNon-club participants = all participants excluding those who participate in any type of club

In terms of how representative different types of clubs' participants are of the English population, the table demonstrates that both the main types of club under-represent older people (65+), those of Asian and Chinese ethnicity and those who are in the category other economically inactive (e.g. full-time in the home). Sport clubs also under-represent females, 35–64 year olds, and those of Black ethnicity.

7.3.2 Societal Importance of Sport Clubs

Sport clubs led by volunteers are important because they provide the opportunity for people to take part in sport at a cheaper rate than if they had to pay for use of commercial facilities—although as reported in the paragraph above, the participants' income profiles at the two types of club are very similar. The 2013 Sport and Recreation Alliance survey of sport clubs estimated that each club had, on average,

82 playing adult members, 32 non-playing members, and 90 junior members (Sport and Recreation Alliance 2013). Combining these figures with the estimate of 85,000 clubs in England in 2009 (the latest which is available) gives 6.97 million players, 2.72 million non-playing members, and 7.65 million juniors. The figures may be an overestimate because the Sport and Recreation Alliance 2013 survey sample of 2,910 clubs over-represents those with Clubmark accreditation, 41 %, (a Sport England accreditation scheme) and with Community Amateur Sports Club (CASC) status, 23 %, which confers tax advantages. These clubs are likely to be the more formal and larger clubs (Nichols et al. 2012). It also double-counts people who are members of more than one club. However, it does not include unaffiliated clubs, although these are likely to be less important for junior participation.

It is not known how the non-playing members in clubs are split between those who support participants and those who are members primarily for the social rewards of conviviality. Volunteers supporting participants will be more significant in clubs with large junior sections (Nichols et al. 2013a). Formal volunteering has been associated with high levels of social capital in the UK and sport and exercise is the largest single area in which formal volunteering takes place (DCMS 2013). However, social capital is not an unambiguous social good. Club association may enhance 'bonding' social capital within club members, but not necessarily bridging social capital with the rest of the community (Nichols et al. 2013; Blackshaw and Long 2005). There is also an unclear relationship with the policy of the central government in the UK to promote volunteering within a *Big Society*, in which individuals take greater responsibility for their immediate environment through civic activism. An aim is to reduce the activity of the state which has been regarded as crowding out the voluntary sector by Big Government. However, the Big Society concept has been criticised as idealistic, ignoring the different propensity of social classes to volunteer and as a substitute for the considerable cuts in public sector expenditure since 2010. On the one hand government aims to increase volunteering, but on the other hand reductions in practical support to voluntary sport clubs, such as through subsidies for facility use and grants for refurbishing facilities, provide additional challenges (Nichols et al. 2013).

7.4 Characteristics of Sport Clubs

The Sport and Recreation Alliance has surveyed sport clubs in the UK every 2 years since 2007. The latest of these surveys, in 2013, had a sample of 2,910 clubs from over 100 sports, with over a third of the sample from cricket (15 % of the total), rugby union (12 %) and football (8 %). The survey is largely of voluntary sport clubs—90 % of the clubs surveyed are non-profit clubs—and it does not include commercial health and fitness clubs. Although it is a UK survey, nearly 95 % of the responses in 2013 are from English clubs. The survey does not sample the same clubs each time, so variations between the surveys may simply reflect different samples (Nichols 2013). The survey includes questions on staff and volunteers,

members, facilities, finances and community links. This section summarises these characteristics, except for members, which are discussed in the previous section.

7.4.1 Club Size and Sports

Typically sport clubs in England are single sport, largely because of their historical development—see above. Whilst the average number of adult playing members is 82, according to the Sport and Recreation Alliance (2013), responses to this survey are likely to be biased towards larger clubs. Nevertheless, Table 7.3 illustrates the considerable variation in size between sports, both for adult and junior participants.

