Wales Strategic Volunteering Project

Volunteering at the Board, Trustee and Management Level in the Community Sport Sector in Wales: Landscape, Challenges, and Opportunities for Support

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Contents

The Wales Strategic Volunteering Project, funded by Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), aims to enhance the capacity and impact of board, trustee, and management-level volunteering for community groups across Wales delivering sport and physical activities. It consists of two stages: firstly, understanding and reporting on the landscape of volunteering at this level within community groups in Wales, and, secondly, providing a series of recommendations to stakeholders within the sector on how best to achieve such an increase in capacity and impact.

In doing so, the project looks to connect with, and support, the Welsh Government's Well-being of Future Generations Act. In particular, the project focuses on the skills and development of volunteers (a prosperous Wales), an inclusive and accessible volunteering sector (a more equal Wales), and a volunteer community promoting and protecting local communities as well as engaging in sports and recreation (a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language).

This research report represents the findings from the first stage of the project. It outlines who volunteers at the board, trustee, and management-level within community groups delivering sport and physical activities in Wales, the challenges facing volunteers – or those wanting to volunteer – at this level, and the routes into volunteering in these roles. It concludes by looking at what currently works well in meeting the needs of such roles and the volunteers who fill them. It is based on robust and in-depth primary research conducted with stakeholders across the community sport and broader voluntary sectors in Wales, representing feedback from those directly involved in, or supporting, these vital roles for community groups across the country.

The research identified four key themes around the landscape of Volunteering at the Board, Trustee and Management Level in the Community Sport Sector in Wales: Landscape, Challenges, and Opportunities for Support

- ► The profile of volunteers in these roles.
- ► The barriers and challenges facing volunteers, or those looking to volunteer, in these roles.
- ► The routes into and facilitating factors for recruitment and retention in these roles.
- ► Current good practice for encouraging and supporting volunteering at this level.

The profile of volunteers in these roles

- ► Volunteers at the board, trustee, or management level are likely to be heterosexual, white, male, 45 years old or over, and without a disability.
- ► They generally spend a longer time per week carrying out these roles compared to other volunteer roles and are likely to have occupied these positions for longer than those volunteering in other roles at community groups.

Barriers and challenges facing volunteers, or those looking to volunteer, in these roles

- ► Volunteers at the board, trustee, and management level face significant time pressures in these roles, with too few volunteers willing or able to take on and share these responsibilities.
- ► The demands of the roles can make them inaccessible for those in full-time employment, with parental or caring responsibilities, or with long-term, changing, or unpredictable health conditions.
- ► Expectations from external stakeholders can be unrealistic given the voluntary nature of these roles, compounded by a lack of support from such organisations.

Routes into and facilitating factors for recruitment

► Value-driven engagement is the strongest motivating factor for engaging with board, trustee, and management roles, where individuals' values align with those of the group.

► Personal connections, such as through own children participating at a group or knowing someone already involved with the organisation, are often key to recruiting volunteers to senior roles.

► Two skill sets are crucial in recruiting and retaining volunteers in these roles: 'soft' people skills (confidence, being motivational, ability to work with young and older alike) and 'technical' skills (project planning and fundraising experience).

► Perceptions of required skills as being attainable only through traditionally office-based professional careers hinder those without such life experience from engaging with these roles.

Current good practice for encouraging and supporting volunteers at this level

► Streamlining or reducing the administrative burden on volunteers in these roles increases capacity.

► Increasing representation to fully represent all members of the local community supports more effective and inclusive recruitment and retention.

► Positive volunteering environments reward, recognise, and support development pathways for volunteers into these roles.

The following is a condensed version of the project literature review. It provides the broader context for the Wales Strategic Volunteering Project through the landscape of existing research and insight around community volunteering in Wales.

