

Great expectations: Voluntary sports clubs and their role in delivering national policy for English sport

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Abstract

Sports clubs comprise about a quarter of all volunteering in England. The volunteers work in a mainly mutual aid, self- production- consumption system, geared mainly to identifying, and nurturing high-level performers. But the new HMG/Sport England strategy (2008) leading to London 2012 expects them to make a major contribution to extending participation .The study uses 36 semi-structured interviews with officials and members of clubs across the six counties of Eastern England to record their perceptions and attitudes to being expected to serve public policy and the current pressures on themselves and their clubs. The results lead the authors to question the appropriateness and sensitivity to current policy

Key words: sports clubs, volunteers, pressures, public policy

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Introduction

The Sport England *Strategy 2008-11* stated 'a modern network of sports clubs will be the centrepiece of people's sporting experience' (2008, p3), thereby highlighting a commitment by the Government to supporting sports participation in such environments. The *Strategy* focussed policy on raising participation to Finnish levels by 2020 and with 1 million more players by 2012-13 after the London Olympics (an inheritance from the previous policy phase, but to be delivered mainly through National Governing Bodies of Sport and their affiliated voluntary sports clubs (VSCs), a reversion to sport for its own sake, rather than sport for shared social good (Collins, 2008a). This 'world class' sports development system was intended to speed the transition from school to club sport, increasing adult participation, as well as playing a key role in developing talented athletes. These ambitious aims will place increased emphasis on the role of VSCs in delivering HMG's policy for sport (Collins, 2008b)

Considering such political developments, this paper is timely, as it examines the views of a sample of VSC volunteers regarding the alignment of VSC objectives and sport policy objectives, and their views on VSCs as delivery agents of government sport policy.

Context: a new era for sport?

For a long time the role of club sport and its NGBs was seen as to identify talent, to support performance development and deliver competitive success, and this became the foremost aim of policy in England, Australia and Canada (Bergsgaard *et al*, 2007; Stewart *et al*, 2004). From 1997 onwards, when sport was called upon to help deliver the cross-cutting issues of regeneration, better health, safer and more cohesive and inclusive communities and lifelong learning, encouraging volunteers, both youth and adult, became an end to help sport but also to increase social capital and active citizenship (Coalter, 2007).

In recent years, VSCs have been allocated a leading role in delivering government sports policy, reinforcing the notion of a 'new purposive stance towards the third sector' (Kendall, 2000). Previous reports include references to voluntary sector organisations as key drivers of participation in sport (Sport England, 2004) and the positioning of VSCs as a core component of the 'Single Delivery System' of English sport (Sport England, 2005). The DCMS' latest vision for sport, *Playing to Win: A New Era for Sport* (DCMS, 2008) and Sport

England's *Strategy 2008-11* (Sport England, 2008) reinforced this and laid out clear expectations for VSCs in sustaining and growing participation.

During 2008 sport strategies were re-aligned from sport for good (Coalter, 2007) towards 'pure sport', highlighting a commitment from central government to invest in sport for its own sake. The Sport England Strategy included sector-specific targets, stating that: '*...clubs and coaching should have a positive impact on participation rates. We hope that this will attract an extra 200,000 sporting participants per year*' (p19), participants being defined as people undertaking 30 minutes of moderate sport at least three times a week). It also set a target for the Third Sector, a category that whilst not defined in the strategy, would usually include VSCs, of 100,000 new participants by 2012-13.

As the new 'heart of delivery', NGBs will be assigned a target of 500,000 new participants by 2012-13. The role of VSCs as delivery agent is clearly acknowledged: '*National Governing Bodies are placed at the heart of the strategy as it is their networks of community clubs and other assets that will drive delivery*' (Sport England, 2008, p 10). The net result is an expectation that voluntary sport organisations will play a leading role in recruiting the 1.2M new sports participants by 2012-13

In considering the role of VSCs in delivering sport policy objectives, it is important to be mindful of their diversity and independence, subjects well documented (see, for example: Nichols *et al*, 1998; Allison, 2001; Taylor, 2004; Taylor *et al*, 2007). Building on research into the varying management styles of volunteers in small voluntary organisations (see Billis, 1993; Stebbins, 1996; Rochester, 1999). Taylor (2004) identified two extremes relating to the type of voluntary sport organisation: informal-traditionalists, where strong collective identities operate as cooperatives and view professionalism and external assistance as threats and formal-contemporaries, which are 'systematic, business-like, and receptive to external assistance'. This categorisation addresses the diversity of VSCs most of which fall somewhere between the two (Taylor, 2004).

