An Investigation of the Socio-Demographic Characteristics and Factors Motivating the Decision to Volunteer, within Sports Organisations with a View to Better Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Policy Initiatives

A Case Study from Rugby Union.

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SIGNED STATEMENT
ABSTRACT

In light of the well-reported decline in sports volunteers both in terms of uptake and of those existing volunteers ceasing their involvement. The study aimed to build on that of previous research in identifying a socio-demographic profile of the sports volunteer for cross-referencing for future study and ultimately to serve improved volunteer policies and initiatives. However, this study aimed to formulate a profile specific to the community rugby club volunteer based on the conclusion of previous research that current volunteer recruitment and retention policies and initiatives are trying to implement a “one size fits all” approach to solving this problem when in fact, research suggests that sports volunteers are “not a homogenous group”.

Questionnaires were distributed to a sample consisting of current volunteers operating within a case study example of an amateur community rugby union club, three of the questionnaire respondents were then selected to be subject to qualitative semi-structured interview.

The quantitative questionnaire data provided the socio-demographic characteristics that were used to formulate a profile of the community rugby club volunteer; this profile was consistent with that of previous research. Related to the gender and age characteristics of this profile, and supported by the qualitative information obtained via the interviews, the results identified club membership, as an ex-player for example, and family club association through a participating child as key motivating factors for making the decision to volunteer within the club.

The study then proposed therefore that the traditional functions within such volunteer sports clubs facilitate relatively healthy, natural volunteer recruitment and retention levels and that in addition to this, the rugby club in question had made a shift toward more contemporary operations, in terms of its recruitment and retention strategy.

The investigation concluded by developing a conceptual model representing the repositioning to a more contemporary organisation, whilst retaining a appreciation of its original stance, that volunteer sports clubs and the relevant volunteer policy formers need to make, in terms of understanding the functions and wider objectives of the other in order to encourage the formulation of more appropriate volunteer recruitment and retention policies and initiatives.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would firstly like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to Melissa Anderson for her invaluable support and guidance throughout this study.

To my parents and family for the continued finance, love and support throughout my college and university life without which this dissertation would not be possible.

To all the participating subjects of Northwich RUFC – members of the committee, senior and junior coaching staff, current and former players and spectators alike. This investigation proves that the club has something rare that must be treasured.

Finally, to the boys at 11 Bangor St, 2 Montgommery St, 13 Hendy St and to all my fellow UWIC friends and associates for four of the best years of my life.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Department for Culture Media and Sports (DCMS)

Leisure Industries Research Centre (LIRC)

Rugby Union Football Club (RUFC)

University of Wales Institute Cardiff (UWIC)
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Rationale of the study

In light of the recent decline in sports volunteer recruitment and retention (Burgham and Downward, 2005; Coleman, 2002, Collins, 2003; Cuskelly, 2006; Nichols, 2004; Nichols and Shepherd, 2006; Shibli et al, 1999) and of the recognition that sports volunteers are “not a homogenous group” (Coleman, 2002) for government and governing bodies to implement a “one cap fits all” policy to solve this issue.

This paper explores specifically who rugby club volunteers are (in terms of socio-demographic characteristics) and strives to gain a greater understanding of these people to identify what motivates volunteer work so that it may continue into the future. Shibli et al (1999) suggested that:

“If volunteers are to be successful in sport then it is vital that some understanding of the characteristics of such people and the motivations that underpin their involvement in a given sport is reached” (cited in Coleman, 2002, p.236).

This provided initial justification for choosing to identify motivations, rather than the barriers concerned with sports volunteers. Hatch (1983) stated that

“It is disorder and suffering, rather than goodness and virtue that most readily loosen the purse strings of grant givers, in the expectation that research will help to put right things that are wrong. There is less interest in what is right to begin with, and our implicit optimism assumes that rightness or virtue is normal and therefore does not need to be explained” (p.7).

The supposed diminishment of the sports volunteer sector shows that the desire to help others is not so strong and widespread.
Again Hatch (1983) suggests that developing and implementing policies that rely on and promote the output of volunteers would be difficult “without a good understanding of what it is that leads people to become involved” (p.7).

It is only through such understanding, that proper judgement can be made about the potential of the volunteer workforce and the best ways to tap this potential. He continues:

*In seeking to explain the strengths and limitations of voluntary action, the relationship between the motivation of volunteers and the goals of voluntary organisations, and the ways voluntary organisations seek to develop and sustain the motivation of participants, seem particularly to deserve exploration.* (p.7)

### 1.2. Dissertation Structure

- The review of literature section sets the scene for the research subject. Firstly identifying the individual sports volunteer, what they contribute to the sports industry and to the wider social and political environment; in this light it then explores governments relationship with volunteers namely through the “sports volunteer sector” and the role that voluntary sports organisations play within this. It then describes the current prevalent issues that exist within this environment, including the barriers and motivations, that effect volunteer involvement and from this, its impact on UK sports provision.

Finally, it introduces some of the common sports volunteer profile characteristics, as identified in previous studies and their relationship with volunteer policy initiatives, which is closely related to the subject of the results and discussion section.
• The methodology section outlines the research techniques implemented in the study and uses the relevant literature to describe and support the justification for the methods used. It also serves as a guide for the sequential procedure that was conducted in the collection of the required data. Also illustrating how analysis, of the primary data, was crucial to forming the content of the results and discussion section.

