

The Contribution of Volunteering to Scottish Sport

Minutes from 30th January 2019 5.30-7.30pm

Committee Room 5, Scottish Parliament

PRESENT		APOLOGIES	
Kim Atkinson	Scottish Sports Association	Roddy Mackenzie	Sports Aid Scotland
Jeremy Balfour	MSP	Alan Murray MBE	Waterski & Wakeboard Scotland
Susie Benson	Triathlon Scotland	Tavish Scott	MSP
Tom Bishop	Scottish Cycling	Clare Adamson	MSP
Morven Bruce	Triathlon Scotland	Dan Fyffe-Jardine	Sported
Andrea Cameron	Abertay University	John Clayton	
Charlie Raeburn		Alex Cole-Hamilton	MSP
Kirsty Cumming	Community Leisure UK	Helen Toole	Team Scotland
Malcolm Dingwall-Smith	sportscotland	Ron Sutherland	
David Drummond	Scottish Rugby	Carole Sutherland	
Stew Fowle	Scottish Student Sport	Rick Kenney	SALSC
Alison Johnstone	MSP	Liza Linton	RYA
John Kerr	Anderson Strathern LLP	Brian Robinson	ABRS
Matthew Linning	Volunteer Scotland	David Laing	
David Maxwell	Volunteer Glasgow	Neil Champion	Scottish Football Association
Gregor Muir	Scottish Sports Association	Paul Reddish	Project Scotland
Paul Okroj OBE	Scottish Volunteering Forum	Chris Sellar	Oriam
Gail Prince	SALSC	Chloe Maclean	Scottish Karate Governing Body
Fiona Reid	Glasgow Caledonian University	Kirsty Mcnab	Scottish Sports Futures
Liz Smith	MSP		
Helen Todd	Ramblers Scotland		
Helen Webster	Scottish Government		

Introduction to Cross Party Group on Sport

Liz Smith MSP (LS) welcomed all attendees and speakers to the meeting and introduced co-convener Alison Johnstone MSP, and thanked members of the CPG for their commitment to the Group.

Apologies were noted and those in the room were reminded to mark their attendance on the register being passed round.

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved (proposed by Liz Smith MSP and seconded by Malcolm Dingwall-Smith).

LS rounded off her introduction by reading out and congratulating all those recognised from Scottish sport in the UK New Year's Honours List, with a special mention to Paul Okroj OBE who was in attendance at the meeting. All showed their appreciation for the awardees with a round of applause. The list of recipients is available from the SSA website.

Presentation Summaries & Discussion

- **Helen Webster (HW) – Scottish Government**
- **Matthew Linning (ML) – Volunteer Scotland**

Helen Webster – Scottish Government

HW presented on the upcoming Volunteering Outcomes Framework and outlined the government position, namely that the underpinning concept of ‘volunteering is a good thing’ has been added to by explicit recognition and strategic commitment to volunteering from government.

The Framework has been developed in response to the knowledge that changing populations and demographics will mean volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) have to do something differently, and cannot be complacent or rely on their current volunteer base. That includes working to better access more diverse groups with ‘volunteer potential’.

Among the Framework objectives are to set out a coherent and compelling narrative for the benefits of volunteering, and marry the existing data and knowledge of benefits with actual real world practice and actions.

The breadth of the Framework places volunteering as a policy driver across government, as volunteering, both formal and informal, impacts across a wide variety of sectors.

Matthew Linning – Volunteer Scotland

ML provided a background on volunteering and its context in sport, using data from the Scottish Household Survey 2016.

ML noted that the session could have been called ‘the contribution of Scottish sport to volunteering’, as the rates of those involved in sport as volunteers are much above the national average. On the 2016 figures, the national average for involvement in volunteering was 27% but was 36% for those who participate in sport.

Despite these figures, it is key to remember that virtually half of the Scottish population has never volunteered, and that the benefits for individuals, to their physical and mental health, among other areas, are most prevalent when they volunteer on a regular basis.

Sport is in a generally positive position – 17% of all adults that are volunteering are in sport/exercise sector (the fifth most popular). For young people, 49% of those volunteering are doing so in a sporting context. In total, there is not far short of 300,000 volunteers who are involved in sporting activity.

ML lauded the connection between sports participation and volunteering, noting that if you’re active in sport, you are more than twice as likely to volunteer, meaning sport punches well above its weight in terms of volunteering.

Sport also benefits from the involvement of individuals with clubs and associations, which also leads to a greater engagement in volunteering. Further to this, sport has excellent reach into deprived communities, with higher rates of volunteers compared to the national average in those quintiles.

The most recent data analysis has tried to outline what the benefits of volunteering are, who benefits, why do they benefit and whether there are losers as well as winners.

Mental health benefits have the strongest body of evidence, with reduction of social isolation and loneliness and improvement to conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder cited. There is strong

evidence of benefits to physical health too, and there is a symbiotic relationship between positive effects on mental and physical health.

The research also suggests that volunteering is most beneficial to those with challenges, for example those who have an absence of 'role identities' or people with mental ill health. Again, the benefits come from regular volunteering, and from engaging out of altruism rather than personal gain. Benefits are also seen when volunteers receive proper recognition.