Most research has been on simply the number of clubs and members or on the nature of volunteering, so as to better support it. In a representative survey of sports clubs in Scotland, Allison (2001) reminded us that volunteers are mostly amateurs primarily motivated by a love of their sport and a desire to 'give back', rather than an ambition to increase club membership or drive participation rates. What has not been done, unlike Germany in particular, is a survey of the infrastructure, finances and human resources of clubs, so that government knows on what sort of private structures they are putting the onus of delivering

public policy objectives (Collins 2008a). Much more is known about the welfare sector for housing, child/elderly care and other social policies that work in policy communities with other social policy Departments like the Home Office. We return to this below.

In today's society, competition for people's time, money, and enthusiasm is intense, and clubs need to make sports volunteering attractive if they are to compete (Taylor *et al*, 2003). Demands for time and enhanced skills requiring formal training (as in coaching, officiating, working with children) can seem prohibitive. Taylor *et al* (2003) observed further that some new club members are likely to be consumption-oriented and less likely to volunteer, viewing the club as provider of a service rather than an organisation supported by mutual enthusiasms and effort (Nichols *et al*, 2005).

Meanwhile central government, national sport organisations and NGBs have encouraged professionalisation, and development of a 'service delivery' philosophy, partly to reassure parents and citizens. Evidence of this includes Clubmark and other accreditation standards, development plans, coach contracts, particular requirements of funding programmes and non-negotiable conditions of awards, and NGB development programmes that are 'offered' to local sports clubs in return for funding or other inducements (Nichols *et al*, 1998; Taylor *et al*, 2003; Cuskelly *et al*, 2006; Jackson and Bramham, 2008).

Nichols *et al* (1998) saw a shift among sports club from mutual aid organisations (Bishop and Hoggett, 1986) toward service delivery organisations (Handy, 1988), suggesting that contemporary society expects VSCs to deliver a service of comparable professional quality to private/public alternatives, reinforcing a 'service delivery' culture as opposed to a loose and informal organisation run by the shared enthusiasm for the common enjoyment of its membership. Building on this, Enjolras (2002) pointed to a shift in the participant's perception of his/her relationship with the provider. If participation in sport is seen as an exchange between participant and (service) provider, then the relationship between VSC and its members is transformed from one of participation to consumption, a danger recognised by Horch (1994). The pressures of professionalisation can make both administration and coaching seem burdensome and too much like the daily grind of paid work. Not what members joined for.

The combination of these pressures and other findings from his national survey led Taylor (in Sport England, 2005: p107) to report that the implications for driving participation through voluntary sports organisations were 'rather bleak':

Faced with a conspiracy of problems caused by societal changes and national institutions requirements, voluntary sport organisations are hard pressed to deliver their core activities, and many are doing so with diminishing and increasingly hard-pressed volunteer resources. The scope for such organisations taking a lead role in developing participation in sport seems as remote as hoping for significant extra funds for local authority sports development from the exchequer.

However, he also stated that it would be premature to give up on voluntary sport organisations, describing the sector, with an estimated 5.8 million sports volunteer force (Taylor *et al*, 2003), as ‘too large to ignore’, but clearly he believed that any attempt to grow participation in sport through the voluntary sector would result in great inefficiency, chiefly due to the independent and diverse nature of (small) VSCs who do not have to accept being co-erced into supporting public policy, and may not have the capacity to respond to demands of public policy, but also because the few non-traditional clubs more likely to respond to external initiatives and incentives (Taylor, 2004).