Volunteering in Wales: a context

Nearly a third of people in Wales volunteered in 2022-2023 according to the latest National Survey for Wales (Welsh Government, 2023). The wider volunteering sector in the country comprises around 42,000 voluntary organisations and 6,900 charities, the vast majority of which work specifically within a local geographic context: almost 40,000 of voluntary organisations are local-facing (WCVA, 2023 and Third Sector Support Wales, 2023). The most common activity for such groups is supporting their community, with around 22% of voluntary sector organisations in Wales doing so. Sport and recreation is the second most common cause, with 12% involved in this area of work. Supporting children and families lies third, with 9% (WCVA, 2023).

Volunteers within the wider voluntary sector in Wales are most likely to fall within the profile of being male, married, and living in less deprived areas. They are also likely to live in rural communities, have received higher-level educational qualifications, and have a religious faith. Finally, they are likely to have use of the internet and feel that life is worthwhile (Welsh Government, 2023).

There is also evidence to indicate that sport is important both as a background for volunteers and as a venue for their volunteering activities. Those who participate in sports three or more times a week were more likely to volunteer in Wales, with just over a third (35%) of volunteers in 2022-2023 engaging in sport to this extent. 12% of those who participated in sport at this frequency also volunteered at a sports club (Welsh Government, 2023). Such findings reflect the historical significance of sports clubs as a common venue for volunteering across the UK and Europe, and the causal relationships between a person's participation in sport and their likelihood to volunteer (Nichols, Hogg, Knight, and Storr, 2019).

There is demand for volunteers who can speak Welsh, given that the ability to speak with the public in their chosen language is a major asset for voluntary sector organisations. Research has also identified benefits to volunteers in building their language skills, indicating the provision of Welsh language volunteering is mutually beneficial for volunteers, service users, and voluntary sector organisations (Welsh Government, 2014).

The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Volunteering in Wales

The pandemic impacted on the nature of volunteering in Wales, with more digital/remote roles and more intensive face-to-face support. It led to some key benefits for those involved in the volunteering effort, including increasing a sense of connection to others, belonging, purposefulness, and sense of appreciation. It also contributed to changing demographics within volunteering, with a substantial number of new and often younger volunteers offering their time. Lastly, it reinforced the importance of social connection and fostering meaningful volunteer experiences that can build persistent, long-term volunteer engagement in a post-pandemic context (Boelman, 2021, and WCVA, 2023). It should be noted that the impact of these alternative volunteering approaches is not exclusive to Wales (NCVO, 2022 and Mao, Fernandes-Jesus, Ntontis, and Drury 2021).

Who volunteers at the committee and management level in community (sport) groups in Wales

There is a recognised gap in research specifically on committee and management-level volunteering within community groups (Scottish Government, 2019, and Clifford, 2021). As such, existing evidence around the profile of volunteers at this level in Wales, the challenges they face in such roles, and the support they receive is patchy. Where available, evidence indicates that volunteers in these roles in Wales are likely to be older, white men who have been in that role for a longer period than those in other roles at the organisation. Particularly in the case of leadership or committee roles, such individuals are also likely to be retired and with the time to devote to such roles (usually between four to ten hours per week, though it may be as high as twenty hours). Within rugby union, for example, research highlights such roles are most likely to be occupied by those who are or have been solicitors, civil servants, or company directors (Chaudhari, 2022, and Welsh Rugby Union, 2022).

In contrast, coaching roles are far more likely to be taken on by younger volunteers who are at the 'family-stage' in life (Chaudhari, 2022). This fits with research into the lifecycle of volunteering that indicates those in the older age category tend to have more spare time and volunteer for longer while those in the middle-aged category are most likely to volunteer where there is a connection to their child (Jump, 2019).

Volunteers in committee and/or management-level roles are also likely to be among the most time-poor volunteers within the organisation given that there is potential for them to have to manage multiple volunteering commitments within the same organisation. Evidence indicates that those who volunteer in a committee-level role at a sports group often do so alongside other volunteering responsibilities and roles. For example, Sport Wales research notes around half (53%) hold more than one role alongside an administrative or committee position, and of those who do so, over three-quarters (81%) hold at least three roles (Chaudhari, 2022).