• The results and discussion section firstly produces a socio-demographic profile of a rugby club volunteer. It then explores how certain key characteristics from this profile impacts on individual volunteer motivation within the voluntary sports club internal environment, supported by relevant theories and literature. This section then assesses the rugby club in question’s role in the issue of volunteer recruitment and retention and the club’s organisational activity related to this matter. It concludes by highlighting some of the specific issues in the relationship between such voluntary sports organisations and government/sporting body volunteer initiatives, and proposes a guideline to improve this relation in the quest to better serve policy formation concerned with volunteer recruitment and retention.

• The final section summarises the key findings of the investigation and provides a conclusion for the research study in question, identifying limitations to the investigation and recommendations for future research in the process.

1.3. Aims and Objectives

1. To identify a socio-demographic profile specifically of a community rugby club volunteer.
2. Identify the key motivations for becoming a rugby club volunteer (related to certain specific profile characteristics as obtained via the primary data collection) supporting these with relevant literature and theory surrounding the subject of volunteer recruitment and retention.

3. To explore the role of the rugby club and the relevant government / representative bodies in this subject of recruitment and retention.
2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Sports Volunteer

In order to fully understand the aims and objectives of this investigation, it is firstly important to define a sports “volunteer” and then how “volunteers” relate to the sporting context.

Volunteering in the sporting context has been described as: “individual volunteers helping others in sport, in formal organisations such as clubs or governing bodies, receiving either no remuneration or only expenses.” (Gratton et al., 1997, p.4). Some have gone even further to distinguish between “formal volunteering” and “informal volunteering”; the key characteristic of the former is that this is done for, or through a representative organisation, where the latter is the purest form of volunteering, taking place “outside the organisational boundary”, for example, helping someone as a favour (Nichols 2004, p198).

Pearce (1993, cited in Cuskelly, 2006, p.25) further categorised between core and peripheral volunteers. Whilst the boundary between the two is considered “fluid”, Core volunteers usually occupy more senior, formal leadership roles within the organisation, are characteristically highly committed to their role and contribute considerable time to this more demanding work. Their motivation is generated by the activity itself. Peripheral volunteers are relatively steady, occasional contributors with more altruistic motivations than core volunteers and are further distinguished by the idea that they seek limited involvement, carrying out the more operational tasks required by the organisation as
opposed to the more strategic, planning tasks etc, performed by the core volunteers in their more elevated position they occupy within the organisation.

2.2. The Sports Volunteer Sector

Research has identified that the work provided by volunteers has values not only within sports organisations, in terms of their reliance on the work output of its volunteer workforce, but also in its impact on local communities and its economic value to the UK as a whole (Nicholls and Collins, 2003).

Research into the size and value of the sports volunteer sector, has been generally consistent in identifying the sports activity sector as where the vast majority of volunteering takes place (Nichols, 2006), and furthermore the value of this sector to the economy as a whole (Sports Council, 1996). An early study that calculated the number and value of volunteers to the sports industry found that in 1995 there were roughly 1.5 million volunteers in UK sport, averaging 125 hours voluntary work a year, at over 2.5 hours a week for 48 weeks per year. The number of volunteers in sport was more than three times the amount of those in paid employment in the same industry at that time (Sports Council, 1996). More recently, Nichols et al. (2003) found that 26% of volunteers were in the area of sport and exercise, the highest single category of involvement, equating to 5.7 million volunteers (12% of the population),” (Nichols, 2004). In addition to the Nichols (2003) study, a Sport England survey in 2004, concluded that the volunteer workforce contributed 1 billion hours a year to sport, an equivalent to 720,000 full-time paid workers at an estimated value of over £14 billion that year (Sport England, 2004).
Such figures suggest that should the work output of this volunteer sector be compromised, the quality of sports activity and leisure provision to the everyday UK consumer would suffer as a result; “Without a vibrant volunteer sector the quality of life enjoyed by people living in developed countries would be substantially effected and/or they would have to pay considerably more to sustain their lifestyle” (Cuskelly, 2006, p.2).

The sports industry, right from grass-root, local community level e.g. a local football, rugby club etc, up to the most elite level, high-profile sporting events such as the FIFA world cup or the Olympic Games for example, are hugely reliant on the work carried-out by volunteers in order to run these activities and events. For example, The Sydney Olympic Games and the Manchester Commonwealth Games utilised a massive volunteer workforce, which was required due to the size and scale of the events (Torkildsen, 2005). Sports volunteers also play an increasingly important role in primary schools, e.g. Dragon Sport, and the recently implemented 5x60 Programme, and in support for disabled sport, for example, “horse riding for the disabled is supported by volunteers with an average of one helper for less than two riders (Torkildsen, 2005, p.175).

Gameplan (DCMS, 2002), the government policy document for sport, sets out the government’s plans to support success in sport in the UK, primarily by increasing participation at all levels, from grass roots to the most elite performance. It clearly recognises the importance of volunteers in enabling the achievement of this aim, citing newly-formed support networks with an emphasis on capacity building as crucial to enabling the voluntary sector to continue its invaluable contribution in delivering UK sports provision (DCMS, 2002). Although the volunteer workforce is acknowledged, no
formal strategy is identified within the document which addresses how to recruit, manage and retain a volunteer workforce (Green and Houlihan, 2005).