Methods

The launch of the latest DCMS and SE strategies marks another shift in government sports policy. Thus, this research addressed four questions:

- Are VSCs aware of central government’s policy objectives for sport, specifically those that concern community-based voluntary sports clubs?
- What are the objectives of VSCs as seen by members?
- How far do the objectives of VSCs align with HMG’s sports policy?
- What do VSCs perceive as the pressures and challenges in implementing policy?

To address these issues, this qualitative research was conducted in the East of England with the help of the six County Sports Partnerships (CSPs). Sport England and CSP Board members helped test the list of issues, and CSP Club Development officers distributed the invitations. Six focus group sessions were held, with samples of club members selected by the CSPs, ensuring representation across the six counties in the region. Purposive sampling was chosen as the most appropriate technique, to ensure a balance of location, sports played, the playing and total membership of each VSC, facility ownership and whether the VSC was previously known by the CSP was maintained. Given the scope of this research, it was not considered necessary to carry out sports-specific focus groups, as in previous focus group research on volunteering by Taylor *et al* (2003). The groups included 25 men and 11 women, 15 chairpersons, one secretary and one coach, and drew on twenty five sports.

By its very nature, this kind of research was likely to attract pro-active clubs. It is possible that some VSC representatives were resistant to work with external organisations like CSPs, and did not pass on the invitation to other club representatives, or had no desire themselves to engage in such research. On the other hand, it could be argued that the research might have provided resistant or apathetic clubs/representatives with an opportunity to voice their frustration and apathy, and so were more likely to attend. The approach to sample selection resulted in a range of clubs attending, some of which had well-developed partnerships with NGBs, CSPs, and/or local authorities. How far this may have skewed the response is not known. It could be argued that positive relations form a positive influence, but equally that positive relations within the sport (between Sport England and the NGB) engender feelings of resentment about expectations imposed from above on VSCs (Taylor *et al.*, 2007).

The structure of the focus group followed a standard approach, with an introduction including assurances about confidentiality and disclosure, followed by an ice breaker activity. Each 2-hour evening session focussed on five key areas related to the questions above, involving both prompted and unprompted discussion:

- VSC Objectives
- Developmental work
- Understanding of government sport policy
- Views about the role of VSCs
- Pressures and challenges.

The analysis of the discussions in the six focus groups was multi-layered, and involved both open and axial coding of responses (Denscombe, 2007; Silverman, 2007), enabling specific issues, themes, and patterns to be identified, which were considered against existing literature including the objectives, targets, and assertions detailed in the new national sports strategies. We believe that we have elicited intelligent and intelligible responses, as laid out below.

Findings

Attitudes to policy objectives for sport

Whilst one or two volunteers had an up-to-date understanding of sport policy objectives, the overwhelming message was that most VSCs did not understand central government sport policy, or had an understanding that was largely outdated. Table 1 presents a summary of members' comments that relate to policy confusion, chiefly stemming from what is seen as

tension in different policy positions, criticism of the frequent changes in policy and an overall apathy towards the government and, in particular, the perceived difference between messages sent via various media, and reality based on volunteers' experiences.

[table 1 about here]

The processes used to develop policy was a recurring theme in the discussions about policy objectives. A number of volunteers strongly felt there was a hierarchical, top-down approach, with the government and national sport organisations like SE developing policy with an expectation that the voluntary sector would deliver unquestioningly without involving the sector in developing these policies. Whilst (only) two volunteers were particularly aware of current sports policy objectives, neither had been consulted nor involved.

Table 2 summarises responses to this perceived top-down approach to policy development. Although there were strong opinions on the issue of a top-down approach, they were understandably limited to volunteers who had some knowledge/awareness of sport policy objectives. The majority of volunteers were confused about policy and lacked awareness that there were any expectations at all: *'I cannot see that what we do within our club as [sic] something that the government would have an interest in'*. Another respondent suggested that policy was too focussed on the needs of the government: *'Government policy should be less about delivering for the government and more about delivering for the voluntary sector'*.