7.4.2 Staff and Volunteers

On average, each sports club has 24 volunteers helping the club, 9 of whom are qualified coaches; and also two paid members of staff—one of whom is typically a qualified coach. The number of volunteers in the clubs surveyed in 2013 was 20 % higher than the clubs surveyed in 2011 and 26 % higher than in 2007. A quarter of clubs surveyed in 2013 indicated that they had benefited from new volunteers after the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, and over three-quarters of these clubs with new volunteers were in Olympic and Paralympic sports. Volunteers take roles in administration and delivery with individual volunteers typically involved in both. Any role required to allow the club to function will be taken by volunteers, including: chair, treasurer, membership secretary, fixture secretary, welfare officer, coaches, team managers and other roles which may not have a formal definition. Roles which take the most time include those on the management committee and coaching. Typically 20 % of the volunteers contribute 80 % of the time and the volunteers who have been involved the longest create a role as their interests develop. This can lead to difficulties replacing key volunteers' whose role is defined around the person rather than a set of functions. Paid staff are more common in the larger clubs which manage their own facility and tend to be involved in facility maintenance, running a bar and in coaching roles—as above. Thus, paid staff are not usually involved in management roles.

7.4.3 Facilities

Clubs in different sports tend to use different facilities, as shown in Table 7.4. In the 2013 survey, 45 % of the clubs surveyed own or part-own their facilities, or have long-term leases on them.

Table 7.3 Average adult playing members per club for different sports in England (Sport and Recreation 2013)

Sport	Average number of adult playing members per club	Average number of junior playing members per club
Golf	387	48
Snowsports	314	162
Angling	308	38
Motor sports	249	9
Sailing	176	91
Athletics	151	105
Tennis	149	130
Bowls	124	4
Triathlon	124	70
Badminton	110	38
Rugby Union	106	216
Canoeing	97	49
Equestrian	92	18
Rugby League	90	130
Gliding	83	10
Cycling	82	32
Hockey	81	91
Rowing	74	42
Orienteering	72	21
Shooting	71	9
Table tennis	62	35
Archery	55	16
Volleyball	52	20
Cricket	49	70
Football	49	121
Netball	38	40
Wheelchair basketball	34	65
Karate	31	43
Basketball	31	64
Korfball	29	4
Fencing	28	26
Weightlifting	24	16
Swimming	23	163
Taekwondo	21	61
Tchoukball	20	2
Judo	19	121
Boccia	18	16
Gymnastics	15	252

Table 7.4 Sports clubs and facilities (Sports and Recreation Alliance 2013)

Sports with more clubs owning or leasing their facilities (% of clubs)	Sports with more clubs hiring facilities (% of clubs)	Sports with more clubs using public spaces (% of clubs)
Golf (83 %)	Korfball (100 %)	Orienteering (100 %)
Squash (82 %)	Tchoukball (100 %)	Motor Sports (82 %)
Shooting (50 %)	Badminton (97 %)	Cycling (61 %)
Rugby Union (49 %)	Basketball (97 %)	Horse riding (57 %)
	Judo (95 %)	Canoeing (45 %)
	Karate (94 %)	
	Netball (94 %)	
	Fencing (91 %)	
	Swimming/diving (91 %)	
	Taekwondo (91 %)	
	Volleyball (90 %)	

49 % of clubs hired a facility, with hire costs amounting to 47 % of their total expenditure on average. More than a third of all clubs, and 53 % of clubs which hire a facility, hire from their local authority. This is significant given the sharp cuts in local government spending that are occurring at the time of writing, because one implication of these cuts is increasing facility hire costs for clubs. Another implication is reduced maintenance of facilities—for 68 % of clubs hiring facilities, it is the local authorities which are responsible for maintenance. 14 % of clubs use public space for their activities.

7.4.4 Finances

On average sport clubs made an average surplus of £1,825 in 2012, which is 67 % higher than in 2010. But this average hides a lot of variation. Whilst 48 % of clubs surveyed made surpluses, 24 % made losses. The ratio of surplus to loss making clubs varied from nearly 8:1 in tennis, to 1:1 in badminton. There was considerable effort by sport clubs to improve their financial situation in the year before the 2013 survey, mostly to increase income to compensate for higher costs, as shown in Table 7.5. A key income earner for sport clubs which lease or own their facilities is the bar, which in 2012 contributed on average a third of the surveyed clubs' incomes and typically the bar made a profit. Sports with the highest average clubs' income are golf, rugby union, gliding and gymnastics; whilst sports with the lowest average clubs' income include weightlifting, baseball/softball, karate and netball. The same structure applies to clubs' expenditures—there is a strong correlation between higher or lower average income and higher or lower average expenditure, reflecting the typical financial objective of break-even.