Among the gaps in the research is the effect of a volunteer's role, and the management of their role, on both the benefits seen and in longevity of volunteerism.

ML also noted some potential negative effects of volunteering for some individuals, including role strain, stress and burnout, which can all lead to people volunteering less or stopping altogether.

ML concluded that, overall, 'volunteering in sports' is a good news story. Sport has the attraction, participation, engagement and reach to continue to bring positive volunteering statistics in the future. In order to do so, among the next steps required are ensuring volunteering policies and practices are in place to support volunteers as much as possible, and to improve the participant-to-volunteer pathway so that more people become dedicated volunteers in the future.

LS introduced Paul Okroj OBE (PO), Scottish Volunteering Forum and opened the panel (PO, HW, ML) to questions.

Key Discussion Points

Among the key discussion points were around how to best measure qualitative data, including the impact on deprived sectors and demonstrating that those who get the most benefit from regular volunteering are those who are currently the least engaged. Proactive community engagement is required, with a focus on participation which ultimately leads to more volunteers.

Fiona Reid (FR), from Glasgow Caledonian University, cited research projects around host city volunteers from the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow in 2014, in which those surveyed reported that volunteering at the Games had made a difference to their lives, but that the shift to regular volunteering had been a step too far for many.

FR agreed that the participation-to-volunteer pathway needs to be improved, possibly by better understanding the link between club membership and volunteering, and understanding what mechanisms underpin the health and wellbeing benefits to be gained.

HW noted that a challenge lies in the fact that there is no single set of circumstances that lead to benefits, and that there is a responsibility on all in the sphere to try and ensure a high quality volunteering experience.

PO added that the specifics of the person and the role are important. Further research is required on why individuals stop volunteering. The upcoming Framework will be useful, but it has to be accompanied by organisations being volunteer-led in their thinking and communicating with their volunteers.

Jeremy Balfour MSP raised the issue of young volunteers dropping off at age 18, and how to better keep people, and a broader spectrum of people, engaged.

The most significant drop off comes when young people first enter the world of work, and that is hard to address. In recent years there has been significant focus on youth volunteering programmes, which leads to high volunteer numbers, but the original push factors disappear when young people reach working age.

PO noted that it would be useful to get volunteering on the agenda at a younger age, with a network of local ambassadors. Consideration must be given to what the position will be in 15 years' time if trends continue.

PO added that despite the importance of top-down efforts such as the Framework, word of mouth remains the most successful recruitment policy for volunteers in Scotland.

John Kerr, Anderson Strathern LLP, suggested that there is a crisis point among volunteers in sport, and that access to sufficient volunteers is constantly challenging. One reason may be the extent of regulation and excessive professionalization and bureaucracy that prevents people easily volunteering.

The panel agreed that this challenge is not unique to volunteers in sport. Changing lives are creating pressures around how people want to use their time. Organisations need to communicate better with volunteers and potential volunteers, and the competition for volunteer time is very intense.

Stew Fowlie (SF), Scottish Student Sport, noted that sport volunteering is often driven by necessity and organisations can't be complacent. SF raised the issue of funding, noting that there is not money readily available to invest in ensuring that organisations are doing volunteer management well.

Encouraging volunteering through the life course should be a priority. The lack of longitudinal data sets makes it harder to track life course volunteering. Ease of access to volunteering also needs to be examined, to make it easier to return and keep a track of an individual's volunteer history.

Tom Bishop (TB), Scottish Cycling, cited the different strands of volunteers within cycling, from coaching to ensuring the smooth running of events. TB suggest that there should be a duty of care on the part of SGBs to watch for burnout among their volunteers and work better at success planning, keeping ahead of when volunteer may drop out. TB also noted that there is generational knowledge that older volunteers could be passing onto younger ones, helping them get benefits from volunteering and stay engaged longer.

Charlie Raeburn gave examples of volunteers running local facilities in other nations, and noted that the role of the volunteer is not taken seriously enough in the UK.

PO suggested looking at other practices to see which volunteer roles should organisations be adapting and piloting to allow volunteers to take ownership and be more engaged.

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith, sportscotland, raised the point that volunteers in sport are often engaged because they want to be involved in that sport, and it would otherwise not be possible without their efforts. The definition of volunteering also leads to some grey areas, where volunteers may do some paid work, and some voluntary work on top of that, and subsequently not classify themselves as volunteers within the survey data.

Some clarity may come from the next round of Scottish Household Survey results, as this will include more figures around informal volunteering.

Key Actions Requested Following The Meeting:

- PO - Improve knowledge of sports volunteers – ask your volunteers what works and what roles would they take on?
- ML - Give us input to help us put research into practical steps.
- HW – Keep in mind the policy agendas parallel and the massive opportunity for volunteering focus to influence broader society and policy.

AOCB

- Date of next meeting: Wednesday 19th June 2019, 5:50-7:30pm.
- Liz Smith MSP thanked everyone for their input, with special thanks to the speakers and then brought the meeting to a close.

*The Cross Party Group on Sport is co-convened by Alison Johnstone MSP & Liz Smith MSP.
It is jointly administered by the offices of these MSPs and the Scottish Sports Association.*