[table 2 about here]

In five of the six focus groups, volunteers expressed uncertainty about the 'deliverability' of central government sport policy. Volunteers appeared either distrustful of government policy, or not confident it could be delivered, as displayed in Table 3.

[table 3 about here]

Some volunteers expressed concern about the nature of policy making as well as the importance of funding to support delivery. Discussion in three of the six focus groups confirmed that a number of volunteers viewed policy with a degree of caution, or scepticism or even cynicism: *'Sometimes you are just not sure how long policy is going to be policy, there seems to be one big push after another on a range of different issues'*; another respondent felt that *'government policy is whatever the latest minister says it is, which is part of the issue'*.

Funding emerged as a major concern in terms of whether government could deliver its policy, with all focus groups pointing out the great need for investment, and some mentioning how the 2012 Games is diverting funding away from community sport. There was also some discussion about the lack of Lottery funding for facility development, which was seen as key to meeting policy objectives. Some felt that *'...government likes having policy but do not like paying for it'*. Overall, most volunteers viewed policy as outside their sphere of influence, that would exist regardless of their views and an issue they could largely choose to ignore unless they were thinking about applying for Lottery funding.

Views of VSCs about delivering policy

By considering the views of VSC members about each club's aims and objectives, we looked at how far there was alignment with national sport policy. As might be expected in a loose-linked voluntary system, clubs reported a broad range of objectives, ranging from inward-looking ones, focussed on day-to-day survival to developmental, outward-looking ones. Table 4 shows this range, categorising them as either 'survival orientated' or 'developmental' objectives. Clearly participation, social inclusion and performance/elite development aims were mixed in even in such modest sample. This emphasises the nature of the challenge to policy; do Ministers understand this, or even NGBs? Did the NGBs involved in the consultation for Sport England's 2008-11 strategy promise to deliver a commitment to participation through their clubs on a scale never before essayed?

The focus group discussions revealed a common challenge across VSCs: in reaching agreement on objectives. In reporting this challenge, and in securing acknowledgement from his peers, one club volunteer explained: *'...we have different factions within the club: the coach wants to develop talent, two or three people want to get more members in, whilst the majority of committee members want to get on and play their matches'*. Such diversity of opinion will obviously create some tensions and may impact on whether or how clubs deliver sport policy.

[table 4 about here]

The volunteers were given a brief overview of the key current policy objectives for sport, so their responses about VSCs as delivery agents of sport policy were informed. It was possible to group their responses into four broad categories: resistant, indifferent, reactive and supportive, as displayed in Table 5.

Most volunteers felt that government policy was not and should not be a direct concern of the voluntary sector. Many stated that their motives were fuelled by a love of their sport and their club, and they were neither interested nor motivated by the idea of being part of a structure that is responsible for hitting participation targets. Garrett (2003) recorded resistance to meeting all the requirements of Lottery funding, even from clubs receiving grants. A small number of clubs, across all six focus groups suggested that their clubs are already delivering, or would be interested in delivering, government policy objectives for sport: *'We have no problem delivering policy as it is the same as our own objective, to get more people participating in sport'*.

[table 5 about here]

This range, with its degree of resistance and indifference also needs to be taken into account by policy-makers, as does consideration of the resources needed to encourage the supportive and engage the reactive. In the end, VSCs have the right to refuse partnerships with anyone, including HMG (Nichols and James, 2008), and should not be penalised for their choice, even if not rewarded.

Pressures on volunteers

The focus groups revealed a number of pressures and challenges similar to those identified in previous studies of VSCs (Allison, 2001, Taylor *et al*, 2003, Reid Howie, 2006). Five strong themes emerged: volunteer recruitment, bureaucracy, member attitudes, resource constraints, and the effects of the rapidly evolving sports development profession.

LACK OF VOLUNTEERS

Most volunteers voiced concerns about lack of new volunteers, stating that it was *'just too difficult to recruit new volunteers'* and that they did not know where to start. Others reported they had tried to recruit from within the club, but people were not willing and usually cited too little time to be able to help. Many opined that these difficulties meant their clubs struggled to get by with a few committed volunteers: *'with regards to the committee, it's usually the same people'*. Table 6 shows a summary of these comments, with only two representatives saying that they had enough volunteers to manage the tasks associated with the club.