Table 7.5 Achieving break even—balancing increasing costs with higher income (Sport and Recreation Alliance 2013)

Higher costs for clubs, 2011–2012	Increasing income for clubs, 2011–2012
Outdoor facility maintenance (33 % increase)	More fundraising (49 % of clubs)
Indoor facility maintenance (23 % increase)	Applying for funds from external organisations: NB national or local government, NGBs (45 % of clubs)
Business property tax (20 % increase)	Higher membership income: from more members (44 % of clubs) and higher membership fees (34 % of clubs)
Water costs (38 % increase)	More social events (40 % of clubs)
Electricity and gas costs (10 and 19 % increases)	Hiring out club's facilities (21 % of clubs)

The 2009 survey of clubs was able to show the major differences in income between clubs that owned or did not own their own facilities. Owning facilities meant that a much higher income, and higher proportion of income, could be gained through bar, catering and hospitality. Owning a social facility gives the club a social focus, allowing a wider range of social rewards for its members. This is harder for sports such as swimming or athletics to achieve, because participation is as an individual and not co-ordinated at the same time, or event place. Thus, facility ownership confers additional costs and benefits, and is associated with the larger clubs (Nichols et al. 2012).

7.4.5 *Community Links*

Over half the clubs surveyed in 2013 are working with local schools and 88 % of these clubs claim the links are successful, although the precise meaning of the terms working with and successful for the responding clubs is not explored in the survey. Links between clubs and schools have been an important aspect to a variety of government policy initiatives in recent years. The most common factors contributing to perceived success in club-school links are reported by clubs to be: students joining the clubs as members, effective communication, advertising club opportunities in schools, club coaches or officials assisting in PE lessons, and the opportunity for clubs to identify talent in schools. 54 % of clubs surveyed report that they are running programmes that engage with the wider, non-member community although again the exact nature of these programmes is not provided in survey responses. The most common are 42 % of clubs working with young people in the community, and 30 % of clubs involved in programmes to improve physical health. There is evidence, therefore, of significant minorities of clubs aligning some of their activity with government policy.

7.4.6 Challenges for Sport Clubs

The 2010 GHK report, *Volunteering in the European Union* used previous research in the UK (Gratton et al. 1997; Taylor et al. 2003, 2009) and three interviews to identify challenges faced by sport clubs. Challenges included: the recruitment and retention of volunteers, professionalisation of the voluntary sector (meaning requiring volunteers to adopt practices of management and service delivery comparable to those in the private or public sectors), reacting to legal and regulatory frameworks, the production of information on volunteering, achieving sustainable funding, managing a tension between state support and incorporating objectives of the state, achieving recognition for the work of volunteers, overcoming a prejudice towards voluntary engagement, and coping with a lack of a clear strategy in a fragmented political landscape (p. 254). The three most important concerns raised by sport organisations were: the complexity and administrative burden of applying for subsidies, insurance and liability, and the low level of public funding (p. 256) although this conclusion is likely to have been derived from the three interviews.

More recent information is provided by the Sport and Recreation Alliance surveys—see Table 7.6. As noted above, these surveys tend to over-represent the larger and more formal clubs. The extrapolation of trends is also limited because the surveys do not include the same sample of clubs each time.