How did we do the research?

The project used mixed methodology research, combining qualitative and quantitative data collected through four approaches: an initial landscape-scanning literature review followed by primary research involving an online survey, one-to-one interviews, and focus groups. Key research themes were initially identified through the literature review before consultation with the project advisory board to narrow the scope for the primary research phase. These fell under two areas:

▶   What are the challenges facing volunteering at the board, trustee, and management level?

▶   What support currently meets these challenges, or could do so in the future?

The definition of volunteers was informed by the Welsh Government's Volunteering Policy, which describes volunteering as an activity undertaken freely and by choice, of public or community benefit, and not for financial gain.

Literature Review

The project insight team reviewed existing literature on the landscape of volunteering at the management or committee level in community groups delivering sport and physical activity. This focused where possible on Wales but, where relevant, also considered UK and international-focused research. The review included academic research, charity and voluntary sector-commissioned reports, and sport-specific research provided by relevant national governing bodies (NGBs). Research was sourced from publicly accessible literature online and through non-public reporting available through the advisory board and affiliated groups. A bibliography is available in the appendix to this report.

Online Survey

735 responses
A mixed qualitative and quantitative survey targeted volunteers at community groups delivering sport and physical activities in Wales, including those at board, trustee, or management level, those in other positions, and those who do both types of roles. The survey focused on the demographic profile of respondents, the challenges facing volunteering at the board, trustee, or management level, and current and desired support to meet these challenges. It was distributed to all Sported groups in Wales and to groups affiliated with advisory board organisations who met the above research criteria.

One to one interviews

21 interviews
Semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteers from the target research audience who agreed to participate in this additional research stage having provided contact details through the online survey. The interviews provided further qualitative depth to the survey themes. Interviewees included volunteers at board, trustee, or management level, those in other positions, and those doing both types of roles. Interviews were conducted online by a member of the project research team and anonymised for the purposes of this report.

Focus groups

Two focus groups with young people
Focus group workshops conducted with young people participating at community groups delivering sport and physical activity in Wales. The focus groups were facilitated by a member of the project research team and data collected through the sessions were anonymised for the purposes of this report.

Four focus groups with staff and volunteers from community groups and broader voluntary sector organisations.

A series of facilitated focus groups involving volunteers from community groups as well as staff from organisations supporting the community and voluntary sector more broadly in Wales. The sessions focused on the challenges with volunteering at the board, trustee, and management level within the community sector in Wales and what currently works well, or might work well in the future, for supporting volunteers in these roles. Sessions were facilitated by members of the project team and the gathered data anonymised for use in this report.

The Wales Strategic Volunteering Project used an online survey distributed to community groups across Wales who deliver sport and physical activity to build a profile of those who volunteer at three levels within these groups:

► those at the board, trustee, and management level.

► those who volunteer in other roles at these groups.

► those who volunteer in both types of roles at their group.

Doing so allowed the project to better understand the makeup of volunteering in these board, trustee, and management roles, and to compare this profile with those volunteering in other roles.

The profile below of those volunteering in board, trustee, or management levels positions is based on 301 responses to demographics questions in the survey from those who volunteer only in these roles or where they combine it with another volunteer role at their group. It should be noted that the majority of responses to the survey (74%) were from those involved in football groups in Wales. The profile below notes where this concentration around a particular sport impacted on the findings.

Profile of volunteers at the board, trustee, and management level

Volunteering at this level takes up a considerable amount of time per week, with these volunteers spending more time on them than those in non-board, trustee, or management roles.

Around half of board, trustee, and management volunteers spend seven or more hours per week on these roles, compared to one in ten volunteers in other roles spending this time on their role.

Board, trustee, and management volunteers often maintain this role for several years and do so for longer in contrast to other volunteer roles at community groups.

Around a quarter of board, trustee, and management volunteers have been in their role for more than ten years, with approximately half having been there for four years or more. In other volunteer roles, the majority have volunteered for less than three years – fewer than one in ten have been there for more than ten years.

