

Developing Volunteering in Sport
**An evaluation of sportscotland investment in
the post of Volunteer Development Manager
with Scottish Swimming**
Research Digest: No 106

*A research study for **sportscotland***

by

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Published by:

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ISBN 978 1 85060 543 0
September 2008

***sportscotland** is the trading name of the Scottish Sports Council*

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all those who contributed to this study giving their time and their feedback to help us to learn from this pilot project. In particular, thanks to the swimming volunteers who showed through their comments and views their commitment and passion in developing swimming in Scotland. Thanks also to Sport England for their willingness to share information from their experiences in the field of volunteer management.

Summary

This is a summary report of the evaluation commissioned by **sportscotland** to assess the impact and effectiveness of the work of the Volunteer Development Manager (VDM) post on volunteering within Scottish Swimming.

Evidence from the evaluation indicates that the pilot VDM post has been a success for Scottish Swimming and has potential for delivering concrete impact for clubs. This suggests that, as a pilot, this has been a good investment for **sportscotland**, but the long term impact of this for other Governing Bodies of Sport will be dependent on how **sportscotland** takes forward the learning and recommendations from the pilot.

Introduction

Under the strand of Strong Partners **sportscotland** commits in its current corporate plan to supporting Sports Governing Bodies (SGBs) in their plans to recruit, retain and develop volunteer and to delivering programmes to develop SGB paid staff and volunteers

The national strategy for sport 'Reaching Higher'¹ highlights that 'people are our most important resource and that well-trained, motivated, confident and capable coaches, officials, volunteers and professional staff are core to the delivery of our vision' for sport. "It is no longer acceptable to expect them (the volunteers) to operate effectively or stay motivated without access to quality and affordable education, training and support."

In the context of its work to support volunteering within Scottish sport, **sportscotland** were keen to test out a dedicated full-time Volunteer Development Manager (VDM) post in an SGB. This was the first post of this kind in an SGB in Scotland.

In developing this pilot **sportscotland** drew on evidence and practical models from England where Sport England currently funds or part funds similar posts in 23 governing bodies of sport. In particular **sportscotland** adapted the job descriptions available from England and monitoring and evaluation feedback has been used to compare and contrast findings in this evaluation.

The Scottish pilot VDM post was set up within Scottish Swimming due to its status as an SGB with a good infrastructure to support the VDM post and where the SGB was a willing partner.

It is **sportscotland's** view that successful volunteer development in sport means that if sport is really to be accessible to all, it will always be dependent upon volunteers to run clubs, to provide coaching and leadership, to organise competition and to manage development. If SGBs prioritise volunteering they can make it attractive, ensuring that people's time is well used. They can also ensure that volunteers feel valued and appropriately rewarded for giving their time and effort, explore innovative ways of recruiting and retaining volunteers and develop new local and regional partnerships

In order to develop volunteering in their sport, governing bodies need to:

- make volunteering a management issue;
- integrate it into their development plans; and
- allocate sufficient resources to it.

SGBs can achieve this by developing and implementing strategic objectives and actions to positively affect voluntary input in their sport. The benefits should include:

- recruiting and retaining enough volunteers to do the work required;

¹ *Reaching Higher: Building on the Success of Sport 21*, Scottish Executive, 2007

- deploying appropriate volunteers in the right jobs and roles; and
- recruiting volunteers who are well-informed, appropriately skilled and positively motivated.

The key functions of the Volunteer Development Manager post in Scottish Swimming were as follows:

- To produce and lead the implementation of a volunteer development strategy.
- To provide support, training and development programmes for volunteers in swimming.
- To recognise and value the work done by volunteers and reward them appropriately.
- To raise the profile of volunteers throughout swimming.

Purpose of research

The overall aim of the evaluation was to provide information to **sportscotland** and to Scottish Swimming on the impact and effectiveness of the work of the Volunteer Development Manager post on volunteering within the sport of swimming. In addition, there was an expectation that the evaluation would generate learning that could be relevant to other SGBs.

Methodology

The evaluation methods were designed to gather a range of information from different stakeholder perspectives, including, key personnel from Scottish Swimming personnel and **sportscotland** and a representative sample of swimming volunteers. The emphasis for the evaluation was on gathering detailed qualitative data and was organised into two stages:

- Initial information gathering, particularly around questions linked to achievements and results and impact and effectiveness, with 14 interviews, and an analysis of key documents.
- A review of information gathered and a further discussion involving key personnel concentrated on identifying learning from the evaluation such as: the stages of VDM development in Scottish Swimming and alternative models for volunteer management in sport.