The 2013 survey (Sport and Recreation Alliance 2013) is able to show that immediately following the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, clubs experienced a greater than normal increase in junior members. This is likely to have been the result of ‘inspiration’ due to saturation coverage of sport on television for 3 weeks (Ives 2012) rather than as a coherent government strategy for promoting sport, which has been criticised for its absence (Weed 2014). Seven in ten clubs in the Sport and Recreation Alliance survey (2013) reported the Games had no noticeable impact on adult sports participation. The Taking Part national survey shows an increase in formal volunteering rates in the UK from January 2012 to December 2012 (DCMS, 2013, p6) and the 2013 Sport and Recreation Alliance

Table 7.6 Most common challenges faced by sport clubs in England (Sport and Recreation Alliance 2013)

Expected challenges in the next 2 years	Percentage of sport clubs reporting (%)
Accessing funding	52
Recruiting new members	51
Improving or extending facilities	49
Generating sufficient income	48
Increasing facility costs	47
Retaining existing members	44
Retaining volunteers	42
Financial sustainability of club	41
Equipment needs improving	40

survey (SARA, 2013) found that between 2011 and 2012 clubs had experienced a 20 % increase in the number of volunteers. This may have been assisted by Sport England's *Sport Makers* programme (Nichols et al. 2013) although there was no national strategy to convert the Olympic and Paralympic Games volunteers to more long-term volunteering (Nichols and Ralston 2014). Seventy three percent of clubs reported that no volunteers joined them in the 2 months immediately after the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (Sport and Recreation Alliance 2013). The 2013 Sport and Recreation Alliance survey (p. 44) reports that clubs were experiencing above inflation utility costs, as reported above. Costs of hiring local government playing facilities increased from 2011 to 2012 for a majority of clubs (Sport and Recreation Alliance 2013) although the average proportion of total club expenditure taken by facility hiring remained the same.

7.5 Clubmark Accreditation and Formalisation of Management

This section describes *Clubmark*, Sport England's *licensing system* for clubs with junior participants, as an example of the formalisation of club management, which is certainly seen as an advantage by Sport England, but may be seen as a threat by some more traditional clubs with no junior members. It draws on a pilot study of the effects of Clubmark accreditation on club volunteers (Nichols and Faulkner 2013). Attaining Clubmark accreditation requires clubs to comply with defined standards across:

- 'Activity/playing programmes—this includes, for example, coaching qualifications required, insurance and 'coach to participant' ratios.
- Duty of care and welfare—appropriate risk assessments, health and safety policies, training, compliance and child protection policies.
- Knowing your club and its community—this ensures that your club is committed to fairness and equity in respect of the way in seeks to attract and retain members from your local community.
- Club management—which covers issues to do with club and committee structures and the general running of the organisation'. (Sport England 2013b).

Attaining these criteria may be a 2 years process involving considerable effort from volunteers. It may require new roles, new training—particularly to attain coaching qualifications—as well as additional volunteer roles and the formalisation of management practices such as role descriptions. Some of these requirements, such as gaining coaching and first aid qualifications, can be costly. These costs are likely to be passed on to participants. Benefits of Clubmark accreditation include providing a badge of quality for parents of junior members and assuring club members that they are implementing *good practice*. Clubmark accreditation is a condition for funding support from local and national government and from NGBs; and also, in some local authorities, preferential access to facilities. Clubmark was

introduced in 2002. By August 2013, 11,711 clubs had obtained it and 3,972 were working towards it. Clubmark requires reassessment every 3 or 4 years.

As an example of formalisation and 'professionalisation of club management, one can argue that Clubmark has both benefits and costs. The new procedures will enable the club to compete more effectively for the time, enthusiasm and subscriptions of junior members (and their parents). It will enable new volunteers to more easily see their role in the club and thus may aid recruitment. Yet there is also an argument that adopting management procedures from service delivery organisations may be inappropriate for a mutual aid organisation which also has objectives of providing conviviality (Schulz et al. 2011; Rochester 2013). They may change the very nature of a club from mutual aid with conviviality towards a service delivery organisation. Is this what volunteers want to happen, or is it a change imposed upon them, overtly or covertly?

It is possible that the clubs with Clubmark status will expand and those without it contract as, where a choice is available, parents of new junior members gravitate towards the accredited clubs. As NGBs and local government focus their support on Clubmark clubs this will also help them develop at the expense of others. In this respect clubs without junior sections, but possibly with a large number of adults, are also disadvantaged.