2.3. Volunteers and the Government

It has been suggested that sports volunteering has to be understood in wider context than financial/numerical if its role within sports development is to be fully realised (Hylton et al., 2006).

Despite the obvious contribution of the volunteer sports sector, there is little legislation that requires local authorities to be engaged with sports, leisure and recreation. Their involvement is largely discretionary and motivated by socio-political objectives, mainly justified by the perceived benefits of sports, leisure and recreation to local communities, such as: -

- Providing for the socially disadvantaged
- Supporting the education of children and young people especially
- Attracting tourists
- Developing civic pride and reducing crime
- Promoting health

Torkildsen (2005, p.150)

This contemporary idea, of investing in the local community and the people within it, has become commonly referred to as “social capital”. Hanigan (1916, cited in Collins, 2003), defined social capital as “those tangible substances that count for most in the daily life of people: namely goodwill, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse” (p.234) he goes on to describe it as “a kind of sociological superglue”.

-8-
It would seem that government is beginning to recognise not only the economic value of the sports volunteer sector but also the value of social capital as being “one of the most important outcomes of volunteering and a strong voluntary sector (Cuskelly, 2006, p8). Some studies have supported this idea in suggesting that societies rich in social capital will tend to have lower crime rates, lower levels of school absenteeism and higher levels of economic growth, happiness and neighbourhood vitality (Johnson et al., 2005; Putnam, 2000, cited in Cuskelly, 2006, p3). Accordingly, the government sees the volunteer sector as a favoured medium for the delivery of public service provision, they have therefore, “scaled back their involvement in the direct delivery of welfare and social services and now rely more on non-profit and volunteers to deliver services, maintain community cohesion and build mutual trust and solidarity (Hodgkinson, 2003, cited in Cuskelly, 2006, p.10)“ For local authorities this means justifying the funding of schemes/resources aimed at supporting sports volunteers is done through the notion of this activity as “a public good” – “a positive example of an activity that is a component part of the associations and groups helping to mediate between government and the market, in this case civil society (Sirianni & Friedland, 2001, cited in Adams & Deane, 2003, p.40)”.

This idea seems to support, in part, the philosophy behind Gameplan (DCMS, 2002), in supporting the government concept of “Best Value”. This primarily identifies a need to improve “joined-up thinking” across the various sectors, namely between the various sport national governing bodies, local authorities, schools, sports clubs and the private sector (Hylton et al 2006). It is suggested that government can best achieve this Best Value from these divisions by setting itself two overarching objectives:
• A major increase in participation in sport and physical activity, primarily due to the significant health benefits and to reduce the cost of inactivity.
• A sustainable improvement in success at international competition, particularly the sports which matter most to the public, primarily because of the “feel good factor” associated with winning.

(www.sportengland.org)

Gameplan (2002) can be considered a representation of the shift in the ideas of sports policy to respond to this “Best Value” concept, in working to attempt to achieve the objectives outlined above. This has elements of the idea that sport “is now clearly seen as having value as an agent for the promotion of policies relating to a wide range of cross-cutting issues but is seldom promoted as sport” (Hylton et al, 2001, p30). This can be understood to be an example of the pivotal role that sport can play in promoting social capital in local communities through sport.

Baddock (2002, cited in Cuskelly, 2006, p.8) identified voluntary sports clubs as being one of a varying range of settings, in which the social and community support networks associated with the promotion of social capital is formed. Therefore, research studies surrounding the subject of volunteers within sports clubs, could possibly be used to serve as further investigation for the subject of social capital. Cuskelly (2006) suggests that “While the broad relationship between volunteering, social capital and civil society are generally considered to be strong, the role of volunteerism in shaping the nature and mechanisms of social capital development and maintenance of civil society is under investigated (p.9)”. 
2.4. Volunteer Sports Club Organisations

As highlighted earlier, sports clubs are the setting for a significant amount of sports volunteer activity in the UK, especially in amateur sports clubs; which require the work output of volunteers in order to exist (Hatch, 1983). Sport England (2005) defines community amateur sports clubs as:

> Properly constituted as not for profit organisation, with no provision for payment to members during the life of the club or upon dissolution. The club must operate an open membership policy that allows anyone, within reason, to join and use its facilities.

Valuing Volunteers in the UK (Sports Council, 1996) revealed that sports clubs and governing bodies “are the bedrock of voluntary inputs and value – they provide over 90% of the total estimated hours and value and of this category sports clubs provide 90% of the volunteer hours and governing bodies 10%” (Sports Council, 1996, p 17). More recently the Leisure Industries Research Centre (LIRC) (2003) reported that of their core of 2.01 million sports volunteers in England, 75% were club level volunteers, accounting for 83% of the total hours volunteered (Cuskelley 2006, p.17).

A Sport England’s “Driving up Participation” (Taylor, 2004) identified two types of sports club organisations operating at opposite ends of a continuum as:

1. Traditional, informal organisations - consisting of members often referred to as “mutual enthusiasts” in their sense of collective strength and unity (Hogget and Bishop, 1985). These clubs are characteristically reluctant to create a
more formal organisation as part of its resistance to outside assistance, viewing it as a threat to their cultural traditions.