Board, trustee, and management volunteers tend to be older, with few individuals in these positions under 35 years old – but there is little difference in the age ranges between people in these roles and non-board, trustee, or management roles.

Around 90% of respondents were 35 years or older, for both types of volunteers, with similar proportions of those aged 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, and 65 years or older across the volunteering types.

There is a higher proportion of men in board, trustee, or management roles, but the research was impacted by a significantly higher number of men in such positions at football groups – across non-football groups, the research found there are more women in these roles than men.

55% of respondents in board, trustee, and management roles at non-football groups are women, while Football Association of Wales-affiliated groups saw just 19% of these roles held by women.

Volunteers in board, trustee, and management roles are most likely to identify their ethnic origin as white, with white Welsh the most common ethnic origin for such roles.

85% of those surveyed identified their ethnic origin as white, with nearly two-thirds being white Welsh and around a quarter being white British.

The vast majority of volunteers at the board, trustee, and management level describe their sexual orientation as straight/heterosexual.

92% of those surveyed described themselves as straight/heterosexual, with 3% being bisexual, 1% preferring to describe as queer, and 1% gay or lesbian. 3% preferred not to say.

Volunteers at the board, trustee, and management level are unlikely to consider themselves as having a disability, with one in ten responding that they have a disability.

90% of those surveyed said they don't consider themselves to have a disability – of those that did, autism, hearing challenges, and musculoskeletal conditions were identified by respondents.

The research identified several key barriers and challenges facing those volunteering at the board, trustee, and management level, or those looking to volunteer in these roles. Such barriers and challenges can act as discouraging factors for volunteers wanting to take on board, trustee, or management roles, or hinder those already in these roles. These challenges include:

- ► Time constraints in fulfilling these roles.
- ► Lack of accessibility around these roles.
- ► Limited support and capacity-building for these roles.

Time constraints in fulfilling these roles

Time constraints are the most common challenge facing volunteers at the board, trustee, or management level. Volunteers already in these roles repeatedly emphasised that there is too much to do and too little time to do it all in. The requirements of the day-to-day running of a community group placed on those donating their time for free, particularly the governance burden placed on volunteers at this level, contribute significantly to this time pressure.

"It's non-stop work, no days off or go on a holiday without checking emails and sorting out club issues."

"The governance burden that a national governing body bears is huge. With no paid staff, you are expecting much of volunteers to carry out the more mundane and less exciting things that are needed to make an organisation run smoothly."

This is compounded by too few other volunteers able or willing to take on the responsibilities that come with board, trustee, or management-level positions. The unpaid nature of the roles and the intrusion on personal/spare time are important factors here, because they are especially challenging for those in full-time employment, seeking full-time employment, or have family or caring responsibilities.

With our research finding that volunteers in these positions spend twice as long per week on such roles compared to those in non-board, trustee, or management roles, it's unsurprising that a significant barrier to leading on these roles – or wanting to take them on – is simply having enough time to do so.

"The majority of volunteers are parents, therefore of working age. Time constraints are the biggest challenge."

"I cannot stress enough how time barriers disproportionately affect mothers, who are an incredible asset and huge part of the workforce potential."

"[We] very rarely have a full committee at meetings… Turning up to a meeting when you work full time, have family commitments, and are busy is, in the current climate, difficult."

Lack of accessibility around these roles

The lack of accessibility around volunteering at the board, trustee, and management level is not only confined to those in paid employment or with family and caring responsibilities. There were indications that these roles are also inaccessible, or at least challenging to engage with, for disabled volunteers and those with changing or unpredictable health conditions.

With volunteer positions at board, trustee, and management positions often a long-term commitment – particularly in comparison to other volunteer roles at community groups – changing and unpredictable health conditions can be perceived as an exclusionary factor or an accessibility challenge that prevents people taking on such roles. As one former board member put it:

"[A volunteer] might experience chronic illness… and it could be something that prevents you from long term commitment."