[table 6 about here]

In two sessions, volunteers suggested that the pressures felt by clubs were not as much about numbers of volunteers as the type of volunteers that they were able to recruit. One

respondent suggested his club had enough volunteers, but they lacked the experience or ability to lead and coordinate activities:

I think within the club there are a good number of volunteers and in fact I think there are an increasing number who are prepared to help. The real challenge is finding volunteers who are able to take responsibility and able to lead.

Several volunteers also felt that the issue of payment was a challenge in that many people, particularly youths, were unable or not prepared to give their time unless paid to do so. The majority of club representatives said they would not entertain the idea of paying, and that this would be the beginning of the end of volunteer-run clubs. One or two, however, admitted to paying new recruits, albeit only assistant coaches and coach helpers. Table 7 sets out a brief summary of the comments relating to pay. Tensions on this issue were particularly conspicuous in cricket, tennis, rugby and athletics clubs.

[table 7 about here]

BUREAUCRACY

With professionalisation in voluntary sports organisations comes bureaucratisation (see Kikulis *et al*, 1989), for NGB purposes or for accountancy to sponsors or public grant –aiding agencies, including the Lottery. Our results suggested that bureaucracy affected all VSCs, if to differing degrees. Many clubs mentioned that the volume of paperwork they handled had increased. Child protection legislation and Clubmark were commonly cited as examples of this. Clubs understood the need for both, and were positive about the schemes' intentions, but the process, particularly its paperwork, was deemed overwhelming by many. One club member who had recently worked through the Clubmark process commented:

Our club development plan has really helped to clarify the future direction of the club. Most of us are now really clear where we are heading, so from that perspective it is great, but whether it really needed to be 80-odd pages long is another issue altogether.

Other examples of what was seen as bureaucracy included: coach and volunteer contracts (introduced by some NGBs), new data reporting systems, and the processes of securing external funding. It was clear from the discussion that this is not a direct reprisal against professionalisation. The comments were aimed at helping to ensure that future schemes are streamlined, minimising the amount of form-filling associated with accreditation standards, development plans and child protection procedures.

There were clear concerns also about the longer-term impact of increased bureaucracy which implied tying up more volunteers, and for those clubs with a few, this meant more work (and more pressure) for those few who. This raises questions about the longer-term willingness of the committed stalwarts/core members to continue multi-tasking and keep their club going. It also is a concern for clubs trying to recruit new volunteers, as one person stated:

I can just see myself signing up fifteen potential volunteer coaches and imagine my colleague next to me says, Oh by the way here are the coach contracts and here are the volunteering contracts and all the other bits and pieces that have to be completed. We would be killed in a stampede as they turn around and run out the door.

MEMBER ATTITUDES

Interestingly, the issue of lack of appreciation and high expectations amongst members was a common, unprompted discussion topic. Responses from volunteers varied between those who considered attitudes to derive from a conscious source; that is, that club members expected high quality services in return for membership fees, to other volunteers who saw this as nothing more than an unintentional consequence of people leading busy lives, having different priorities and not thinking about or understanding the practical implications of running a club.

One or two clubs in each of the six focus groups noted a lack of appreciation and a feeling of being taken for granted: '*...there are a very irritating minority who demand things of you...it's really annoying*', and '*I think it's also just that aspect, sorry...I've paid my membership therefore I've done my bit, I have a right to come here because I've paid to be here*'. The most criticism or annoyance was levied toward parents; many volunteers felt they were being used as a cheap baby-sitting service, with some admitting to doing this themselves in the past. Table 8 highlights a summary comments relating to the attitudes of other club members.