2. Contemporary, formal organisations – represents not only the alternative to traditional sports clubs, but also the transition that many are beginning to take in becoming more receptive to a modernised formal approach to sports development.

Nichols & Shepherd (2006) used ratio analysis “to relate volunteering in clubs to club membership (p.206)”. This investigation was carried-out with the notion that a few previous studies had identified the characteristics of the sports club volunteer, with the intention of assisting recruitment and retention strategies, but “none had been able to relate these to sports club membership (p.205). “The key findings of this study, aside from establishing a profile of sports club volunteers, was that the older (35-54) age range was over-represented in volunteers; this is due to these older members “maintaining a continuity of interests, by moving from playing to volunteer roles” (Atchley, 1999, cited in Nichols and Shepherd, 2005, p.205). Furthermore, volunteering seems to be particularly strong in traditional team sports clubs with memberships covering the non-player, older representatives.

In the interests of this study, The Rugby Football Union (RFU) (an example of a union consisting of such “traditional team sports clubs”) has over 43,000 grass-root/amateur club volunteers, within community clubs, schools, colleges and universities, averaging 36 volunteers per club (Rugby Football Union, 2007). In 2005 a “specially commissioned survey of rugby workforce at 91 clubs”, all at non-professional level, found that volunteers accounted for 88.7% of the total rugby workforce, and more recent RFU
research in 2006 calculated that volunteers “gave over 8.5 million hours to rugby” (RFU, 2006) in that same year. The RFU is an example of a sports governing body that recognises the contribution of volunteers and is actively working to recruit and retain as part of their policy. The RFU Strategic Plan, as part of its RFU Volunteer Policy (RFU, 2002), has an objective of “achieving a minimum of 3% per annum increase in the number of volunteer administrators over the period of the plan (RFU, 2002)”.

Volunteer recruitment and retention is a particularly complex subject and the issues surrounding this matter have been the focus of a number of research studies. These are discussed in the results and discussion section.
2.5. Issues Surrounding the Volunteer Sector

Despite the obvious, wide ranging contribution of the volunteer sector; Cuskelly (2006) proposed that there is much evidence to suggest volunteers are currently being treated or managed poorly and are also becoming increasingly difficult to retain (p.1).

As highlighted earlier, key, post-millennium government sports policies, such as A Sporting Future for All (DCMS, 2000) and more recently Gameplan (DCMS, 2002) have been largely orientated towards increasing participation levels in sport from local community, inter and intra-school sport etc, right up to the most elite performance levels. This has brought renewed focus to the structure of community sport systems and the management of its volunteer workforce. Should such policies be successful in increasing the participation levels in UK sport, it must therefore be assumed that a greater supply of volunteer labour is required to meet the increased demand for sports provision (Cuskelly, 2004). Reorganisation of the sporting structure has, as encouraged by the Labour governments’ “Best Value” concept, extended the delivery of sports participation services to beyond that of the public sector, through the involvement of the commercial sector (Hylton, 2001). This is often in the form of “pay-for-play sports” (Cuskelly, 2004, p.61) for example the nationwide “Powerleague” football competition centres, and David Lloyd tennis centres etc. Cuskelly (2004) continues, stating that not only might this increased involvement of commercial sector provision “result in a displacement of participation from community to commercial organisations rather than any real increases”, but importantly that the required increase in paid staff produces a conflict between the two and “the disempowerment of volunteers” (p61). The increased
professionalism that would arrives with the cross sectional workings between sectors has led to the increased complexity of managing sport organisations in terms of staff training, qualifications, and general bureaucracy (Verhoeven et al, 1999, cited in Cuskelley, 2004). The work requires specialist skills and increased amounts of responsibility and accountability that overburdens unpaid volunteers and is therefore better suited to the job role of paid specialist employees. Hiring more paid staff, forces core volunteers (as described earlier) from the elevated organisational roles that they currently occupy in to a more peripheral role (Auld and Godbey, 1998, cited in Cuskelley 2004).

This “professionalisation” of the sports volunteer sector is just one example of the pressures volunteers can experience. As a result there are concerns within the industry that this volunteer contribution is fading, to the detriment of the sports industry and the public sector; Burgham et al (2005, p79).

2.6. Barriers to Volunteering

Although not a primary concern of this investigation, the perceived barriers to volunteer involvement are an important factor when considering the issues surrounding recruitment and retention and the policies concerned. Table 1 below, lists the difficulties that were experienced by volunteers, and the percentages of the samples that reported this, from two studies:
Table 1 Barriers to volunteering

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>there are not enough people to volunteer</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the work is increasingly being left to fewer people</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dissatisfaction with parent contributions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>little time left after paid work</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rules and regulations of the association</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conflicts with family commitments</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increasing demand of specialist skills for volunteer roles</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of organisation leads to the feeling that efforts are being wasted</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor support from other leaders</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there is little time left after partner's work commitments</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor training support offered by association</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>children no longer involved in the association so feel less motivated</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Gratton et al (1997) and Nichols & King (1999), adapted from Nichols (2004, p.199)