With the project survey finding that very few volunteers at the board, trustee, or management level identify as having a disability or long-term health condition, there may be both a lack of knowledge around supporting disabled people or those with longer-term health conditions to engage with these roles. At the same time, this limits organisational capacity through such roles to support participants with a disability within the group more generally.

"I am lucky in that I have a core group of people who fill volunteer roles but not at committee level. I could really use one or two volunteers to learn how to assist our disabled sports people at competitions. This would involve at least one weekend in a hotel, for which we don't have funding to provide for the volunteers"

Limited support and capacity-building for these roles

Volunteers in board, trustee, or management roles can feel under-appreciated and under-supported in carrying out their duties. This includes too little assistance in managing governance responsibilities but also a general lack of support in the day-to-day running of entirely or primarily volunteer-led community groups. Expectations from external stakeholders can be unrealistic and avenues of support from such organisations limited. This particularly covers those in the sport sector, most notably national governing bodies.

A common perception among community groups, from those in board, management, and trustee positions, as well those in other voluntary roles, is that external stakeholders underappreciate the extent to which these groups are reliant on volunteers. National governing bodies were highlighted as holding unrealistic expectations given the voluntary nature of so many individuals involved in running community groups.

"Governing bodies not having expectations of volunteers that are unacceptable and forgetting these roles are not paid roles, but people are volunteers, which in my experience is often forgotten."

For those in board, trustee, or management roles, such concerns connect to the high levels of administrative duties required of them by these stakeholders, especially governing bodies. Requirements to comply with regulations, both on a day-to-day organisational level but also on more specific issues, such as grant and funding compliance, places strain on volunteers in these governance positions. With limited support around capacity-building and learning from these external bodies, volunteers at the board, trustee, and management level face significant pressure.

"I'd like organisations to show more appreciation for volunteers and to remove the vast amount of admin that club trustees/secretaries do."

"There is never enough time to do what is expected and there is no coherent place where we can learn everything."

Of particular concern among volunteers is the difficulty in identifying, accessing, and applying for funding. Those in board, trustee, or management roles are heavily involved in fundraising and grant applications and can feel unsupported amid the wider context of a very competitive funding landscape and the daunting nature of many application processes. There was recognition that even when support is available, this may only be available through external organisations who offer such support at a price.

"That's always a struggle, trying to compete with everyone else who's equally trying to get funds".

"There's enough organisations willing to help us out, but they all wanted paying for it."

The project's research found significant concerns around recruiting volunteers to board, trustee, and management roles: 85% of our survey respondents in such roles at the moment said they agreed that recruiting for these positions is a challenge. For those wanting to recruit and retain volunteers at this level, and for those interested in volunteering at this level, there are several factors that can help or hinder responses to this challenge. The research found:

► Value-driven engagement motivates volunteers for these roles.

► Personal connections act as both a facilitator and barrier to recruitment.

► There is a limited pool of volunteers with the skills most-required for the roles and difficulty in upskilling those already in the role or wanting to take them on.

Value-driven engagement

The strongest motivation for volunteering at the board, trustee, or management level is where an individual's values and principles align with those of the group. The research found that shared values sustain long-term involvement with a group. Given the average duration of such leadership roles and the amount of time required to devote to them, this value-driven engagement makes volunteers more likely to take on these time-intensive opportunities.

"[You're volunteering] your time and personal emotions rather than for an economic reason. It's more about that match between yourself, your values and the organisation that you are volunteering for."

One particularly important factor in developing such shared connections with a group is where volunteers feel they are giving back to organisations supporting their children or where they had taken part at the group when they were younger. This acts as a facilitator for many volunteers, encouraging long-term engagement, but it may also discourage volunteers from continuing to engage – or progressing to board, trustee, or management roles – once their children move on from the group.

"Often when a swimmer leaves the club then a volunteering relative/parent leaves as well."

As noted in the literature review, coaching roles tend to be in the middle stages of life where having children at the group is most common. Ensuring such volunteers continue to engage with groups after their children move on from the group, or providing an accessible, supportive environment where those at this stage of life feel empowered to volunteer at board, trustee, and management levels, is important. This would be one way of harnessing this value-driven engagement to bolster recruitment to these positions.