7.6 Conclusion

Sport clubs in England face a number of considerable challenges now and in the foreseeable future. The apparent stability of an infrastructure which emerged from the conditions of the nineteenth century may be deceptive. First, the nature of participation in sport and physical activity is undergoing a long-term change, from traditional, time-bound sporting activities, often organised by teams, to individualised, time-flexible fitness activities. Thus, voluntary sport clubs are being overtaken in terms of participation numbers by health and fitness clubs, which are a source of significant growth for the commercial sector. If this change in relative importance is to be arrested by voluntary sport clubs, they will need to adopt a more flexible approach to the needs of potential members and volunteers. Participants will continue to want more opportunities for fitness activities, so sport clubs need to consider whether or not to accommodate this important source of demand. Clubs may not choose to do this if the collective enthusiasm binding volunteers to the club is love of a particular sport, rather than a desire to serve a particular community.

Second, while volunteers are sport clubs' lifeblood, the management of volunteers presents challenges. In seeking to recruit volunteers, normally from club members and parents of members, clubs may have to accommodate a trend towards *episodic* volunteering, which is limited in time duration (Rochester et al. 2010). Managing a larger number of episodic volunteers presents a more complex task of volunteer coordination for the traditional 'long-term' volunteers (Cuskelly 2005) who may themselves become harder to replace. Further, the management practices

advocated by Sport England, as embodied in Clubmark accreditation criteria, are based on a conception of the club as a competitor to provide a service for new participants in a leisure market. The key is to find management practices which allow clubs to do this, if they want to, but at the same time retain traditional practices which maintain the function of providing *conviviality*. Volunteering is a form of leisure, and the volunteers have to experience it as such. A danger of regarding the club as a service provider is that new members may also regard it as just that: a place to satisfy a need to play sport with no moral obligation to contribute to the *collective enthusiasm*.

Third, a large number of voluntary sport clubs struggle for financial security, which is influenced by their success or otherwise in attracting members and income, and their ability to contain costs. An important moderating influence in this relationship is facilities, particularly when they are hired. For those clubs which hire facilities from local authorities, there is a real threat of increasing costs and/or reduced quality of facilities as local government is forced to cut spending. Financially, voluntary sport clubs in England appear quite fragile—they make a very modest financial surplus on average. Yet it should be remembered that they are also reasonably durable and resilient and that they are in the main non-profit organisations, so operating to a break-even requirement is the norm. There are considerable financial challenges, however, in the form of increasing costs, which underpin widespread efforts by clubs to increase their income.

Fourth, there is a tension between the traditional independence of voluntary sport clubs and the increasing pressure to adhere to government policy. This is particularly the case in those sports which are in receipt of government funding for their NGBs. These sports are accountable to participation plans which rely largely on sport clubs to achieve them. At one level, this tension is in principle restricted to the 46 sports funded by the government's agency, Sport England. Nearly a hundred other sports do not have such funding, so they are less directly tied to government objectives. However, the Sport and Recreation Alliance survey evidence suggests 45 % of clubs have applied for funding from external organisations, and over half of clubs have links with schools and/or programmes stretching into their local communities. Clubmark accreditation is regarded as a key criterion for a club applying for funding, thus obliging clubs to obtain it. There is evidence that NGB support through sports development officers is directed at clubs who have, or are trying to obtain, Clubmark (Nichols and Faulkner 2013). These suggest less independence than would previously have been the case. If more participation is taking place outside traditional sport clubs, NGBs may have to work through other organisations to achieve their Whole Sport Plan participation targets. However, this will divert their role from the traditional one of representing and supporting the clubs. So while Sport England see sport clubs as playing a major role in its strategy to increase participation, at the same time Sport England policies may be making NGBs less representative of clubs. It is interesting to speculate how the influence of Sport England might wane if it is forced to make the same expenditure cuts proportionately as local government and if the revenue it distributes from National Lottery proceeds also declines.

The net effect of these challenges is that voluntary sport clubs in England are in a period of potentially significant change. Whether this results in the continued importance of such clubs for participation and policy remains to be seen. But if current trends continue, it is the private health and fitness clubs and informal participation out of the club structure altogether which will attract increasing attention, by participants and policy makers alike.

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