Nichols (2004) summarised these findings into a number of categories, including, “time pressures on potential and existing volunteers”, which could come from “the demands of paid work … family commitments and the greater range of opportunity to use leisure time (Nichols, 2004, p.200)”. Nichols (2004) also refers to a “demand for professionalism (p.201),“ highlighting internal organisational pressures on the individual volunteer, in the pursuit of appearing as highly professional as possible, as the competition for governing body or local authority funding and grants increases; and also more external pressures from central government through the introduction of the child protection legislation, police CRB checks etc. It is also suggested that there is a change in the attitude of contemporary society towards volunteering in general and that the older existing volunteer cohorts are committing more hours to volunteering to subsidise for the lack of younger people committing their time and efforts (Nichols, 2004). Burgham (2005) supports this finding and suggests that if the evident reduction in younger cohorts of volunteers is not supplemented by “a corresponding increase in the efforts of older cohorts, overall numbers and efforts in volunteering will fall…and then sports will face a problem of supply shortage (p.79).”
The model below produced by Doherty (2005), is an attempt to summarise some of these potential barriers affecting volunteering efforts, separated into two different categories of personal and organisational. The barriers were initially identified in a number of studies including those undertaken by Gratton et al (1997); De Knops (1999); Nichols & King (1998); cited in Doherty (2005, p.36).

**Figure 1 A model of barriers to volunteering in sport**

Source: Doherty (2005, p.36)

Although there are other prevalent barriers to volunteering that have been the subject of much research, psychological barriers for example, that are particularly difficult for sports organisations to combat, however these are beyond the focus or scope this research investigation.

### 2.7. Motivations for Volunteering

Parker (1997) identified four types of volunteer, each interlinking certain elements, with one or more of the others:
- altruistic (unselfish) volunteering as giving of time and effort to help others
- market volunteering as giving something freely, but expecting something in return later
- cause-serving volunteering as promoting a cause in which one believes
- leisure volunteering as primarily seeking leisure experience


As this theory demonstrates, motivations for volunteering are rarely attributed purely to good-nature. There are a number of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, for example the want to gain a sense of belonging to a group or network of people or friends; to achieve a sense of accomplishment or contribution i.e. by improving something for the benefit of the local community, bringing out the talents of others and seeing a team experience success, etc. The more superficial benefits could include the attainment of coaching award badges or certificates to add to a C.V, developing personal skills abilities or receiving free-kit for example.

The model below (Figure 2) identifies three broad categories of factors affecting the decision to volunteer, and furthermore (although not the primary concern of this investigation) the extent of time given to this volunteer work. The model attempts to represent that the decision to volunteer or not is a decision that is “emergent from the interaction of individual and social characteristics, economic factors and degrees of experience with the sport (Burgham & Downward, 2005, p.83)”. It is with this in mind that conceptual models, such as Figure 2 below, should be appreciated as being dynamic...
in that they are not a strict rule, but can be used to represent the individual processes and circumstances of an individual potential volunteer.¹.

**Figure 2 Conceptual model of factors affecting volunteer commitment**

![Conceptual model of factors affecting volunteer commitment](source)


The most frequently cited reasons for volunteering according to recent research (The Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001; The Leisure Research Industries Centre, 2003; Doherty, 2005) were personal development and satisfaction, helping or giving something back to the community and also importantly, parental involvement with a participating child or because someone they knew was personally affected by the sports organisation.

### 2.8. The Typical Sports Organisation Volunteer

Identifying the socio-demographic characteristics that are commonly associated with sports volunteers has been the focus of a number of different studies and surveys. The characteristics obtained through research studies such as Coleman (2002); Burgham and Downward (2005); Doherty (2005); Shibli et al (1999), are typically concerned with

¹ It should be noted that this model was devised from the results of a study concerned with the Manchester Commonwealth Games 2002, therefore these characteristics are concerned with larger scale, spectacle-events, rather than an individual sports organisation.
socio-economic data surrounding individual volunteers, with the intention of using this information to form a profile of the sports volunteer.

Doherty (2005) states that a volunteer profile “can be used as a tool to develop better volunteer programmes to effectively, recruit, position, develop, recognise and retain volunteers (p.7).” Shibli et al (1999, cited in Coleman, 2002) suggested that understanding of the characteristics of sports volunteers and the motives surrounding their involvement are vital to their successful continuation in sport. The formation of the sports club volunteer profile can be based on specific information surrounding “social class, life-cycle, physical mobility, kinship and sex roles affecting both patterns of attendance and leadership(concerned with volunteering)” Torkildsen (2005,p.169)

Table 2 below, displays just some of the characteristics that are common to sports volunteers, as were highlighted in a number of different studies.
Table 2 Characteristics common to sports volunteers

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>99.3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>16-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24-31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>32-39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Bracket</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>40-47</td>
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<td>25-34</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>48-55</td>
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<td>35-44</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>56-63</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>64-71</td>
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<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>72+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9.5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>High School or less</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A-level</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>58.7</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part time</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>11</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Status</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>62.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Volunteer hours (weekly)</strong></td>
<td>2.9 hours</td>
<td>6.4 hours</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Comparison of common socio-demographic statistics associated to sports volunteers as identified by 4 different studies.

Table 2 shows that from the four studies not all featured identical characteristics; however there are similarities between the characteristics identified, for example; age, gender, marital status, occupation, dependent children, etc.