Personal connections as both a facilitator and barrier to recruitment

Recruitment to board, trustee, and management roles is most likely to occur through informal connections and word-of-mouth. A key part of this approach, and a strong facilitator for bringing individuals into these roles, are existing personal relationships. These relationships are vital, both for advertising roles to potential volunteers but also in supporting and encouraging those volunteers to engage with the recruitment process.

"It was originally through a Facebook post responding to a social media thing and then knowing someone in the know."

"[Others] weren't on computers and dealing with administrative day-to-day stuff of running a club. So they asked me to get involved."

Yet while personal relationships are a key facilitator, they also present a challenge for effective recruitment. Those who do not have the advantage of 'knowing someone in the know' may end up excluded from the process. Moreover, with recruitment to board, trustee, and management roles generally occurring through informal, word-of-mouth avenues, the pool of volunteers available through this approach is often made up of those already connected to the group. Research respondents noted that these existing volunteers or parents often view board, trustee, or management roles as 'too much hassle': if recruitment is generally targeted at such existing contacts, there may be fewer individuals willing to take on the added responsibilities of these roles.

"People are sometimes unwilling to volunteer as they understand what a big job it can be."

"[It's] seen as a thankless task."
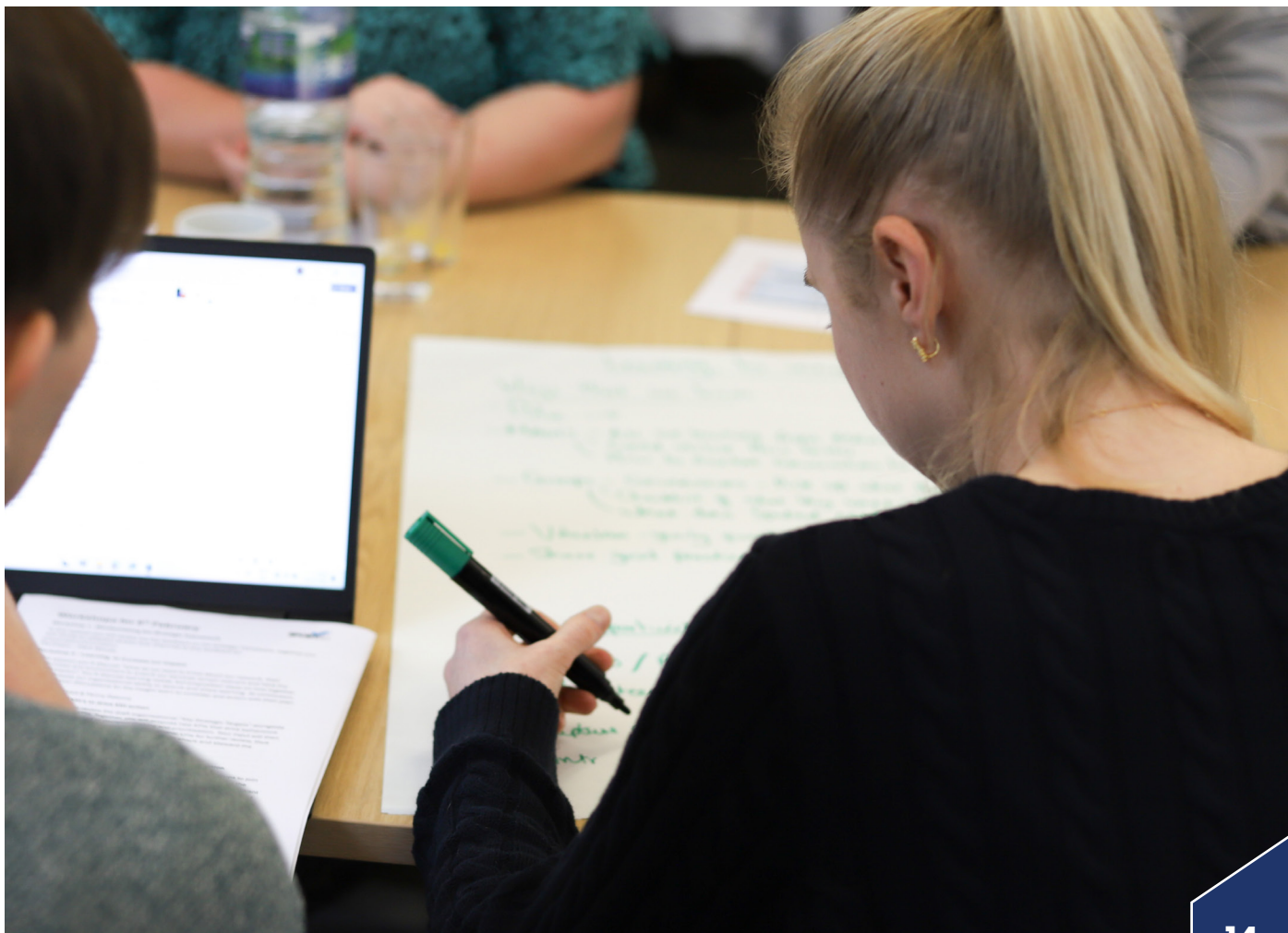
Skills and training