[table 8 about here]

RESOURCE CONSTRAINTS

Unsurprisingly, resources were repeatedly cited as a key pressure. Some opinions were particularly strong, volunteers voicing frustration and anger over the impossibility of their situation, particularly regarding meeting NGB or government expectations when neither was seen as supportive. Discussions on this topic underlined the great tension between the professionalisation of sport and the historic largely amateur nature of sport clubs in England.

Many volunteers said their club simply did not have the resources or capacity to deliver policy goals, with specific reference to the facilities needed to accommodate a growing membership, people needed to respond to coaching and administrative requirements (like Clubmark), and funding to address especially coach development. The cost of coaching awards for various sports has risen significantly, for example

- *'in netball, a level 3 course now costs over £1000, yet the NGB want us to have more level 3 coaches, that is just crazy'*
- *'making sensible charges for coaching courses, some of them are now in the realms of Harry Potter, pure fantasy, do they realise that these costs are paid for by voluntary clubs?' and*
- *'we need more support and help with attending courses, particularly the cost, these are so expensive now that many of our coaches do not bother'.*

Even the powerful and relatively well-resourced German club system ranks as its most serious problems retaining volunteers and attracting new members (Breuer and Wicker, 2008), as does Flanders (de Knop *et al*, 1995).

THE SPORTS DEVELOPMENT PROFESSION

The research revealed a more surprising source of pressure: investment in 'professional' sports administration and subsequent growth of professional sports development. Volunteers specifically referred to professional Sports Development Officers (SDOs) working in NGBs, Local Authorities (or their local Community Sport Network) and CSPs as an additional pressure. They reported two major issues: (i) the expectations and pressures exerted by the government, SE, and NGBs, and (ii) the size, complexity and nature of the system, which has a growing number of specialist organisations, partnerships, and networks involved in the delivery of sport.

Discussion and conclusions: Is the expectation of VSCs as key policy deliverers realistic?

For VSCs, regular changes in policy have created a muddled and confused picture. Sports club volunteers are unclear about policy objectives, many hold an out-of-date view and; many have limited confidence and willingness to become delivery agents. This is concerning, not least because the new SE strategy allocates VSCs a crucial role in recruiting up to 1million new sports participants as part of the recently launched 2012 legacy plans. This presents a significant challenge to SE and to NGBs. Firstly, they must ensure that there is clear communication with VSCs, clarifying the new policy objectives and targets. Secondly, they need to encourage VSCs to commit to the new policy objectives and deliver

activities that will contribute towards the new growth targets, despite little or no involvement in developing the new policies.

As an alternative, SE, NGBs, and other organisations may choose to focus attention on those clubs that apply for grants, either from the Lottery Sports Fund or their NGB. Either explicit grant criteria and/or award conditions could be applied to funding only those VSCs able to demonstrate— on paper, at least —their intention to meet policy objectives. Whether such overt pressure, creating funded sheep and unfounded goats, is something that anyone wishes to see in the sports movement is another, moral matter.

But the small average size of over 90% of English sports clubs provides outside limits to their capacity. In Germany, most of its 90,400 clubs are small and single-sport also, but the minority (6%) of large multi-sport clubs (with over 1,000 members providing a quarter of all club members) are the ones that provide the bulk of new and competitive sports, and take on the tasks of meeting the needs of hard-to-reach groups like disabled and Black/Ethnic Minority people, those from deprived areas, or of helping disaffected youth (Anders, 1991). England has no cadre of such multi-sport clubs. So, the limited capacity and varying motives of VSCs, and the limited power of SE and NGBs to enforce them in a voluntary, opt-in system makes the efficacy of this approach highly questionable.

The study found VSCs variously oriented toward goals of survival or development of participation or performance, and many members indifferent or hostile to being agents responsible for government objectives for sport, perceiving this as an objective which they held no direct responsibility. Some NGBs have undertaken countrywide operations to get each affiliated club to clarify its role, whether for basic teaching and participation, talent identification and performance development of nurturing elite players; examples are the Amateur Swimming Association with Swim 21 and Rugby Union, and the focus club community clusters developed by the English Cricket Board. Our sample repeated earlier findings about serious resource constraints of facilities, finance and human resources. If this small sample is anything like representative, Sport England, the CCPR and NGBs need to think hard about their publicity, promotion and incentive policies. It seems to us that top-down policy makers have once again taken too much for granted. If too much pressure is put on the willing minority (that Nichols, 2005 called 'stalwarts'), we may see the unintended consequence of creating what Pearce (1993) referred to as 'martyred leaders'.