The few research studies identified in this investigation thus far that were concerned, at least in part, with establishing a profile of the sports volunteer (Coleman, 2002; Burgham and Downward, 2005; Doherty, 2005; Nichols and Shepherd, 2006; Shibli et al, 1999)
has been somewhat consistent in its findings. Doherty (2005) summarises the general common profile developed by such studies: “the typical community sports volunteer is male, 35-44 years of age, a college or university graduate, married with dependents at home and employed full-time” (p.4).

In an attempt to relate such findings to sports volunteer policy, a conclusion of Burgham & Downward (2005) was that despite the obvious attempts of various governing bodies (in this case the Amateur Swimming Association) to target recruitment and retention of volunteers as an issue - there is “little to suggest what motivates individuals to commit to volunteering (p81).

Taylor (2004), perhaps explored this link between volunteer motivations within varying sports organisations and sports policy intervention most closely (Volunteer Sports Club Organisations). In this he described the motivations of the typical volunteer within each, suggesting that members of contemporary, formal organisations “are more likely to simultaneously want the club to do well, not just in playing performance but also in organisational performance” (p106) which, as he explains, is characterised by being more receptive to “external support” as provided by local authority and governing bodies etc.

(Coleman, 2002) suggested that “policy support agencies should be cautious of treating all sports groups as a homogenous group (p.236)”.

Hogget and Bishop (1985) found a great diversity of voluntary organisation from their study, consistent with their high regard for independence and diversity of these organisations (as a representation of active citizenship), they too recommended that any
local authority support should be “carefully considerate of these characteristics”, (cited in Nichols et al, 1998, p119).
3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This section aims to illustrate how certain research methods were selected and then to describe the techniques and procedures that were carried-out to collect the research data, and then to formulate the results of the investigation. Specifically, the gathering of information, surrounding current situations and opinions, from individual subjects within a case study environment and then analysis, leading to the possible improvement of current levels of understanding and practice surrounding the research subject in the wider context.

Gratton and Jones (2004, p4), defines “research” as, “a systematic process of discovery and advancement of human knowledge”; the key part of this description being “systematic process.” Thomas et al (2001) identifies this systematic manner as crucial in order to be able to carry out effective research, to ensure that the problem is addressed effectively. It is with this idea in mind that the research design was formulated and then executed, paying a significant amount of attention to the pre-planning of the methodology.

3.2. The sample

The research investigation used a case study example; Thomas (1996) describes a case study as: “a form of descriptive research in which a single case is studied in depth to reach a greater understanding about other similar cases” (p314). This statement is fitting of this investigation due to the fact that it attempts to serve as an isolated example of the
current environment which can then be related to the wider context. This process involves the gathering of contextual information about a case to provide a “context with which to understand causal processes (De Vaus, (2001, p.50).” Through a case study, it is not the desire of the researcher to accept or reject a particular theory, more to add to the results of other existing research, by replicating it and conducting it under a variety of different conditions. If “similar results are found in repeated case studies, or predictable differences are found for particular cases in the study; then we develop greater confidence in the findings of the cases (De Vaus (2001, p.50).”

Northwich Rugby Union Football Club (RUFC), a local-community, amateur Rugby Union club in the North West of England, provided the case study example for this investigation. The rationale for this was that the club operates within the contemporary sports volunteer environment and can therefore serve as an example of the current issues prevalent within it. As highlighted in chapter 2 (Literature Review), the sports sector is highly dependent on the work output provided by unpaid volunteers. Like the majority of clubs operating in this environment, the selected rugby club is highly dependent on a volunteer workforce for its continued existence. It was this volunteer workforce that provided the sample to be subject to the research of this investigation. Additional factors contributing to the suitability was that the researcher had strong links with the club concerned, having represented them as a player and therefore had easy, regular contact and access to volunteer members at all levels within the club.

3.3. Research Design

The investigation utilises a mixed-method approach, allowing the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. This approach was made with respect to the nature of
the research study itself, which was to gain the perceptions, opinions and situational/environmental characteristics of a chosen sample operating within a specific environment. The use of this combination was with the confidence that as much contributory information as possible could be gathered, with the intention of providing “a thorough, holistic account of a complex problem (Thomas, 1996, p.333).”

Often referred to as “triangulation”, this style of approach was favoured for its complementary qualities, Robson (2002) states that “qualitative data can be useful in supplementing and illustrating the quantitative data obtained from an experiment or survey (p.456),” i.e. the follow-up interviews could be used to support, explain or serve as example of the statistical information gathered via the questionnaires.

The quantitative section of the research took the form of “closed” questions, within the questionnaires and was used predominantly to formulate a profile of the research sample and to generate statistics for the results and discussion phase of the investigation. Self-completion questionnaires are a common method of quantitative data collection and enabled the formulation of a baseline of data from the relatively large sample, “to secure information about present practices, conditions and demographic data (Thomas, 1996, p.19),” relevant to the sample.