Our research found that there are specific skills needed for board, trustee, and management roles but that there are too few avenues for training and supporting the development of volunteers to gain those skills. These skills broadly fall into two categories: 'soft' people skills and 'technical' skills.

Among the most important skills highlighted by research participants are those described as 'soft' or people skills. These include confidence, the ability to engage both young people and adults, and good motivational skills. These soft skills support the previously mentioned emphasis on personal connections and long-term value-led engagement that's important in bringing volunteers on the journey to board, trustee, or management roles. The ability to build connections with volunteers and fire their enthusiasm for roles across an organisation are key people skills valued at the board, trustee, and management level.

"You've got to be a people person because of the young people and the parents. If you get them engaged and get them really enthused, that could lead to a more sustainable club down the line when those parents become involved"

Alongside these 'soft' people skills, 'technical' skills are also a major part of the recruitment – and retention – of volunteers at the board, trustee, and management level. Project management and financial skills, including bookkeeping and the ability to write effective grant applications, are particularly sought after by community groups.

"Filling in funding application forms and knowing how to word each document to give you the best chance of winning the application."

"[The] biggest challenges are running the accounts and supplying books to Companies House and HMRC."

However, groups can struggle to find volunteers with the kind of skills needed for board, trustee, and management roles. The perception from those charged with recruiting and retaining volunteers in these senior roles is that such skills are limited to a small number of people.

"Not everyone is going to have a background in project management... that application could probably only be completed by a small number of volunteers."

"[It's] difficult to find people with both the time, the skills to fill roles and the necessary experience within the sport to fill the gaps."

At the same time, there is evidence that a potential pool of volunteers – young people taking part at these groups – are put off from engaging with board, trustee, or management roles because of perceptions that only older volunteers with different life experiences can fulfil such roles. Young volunteers are also reluctant to engage because they perceive their skills, experience, and opinions as wrong, in comparison to those of older volunteers sitting in these roles.

"I think the stereotype of someone being a trustee: it's someone who's older... So as a young person, we're just either the coaches or the participants. And then we leave the more formal stuff to the adults."

"You sit in the meetings in the corner, and everyone's talking with so much experience. And you don't really want to voice your opinions because you might be wrong. And you're inexperienced... People might think you don't really know what you're talking about."

As one young person taking part in the research noted, their lack of confidence in taking on a committee role was in part due to the prejudice that favours certain skills and life experiences as being the only route to these higher levels of responsibility. The idea, as expressed by one volunteer, that "careers give you skills" may be true, especially in relation to the 'technical' skills valued by groups. Yet discouraging young people from taking on board, trustee, and management roles, or devaluing their particular skills and life experiences, acts as a further limiting factor within an already challenging recruitment landscape.