VDM achievements and associated findings

Post implementation

A volunteer development manager post is deemed to have three discreet implementation stages:

- A 'readiness to participate' stage which involves having the right organisational structures in place to support the post and having a willingness and commitment to developing volunteering.
- A second stage involves the groundwork needed to develop a volunteer strategy including a volunteer audit and the processes needed to win the support from volunteers.
- A third stage focuses on implementation and development of the volunteering strategy with the goal of maximum impact on clubs. This stage also involves review and evaluation of the strategy to take account of change and new opportunities that have arisen.

Success as measured against the post aims

In the context of the post's functions the post holder was successful in several respects.

Strategy

Scottish Swimming developed a volunteering strategy and action plan with clear targets for developing volunteering focusing on:

- the retention of current volunteers;
- the recruitment and support of young volunteers;
- the provision of higher levels of support and training for existing volunteers; and
- raising awareness and recognition for volunteers in swimming.

Support, training and development programme provision

The post holder successfully developed and piloted training for Team Managers at two levels. Team Managers organise club teams that attend competitions or camps locally and away from home and ensure that athletes are able to participate in a safe and positive environment.

Runningsports training workshops and resources were piloted with swimming club volunteers. Runningsports aims to help sports volunteers and staff to run their clubs as effectively as possible, by addressing key issues such as volunteer management, finances, partnerships and development planning.

There is now a planned roll out of training through Scottish Swimming's member clubs and districts.

Recognition and reward of volunteers

Through its volunteer audit Scottish Swimming recorded the involvement of approximately 2,500 volunteers in a variety of different roles, with many volunteers carrying out multiple functions.

Using the estimated 2,500 volunteers, the financial value of volunteers to Scottish Swimming has been calculated at £7.9 million each year.²

Again using the volunteer audit Scottish Swimming collated information on the type of voluntary roles carried out leading to succession planning needs identification. They identified three main volunteer categories:

- club volunteer – the largest group at 50% of all volunteers;
- teacher / coach – with about 25%; and
- technical official – also with about 25% of the total volunteers.

Volunteers identified that the VDM has provided a specific reference point for their volunteering needs. Increased opportunities for promoting volunteers and clubs have been utilised through better positioning in 'Splash News'³ and development of the Scottish Swimming website.

For Scottish Swimming this has facilitated an important two-way communication link between volunteers and clubs with Scottish Swimming HQ.

Specific achievements of postholder

The post holder:

- was able to gather a sound evidence base for strategy;
- was able to test, consult, achieve buy-in from volunteers for new programmes and training;
- had the capacity to develop needs-based Continuing Professional Development and training;
- gave a specific reference point for swimming volunteering needs;
- was able to source and access new opportunities for Scottish Swimming for example through joining LOCOG (The London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games).; and

²Taken from the Scottish Swimming Volunteer Strategy and calculated using the formula from the VDS Annual Digest 2006.

³ 'Splash News' is the Scottish Swimming newsletter.

- has triggered discussion and actions on challenges, especially with the focus on young people and their involvement as volunteers.

Challenges

In the context of the post functions, the post holder was challenged because like the findings in England from the evaluation of similar posts, the post holder has to work hard to win hearts and minds. The post holder achieved volunteer buy-in to allow development of her post through a variety of methods, for example:

- careful consultation and much listening;
- the appointment of volunteer champions; and
- testing ideas with volunteers instead of implementing/instructing/imposing to develop practical solutions to fit and involved volunteers.

The volunteer audit identified that the volunteer workforce in swimming is aging and succession planning is required.

A further challenge to the post holder is the that her role can be compromised between meeting the needs of the post and developing her remit (and success in volunteer development beyond this) and being used by SGB to increase capacity in other areas such as child protection or youth development.

To avoid this conflict of role, it is important to have the post holder within a suitable team and line managed by right person. It is crucial that the organisation has the right infrastructure and actively wants to develop volunteering. The organisation must respect and understand the outcomes that the post is trying to achieve in order to see success.

The Future of Volunteer Manager Development Posts

How can the post in swimming be developed?

One area in which the post could develop is by working more directly with clubs, for example:

- There is the potential for volunteer co-ordinators and champions to be introduced at club or district level. This would help embed the volunteer coordinator role and training into existing roles with appropriate support from the SGB.
- There is also the potential for the strategic development of links between clubs and Volunteer Centres and Councils for Voluntary Service networks.

Could the post be replicated in other SGBs?

To successfully implement a similar post within their organisation, an SGB would need to demonstrate the following conditions:

- the right environment and infrastructure within which to host a VDM;
- a clear vision and desire to strategically develop volunteering in their sport; and
- links to a robust network at club level to ensure local delivery.

In addition, sustainable funding needs to be found to roll out and support such a programme.

What are the alternatives to a VDM?