Qualitative data, more descriptive by nature, was present in both the self-completion questionnaires and the semi-structured interviews. Qualitative research has been described as “an enquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of enquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of information and conducts a study in the natural setting (Creswell, 1998, p.15).”
3.4. **Method 1 – Questionnaires.**

Initially, thirty questionnaires were distributed at random to members of the club volunteer workforce via the junior and senior age-group secretaries. It was considered better to distribute the questionnaires via these particular club officials rather than the researcher personally distributing as it further reinforced the idea of subject anonymity and also that these senior officials were more aware of the subjects’ schedules and could therefore coordinate distribution and collection more effectively. In order to ensure an acceptable rate of return of questionnaires it was decided to re-administer any incomplete or un-returned forms to other volunteer members within the club.

As earlier stated, the decision to utilise the self-completion questionnaire method was based partially on the fact that the sample in the study was relatively large. By gathering information on the key factors affecting the decision to volunteer, an easily comparable, baseline of data was established which could then be analysed to form a “profile” of the rugby club volunteer.

Pre-planning was an integral part of the research design, which resulted in the decision to use both open and closed style questions in the questionnaire. An open style question enables the subject to answer the question any way they like; usually a brief statement is required (Bryman, 2004). These were used where the whole range of responses was uncertain and where the nature of the question required the subject’s perspective or personal opinion. The question was kept open so not to cloud or influence the response in any way. This type of question also featured in the multiple-choice questions, leaving
“other” as an option, then asking the subject to specify their response. The main disadvantage of this kind of question is that “completed forms will be difficult to analyse and the researcher will, in the end, impose such a frame of reference on the answers in order to classify them (Marshall, 1997, p.39).” On this basis open questions were kept to a minimum where possible.

Closed questions, also referred to as forced-choice questions (Kane & O’Reilly-De Brun 2001), provide answer options for the subject to choose one or several, usually in the form of a yes or no answer or a multiple-choice format. As stated earlier, the decision to make use of both styles of questioning was based on the mixed-method approach and with the intent of making data collection as in-depth as possible.

3.4.1. Pilot Test/Pre-planning

Pre-testing was achieved through use of a pilot study, which was carried out on a sample of University of Wales Institute, Cardiff students. This was done to ensure the questionnaire was constructed and worded so that it was easily translated and understood by the subjects, simultaneously establishing the validity and reliability of this method, “Pilot work can be of the greatest help in devising the actual wording of questions, and it operates as a healthy check, since fatal ambiguities may lurk in the most unexpected quarters (Oppenheim (1996, p.48).” The pilot study provided valuable critiques on the questionnaire format, content, wording and relevance of the questions, and enabled the researcher to make minor alterations to apply to the final draft of the questionnaire.

Importantly a cover letter was composed by the researcher and provided with each questionnaire for the subject to read prior to completing the questionnaire. If a cover
letter “can explain the purposes and importance of the survey in a succinct and professional manner, the respondent will likely become interested in the problem and will be inclined to cooperate (Thomas, 1996, p.319).” With this consideration in mind, it was the intention of the researcher to eradicate certain potential issues in the data collection method, such as ensuring the privacy and anonymity of respondents and importantly reassuring the respondent of the “opt-out” option, i.e. that they are free to cease completion of the questionnaire at any point, if for example they felt that too personal or intrusive questions were being asked. One of the requirements of the questionnaire was to obtain specific socio-demographic information from respondents and as a result some of the questions could be considered sensitive in asking for personal information; e.g. question 26 asked “between which bracket does your current salary fall?” It was anticipated that some respondents may not want to divulge such information. The questionnaire was therefore designed so that the more sensitive questions were at the very end, when the majority of other information had already been provided. It therefore lessened the possibility of early opt-outs or the perception, which could be caused by the inclusion of sensitive questions early-on, that other included questions were also perhaps too-intrusive.

3.5. Method 2 - Semi-Structured Interview

Following the collection and analysis of questionnaire results, one-to-one, semi structured interviews were undertaken with three individual members of the sample. Interviews are defined as “a survey technique similar to questionnaire except that subjects are questioned and respond verbally rather than in writing” (Thomas, 1996, p.314),” and are often a favoured research technique as the researcher can gain greater, more in depth
knowledge than that provided by questionnaire survey. Gillham (2000) suggests that the key reasoning for the use of interviewing is to gain information and understanding of issues relevant to the aims and objectives of the study. Patton (2002) adds, “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable and able to be made explicit (p.341).” “A key purpose is to gather subject interpretations, rather than explicit facts or laws (Holstein & Gubrium, 2002, p.83).” Gratton and Jones (2004) highlight further advantages in that an interview enables the researcher to assess factors such as body language, tone of voice and facial expressions amongst other things. By assessing such indicators, the interviewer can make slight alterations to the course of the meeting. For example, if the interviewee is leaning back in a disengaged manner, this could suggest they are less interested or perhaps feel that the interviewer is dominating proceedings too much. Furthermore, certain questions can be described in greater depth to aid subject understanding and conversely the subject can elaborate on answers to achieve greater researcher interpretation. The specific use of a “semi-structured” approach was intended to add structure to the content and course of each interview. This ensured that the conversation rarely drifted too far from the intended subject matter and also ensured that comparisons could be drawn between subjects on specific, key areas of information which could be applied to the research findings. This technique provides some flexibility in allowing the researcher to add further probing questions to satisfy the information gathered and also in that the subjects can highlight or introduce issues or factors previously not considered (Bryman, 2004).