We suggest policy makers do not know, and this is another reason for starting to undertake proper surveys of the club system like those done with a sample of 4,000 every four years in Germany recently expanded to 13,000 in 2007 with a longitudinal element of 1,640 clubs (Breuer and Wicker, 2008). Whilst this will require investment of time and money, it will arguably lead to a more effective, needs-based approach in delivering policy objectives. But as a freely chosen set of organisations, settled clubs are those of members enjoying what they are doing (Koski, 1995).

So, policy makers have three options in their approach to this sector:

1. Continue with the current 'blanket approach', accept inefficiencies, wastage and a degree of frustration and resistance (Taylor, 2004)
2. go beyond hub clubs and the clubs built around soccer (*2008-11 Strategy*, p22) to try to create a bigger cadre of large multi-sport clubs, while realizing that these are not part of the mainstream tradition in the UK and for decades will remain a smaller part of the system than in Germany, or
3. Develop a targeted approach, requiring research, sensitivity and a deeper understanding of the variety of VSC types

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5728 words.

Table 1: Policy confusion

- *There is a heck of a lot of turmoil*
- *Current government has moved the goalposts; now [the] focus [is] on winning and medals*
- *It seems to be about high profile sports, you know those that are in the papers week in and week out, football, rugby and whatever*
- *I don't know what policy is now—it's changing every year*
- *Sport this, Sport UK that, it's confusing, there's so much duplication*
- *From top to bottom it is confusing. I am not sure how much they spend at the top; the money does not always come down to the bottom level*
- *It just looks a mess to me*
- *Not sure, mixed messages—win medals, but then why sell off playing fields?*
- *Confusing*
- *Government like putting activity on, but are not prepared to pay for it*
- *It's a joke really*
- *Sport for All, that's where the grants are aimed at anyway*
- *Mixed messages, promoting sport, then selling playing fields, it sends the wrong message*
- *I think it's more about the NHS nowadays and getting people active*
- *I do not have a clear picture of what government policy is about*
- *It's all mixed messages; the behaviour of various public bodies does not match the rhetoric. The rhetoric is about increasing participation and now that 2012 is coming along, trying to find excellence and getting lots of gold medals is the new priority.*

Table 2: Top down approaches to policy

- *Requirements come down from high...[government, NGBs and Sport England]*
- *I think you need to listen to your clubs, rather than just telling them*
- *The governing bodies are being dictated to by government*
- *As far as I am concerned, clubs have not been asked to follow government policy*
- *They expect [what they say] to happen tomorrow*
- *It seems that NGBs are being dictated to*
- *Government's policy is whatever the latest minister thinks, which is part of the problem*
- *What's government understanding of what sports clubs do...the issue is do the government understand how clubs work?*

Table 3: Uncertainty about 'deliverability'

- *Lots of words, but not a lot of action*
- *From what I understand it's all being cut at the lower end, paying for the higher end to make sure that we have the best in London in 2012*
- *It is not clear and whatever it is meant to be delivering, it doesn't appear to be being delivered*
- *They talk a lot at the top [ministerial level] but do absolutely sod all*
- *Policy is just so wishy-washy*

Table 4: Survival and developmental objectives for VSCs

<i>Survival orientated objectives</i>	<i>Development orientated objectives</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The first thing for us is to stay in business</i> • <i>To make sure we have enough income to make ends meet</i> • <i>Our objective is to keep our members pleased</i> • <i>Need to ensure that ends meet, with rising costs it is difficult to run the club</i> • <i>We do not want growth as we are creaking at the edges</i> • <i>We cannot afford to be there as much as we would like to be, we are more focussed on day-to-day survival</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We want to provide a broad cricket offering to the whole community including high quality coaching and competitive opportunities</i> • <i>To achieve high standards of performance in our sport</i> • <i>We are interested in supporting the talented end of the game</i> • <i>We want to work with local schools, recruit children and get as many players as possible</i> • <i>We want to develop a broad base and develop talent</i> • <i>To attract as many youngsters as possible</i> • <i>To grow our club and gain new members</i>