Some SGBs would not benefit from having a VDM or would be unable to support and host such a post effectively. For example, small SGBs who are volunteer led may not be ready to successfully support such a role and could have more important priorities or would benefit from additional resource and capacity in developing their SGBs in a different strategic area.

One alternative to a VDM post could be to provide generic support across SGBs to access menu of development activity. This might include learning packages or 'how to...' packs on issues such as carrying out a volunteer audit, developing a volunteer strategy, developing young volunteers in sport or successful succession planning.

SGBs would also benefit from the development of a forum or network for SGBs to share and develop practice and shared learning.

Recommendations

Scottish Swimming have found the post to be beneficial and have identified where the post holder will continue to develop volunteering. In order to do this, Scottish Swimming should attempt to secure sustainable funding for the VDM post.

Areas in which the post can continue to grow and develop are highlighted below.

- The post holder can build on what has been done and showcase good practice, particularly through individual volunteer and club examples in 'Splash news' and Scottish Swimming's website.
- The roll out the implementation stage of the volunteer strategy with particular focus on volunteer training and links to CPD. This form the basis for establishing volunteer pathways in swimming.
- The development of opportunities for young people to become regular swimming volunteers, including establishing a link to Millennium Volunteers.
- Develop practice areas into 'how to ...' resources for clubs, for example in developing young volunteers or succession planning.
- Establish volunteer awards for young volunteers.
- Plan for the first Scottish Swimming volunteer conference.
- Develop new practice areas perhaps through creating new partnerships and through seeking out wider sources of funding to support volunteering in swimming. For example, the generic volunteer support funding available through the Voluntary Action Fund and the Big Lottery.

sportscotland now has to decide how to use the learning from the Swimming post in context of Volunteer Development across SGBs It is suggested that this is done by:

- The creation of an investment programme to support VDMs in key sports.
- The creation of a generic post within **sportscotland** to provide a wider range of volunteer development support for other SGBs.

It is also recommended that **sportscotland** develops a mechanism for dissemination and sharing of practice across SGBs on volunteer development issues, for example:

- Establish a forum or link to a suitable existing forum and/or peer network.
- Use learning from Scottish Swimming as a case study of good practice.
- Develop a range of resources for supporting SGBs including resources and training in challenging volunteer areas as identified above, such as 'How to...' guides on succession planning, carrying out volunteer audits and introducing young volunteers into sport.

- Define a range of ways for SGBs to develop volunteering that create a development pathway that is realistic in terms of the individual SGB's capacity, but which provides opportunity for growth and potential as the SGB's organisation evolves.
- Create a strategic fund for developing volunteering which SGBs can bid into for specific volunteer projects. Build in conditions of funding that require monitoring, evaluation and feedback in order that other SGBs can learn from experiences.
- Widen links with the Step Into Sport programme in England Step Into Sport is part of the Government's PE, School Sport and Club Links (PESSCL) strategy. It focuses on young people aged 14-19 years and aims to encourage them to undertake an involvement in sports leadership and volunteering that will continue into later life. Such links should benefit especially Scottish Swimming to provide opportunities for it to learn and benefit from a more developed network.
- Make a strong connection between volunteer development in SGBs and clubs with the development of young volunteers, and use this as the vehicle for developing general volunteering practices.
- Establish a young sports volunteer of the year award.

Conclusions

The evaluation has found that the post was successful in meeting its objectives in developing a volunteer strategy in harmony with volunteers, delivering targeted training, raising the profile of volunteers through better data collation and consultation and embedding strategic volunteer objectives and actions in Scottish Swimming overall plans.

Similar posts would need to be introduced into a structure which supports the post holder and allows them to develop within the SGB without applying too much pressure of other SGB remits. Organisationally, the VDM post in Scottish Swimming has been part of a wider development team, and provided a focussed resource enabling Scottish Swimming to respond to volunteering. The VDM post is both a catalyst and an enabler, providing an infrastructure for the growth of volunteering in swimming.

The ability of the post holder to open two-way communication with the volunteer base and use consultation to develop a strategy is crucial. Feedback from volunteers suggest that there is some early evidence of impact and benefits. The VDM post has triggered discussion and actions on challenges, especially the focus on young people and their involvement as volunteers.

Other types of support may be more appropriate for SGBs such as providing a generic support structure for SGBs to enable them to access a menu of development activity relevant to their development needs, for example, carrying out a volunteer audit to inform future planning and action.

A further benefit for SGBs would be through the development of a forum or network for sharing and developing volunteer practices and disseminating learning from for example the experiences of Scottish Swimming.

References

1. Reaching Higher: Building on the Success of Sport 21, Scottish Executive, 2007

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/03/07105145/0>

2. Taken from the Scottish Swimming Volunteer Strategy and is calculated using the formula from the VDS Annual Digest 2006.

www.vds.org.uk