However, Patton (2002) highlights potential limitations to this method, stating that; “The weakness of the standardized approach is that it does not permit the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview was written (p.347).”
further weakness of this method is in the nature of qualitative enquiry, which means that analysis of the information obtained can become laborious and often very time consuming.

Prior to each interview it was important that a cover-letter, similar to that given with the questionnaire, was provided, and furthermore that signed consent was obtained from each interviewee. This was to clarify that they understood that they were part of a research investigation and also that, like the questionnaire respondents, they could “opt-out” at any time.

The interviews were intended to gain information from the interviewees surrounding the subject of volunteers within the club, in terms of the following general areas:

- A general profile of the subject
- their motivation for taking up volunteer work and for continuing with it
- are there any existing procedures or programmes within the club, aimed at volunteer recruitment and retention.

Furthermore, to discover their knowledge/understanding/interpretation of the following: -

- current policies and initiatives specifically relating to volunteers
- if they have any first hand experience of such policies/initiatives in effect.

Interviews such as this “Need individuals who are not hesitant to speak and share ideas and needs a setting in which this is possible. The less articulate, shy interviewee may present the researcher with a challenge and less than adequate data (Creswell, 1998, p124).” Factors such as these were considered on selection of individuals to be interviewed. As all had current or previous coaching experience in addition to roles as
senior club members, the researcher was confident that the selected subjects displayed characteristics and possessed experiences that would be beneficial rather than detrimental to the investigation and that they would have no issues in communicating these in the interview environment.

Each interview was recorded using a Dictaphone and the information contained in each was then transcribed into a written document. More detail of the semi-structured interview methodology used is shown in Appendix 2.

3.6. Data Analysis

The completed questionnaires were analysed using the SNAP 8 and Microsoft Windows Excel packages. The SNAP8 package allowed for both professional design and comprehensive analysis of the questionnaire results in the form of detailed charts and graphs and cross tabulation charts. The package firstly provided statistical information related to each question, which was then transferred into Windows Excel as it was decided that the use of this package would better suit the presentation of the results.

In order to quantify and analyse the qualitative data obtained from the interviews, the interview transcripts were subject to “coding” (Bryman, 2004). This enabled the formulation of distinct key themes from the replies of the subjects. This was achieved by designing a “coding frame that identifies the types of answer associated with each question and their respective codes (Bryman, 2004, p147). Initially, this involved identifying and assigning a different number to clearly defined categories in the data (ensuring no overlaps). Thus, when certain information emerged from data it could be quickly and efficiently placed within the relevant category, enabling the identification of key themes to be the subject of discussion in the results and discussion chapter.
4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

SECTION REMOVED FOR DISK2 REQUIREMENTS
5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Summary

1. The quantitative data gathered reproduced some fundamental descriptive characteristics of sports volunteers that are consistent with previous research, therefore suggesting broader relevance in these findings.

2. Through the socio-demographic/economic profile specific to the community rugby club volunteer that was developed, two key motivations for becoming a volunteer were identified, i.e. membership within a sports organisation and child/family association, in relation to particular characteristics (gender, age).

3. Volunteer sports organisations, such as the club in study, are essentially “blessed” with being naturally self sufficient in terms of volunteer recruitment and retention as a result of their social and cultural traditions.

4. Northwich RUFC is an example of a sports organisation that has shifted to a more contemporary role, in their evident strategy towards volunteer recruitment and retention. They are also an example of the cross-sector workings so desired by central government, in working with local schools and community to enhance their participation base at a junior level.

5. Whether or not this strategy is focused specifically at increasing the clubs potential volunteer base (i.e. more participating children equals more interested parents), the findings of this study demonstrate that this is a definite product of such investment in local community participation.

6. The results seem to not only provide foundation to but also develop Taylor’s (2004) spectrum, in creating another polar in the form of the government/sports authority’s stance in relation volunteer sports
organisations. This visualises the suggestion that these bodies can better formulate recruitment and retention policies/initiatives by also becoming more contemporary in their appreciation of, and approach to, volunteer sports organisations.

7. Small-scale case studies such as this should be seen as indicative rather than definitive in terms of its relevance to the wider context (Burgham and Downward, 2005)

5.2. Limitations of research study

1. This investigation was small scale, in hindsight it would have been preferable to use a larger sample to better generalise the findings.

2. Further analysis (and a report without word limitations) could provide additional key factors affecting motivation, for example it has been suggested that such sporting social networks facilitating volunteer recruitment and retention (as discussed in section 4.3) are further aided by car ownership (Kukayama, 1999, cited in Collins (2003).

5.3. Recommendations for future research

1. A study providing a greater understanding of the complex subject of barriers to sports volunteer participation would add an essential dimension to both the model provided (see Figure 1 results and discussion section) and to the subject of sports volunteers as a whole.
2. A comprehensive investigation, perhaps an internal assessment, into the functioning of government/sports representative authorities process in forming policy initiatives, would add greater validity (or not so) to the role of senior authority in the conceptual model provided and more importantly the issue of sports volunteer recruitment and retention as a whole.
6. APPENDICES
Appendix 1 Sample Questionnaires
Appendix 2 Format of Semi Structured Interviews
Appendix 3 Transcripts of Interviews
REFERENCES


• Thompson, S. M. (1990) “Thank the ladies for the plates”: The incorporation of women into sport. Leisure studies (9)