While the next stage of the Wales Strategic Volunteering Project will identify accessible, deliverable suggestions that respond to the challenges facing volunteering at the board, trustee, and management level in community groups, our research found several examples of good practice already in place – or suggestions for ideal practice - that can support and empower volunteers in these roles. These include:

► Streamlining and reducing the administrative burden on volunteers in these roles.

► Increasing representation to fully include all members of the local community.

► Creating positive volunteering environments that reward, recognise, and develop pathways for volunteers.

Streamlining and reducing the administrative burden on volunteers

For many volunteers at board, trustee, or management level, one of the most effective ways to better support their role would be to reduce their administrative and governance duties. Volunteers in these roles noted "less unnecessary bureaucracy" and a streamlining of the administrative burden from external organisations, such as affiliated NGBs, would help them more effectively meet the demands of their role.

"Once you've passed the accreditation common sense should be you shouldn't have to pay and reapply annually. That could be honoured for three years like a coaching licence. Volunteers have family and work commitments, so this administration needs to be streamlined."

Increasing representation to fully include all members of the local community

There was a strong sense from participants that the more a club or organisation was part of the wider community, and the more it represented the range of people within the community, the more people would be encouraged to volunteer – including in governance roles. For groups in Wales, this is particularly relevant to being inclusive of the Welsh language, and there was recognition that being more open to Welsh speakers can bring benefits for recruitment and engagement.

"[The group] do lots of things for the community in Welsh and they bring lots of people in and I think it probably helps them do well with their volunteers."

Creating positive volunteering environments that reward, recognise, and develop pathways for volunteers

For those new to volunteering at the board, trustee, or management level, or for groups looking to encourage more volunteers to consider joining such positions, recognition of value and effective internal progression are vital. Our research points to the benefits of having a positive internal culture of reward and recognition for volunteers as helpful in encouraging these individuals to move into more senior leadership positions (and as part of a broader positive culture for volunteers generally within a group).

"Make it meaningful and value people, rather than take them for granted. Thank them and tell them what they're doing and how much a big impact they are."

Alongside this recognition and reward can sit proactive reflection on the challenges facing board, trustee, and management volunteers. With such limited time available for so many volunteers in these roles this may be beyond existing capacity, but finding the time to collaboratively identify areas of need and development can be a positive step in planning for such issues moving forward.

"The chairperson will have this annual board director one-to-one meetings to see what are the challenges, what are the training needs, what are the area to improve?... I felt that was very beneficial and also the board will organise several training workshops by inviting external partners to train on crisis management, financial literacy, a strategic thinking."

Conclusions

The Wales Strategic Volunteering Project has identified several key challenges currently facing the landscape of volunteering at the board, trustee, and management level for community groups delivering sport and physical activity across the nation. Time constraints, unrealistic expectations from external stakeholders, and limited capacity make these roles demanding for those currently volunteering at this level and often inaccessible for those wanting or able to.

Likewise, current recruitment methods that prioritise informal 'who-you-know' engagement can be flexible and swift in meeting groups' needs for volunteers at these leadership positions, but they limit the pool of potential volunteers. Recruitment that only looks to traditional office-based career paths and experience can also limit the availability of volunteers.

As the project moves into phase two and considers how best to respond to these challenges, the research points to several areas for consideration. These include possible solutions building upon existing good practice within the sector and support needs identified by participants in this research. Building more effective reward and recognition for volunteers at the board, trustee, and management level, reducing the administrative burden on such roles, and making recruitment and development pathways more accessible could all serve as useful starting points.

Stage two of the Wales Strategic Volunteering Project will use the findings from this research, as well as additional primary research conducted with the community and voluntary sector through 'solutions-focused workshops', to further explore these possible solutions. At the end of stage two, the project will make recommendations for practical, sustainable paths forward for supporting Wales's volunteer workforce at the board, trustee, and management level.

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