Table 5: Volunteers' views about VSCs delivering policy objectives for sport

Resistant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Clubs can't be told to do what someone else wants them to [do]</i> • <i>My immediate reaction is hands-off. The government should not be requiring the voluntary sector to deliver their policy</i> • <i>Leave the voluntary sector to the voluntary sector. We try to develop for the sake of the club, not to achieve government policy</i>
Indifferent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If people want to play sports they will come and knock on the door, you cannot take to the streets</i> • <i>I have no problem with government sport policy, but I do not really see our club as deliverers of that policy. We are all volunteers who do it because we are passionate about our sport</i> • <i>We are far more concerned with running our club</i>
Reactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We have a development plan, but had we not been forced down that route I am not sure we would have one. We did it because we needed some funding</i> • <i>We have become a charity, we get money from the NGB to deliver things, but it is not that straightforward</i> • <i>Our club does not necessarily see itself as a deliverer of government policy, but it could be, if the resources were available</i> • <i>We jump more to our NGB than we do government, it lays down what it expects of us in order for us to get funding or grants</i>
Supportive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We welcome it, but we are lucky, we have funding from the NGB and can be proactive with all sorts of stuff</i> • <i>We would welcome a role in delivering government policy, so long as we were clear about resource and structure.</i> • <i>I feel that we have a role to deliver policy</i> • <i>We have no problem doing it, delivering what the policy is as it is the same as our own objective, to get more people participating.</i>

Table 6: Lack of volunteers

- *...I just do not have the time to put it in and make it work and there are very few others to help out*
- *It is just too difficult to recruit new volunteers*
- *...with regards to the actual committee it's usually the same people...*
- *...it usually comes down to one or two people*
- *One thing I am afraid of is burnout...*
- *I just get the impression that it's the same people every year who are doing the sort of key jobs*
- *...if you took 1 or 2 people out of the club, it would pretty much collapse*
- *I now feel that I am acting as a part-time business development manager for zero money*
- *Our biggest pressures are volunteers prepared to do it and then those that can actually give time to do it. Only a few people actually end up helping*
- *It's very hard to get volunteers. It's an age that if you excuse me I think there is a group, what I call the Thatcher's children that are so self-centred that they don't want to volunteer at all*

Table 7: The issue of paying volunteers

- *Our young people help and it's brilliant that they do, they help the coaches. But they're paid and I'm now listening to people saying that we have to pay them more to compete with the fact that they could go to Tesco's and earn that sort of money, therefore you've got to pay, so it's becoming more of a money issue*
- *I think money and payment are coming into it, more paid people and fewer volunteers*
- *I think paying coaches causes a problem; we could end up losing an awful lot of our volunteers*
- *Getting youngsters can work, but it is a difficult line, many expect to be paid to coach or help out*
- *You've got the younger people who I think in this day and age have to go to work to earn a living who would like to give a lot more and they can't.*

Table 8: Member attitudes

- *We've been billed as the cheapest babysitting service in the area.*
- *...there's also a lack of appreciation that behind the scenes a lot of volunteering is going on, people just don't realise*
- *...there are a very irritating minority who demand things of you as if you were a paid servant and it's really annoying*
- *I think maybe it's also just [an attitude of] "I've paid my membership therefore I've done my bit, I have a right to come here because I've paid to be here"*
- *...basically we are being used as a cheap baby-sitting service*
- *...you've got to be very careful because some of the people who are most active use the term babysitting for want of a better phrase. Two years down the line they're doing the same thing...*
- *Parents were dropping their kids off and running off, leaving them with us and then picking them up an hour later than they should have done. It took us years to change that so I do think it can happen, it's how you manage it*