

Chapter Four: Skills gaps and development opportunities to support and develop a resilient and relevant workforce

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Disclaimer:

This report has been produced for Active Lincolnshire and their partners by the Lincolnshire Open Research and Innovation Centre. The purpose of this market report is to support Active Lincolnshire and their partners with service development decisions, investment decisions, and funding applications.

The findings in this report are advisory only, and represent the researcher’s interpretation of available data. The reader is not obligated to take on any of the recommendations laid out in this report, in part or in full, and is responsible for doing their own due diligence before implementing the findings in any way, shape, or form.

Summary

The chapter begins with an overview of the labour force and existing skills. Some overarching statistics include:

- A total of 28,000 people potentially working in the industry in Greater Lincolnshire.
- 61% of all the people employed in the sport, physical activity, and leisure occupations in Greater Lincolnshire are 25-49 years of age.
- It appears that the labour force in Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland for the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector is more seasonal than in other parts of the country.
- There were far more people holding NVQ1 and NVQ2 level qualifications compared to the rest of the region and the country.
- 34% of workers in the sector appear to be employed in the “caring, leisure, and other service occupations” followed by “skilled trades occupations” (19%) and “associate professional and technical occupations” (18%).

Skills in demand include digital skills, mental health first aid, elite coaching, as well as professional skills in volunteering (such as customer service, sales, human resource management, and more). Multi-Skilled Development and Multi-Level Career Paths were raised as being incredibly important for staff development. For charities, the need for young, skilled professionals on trustee boards was raised multiple times.

Survey responses as well as interview data suggest that there is a significant challenge in recruitment and retention for the sector. However, the sources of that challenge are multi-layered and intersecting. Based on the data, we have identified the following impacting factors:

1. Seasonality of labor force.
2. Career changes and retraining because of redundancies/furlough during COVID-19.
3. Higher demand for skilled employees creating incentives for changing jobs quickly.
4. Digital rollout and cost constraints resulting in some roles becoming consolidated.
5. No incentives for returning workers. / Cost of living crisis pricing entry-level workers out of their roles.

Morale and motivation also pose a massive challenge, especially with the cost of working. Petrol costs, childcare costs, and other caring expenses are a real barrier to work, especially for people at the beginning of their careers, and for women. A family carer might have to pay £2,368 per month just to be able to do part-time work.

There is a need for a sector-wide intervention – not just to drive recruitment, but to address the underlying causes of under-employment and under-use of resources. Examples of such interventions include more digital opportunities, more training to fill digital roles, as well as more investment in local employment opportunities, childcare and elderly care facilities, and local transport and infrastructure.

It is worth noting that while the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector is one where face-to-face delivery is very important, it is not the only set of skills that is in high demand, as the next section will explore.

Finally, it was found that volunteers are also becoming increasingly more and more professionalized, as they deliver at a standard of conduct and skill level that is comparable to those in paid-for roles.

Size of the labour force and existing skills

As seen in the previous section of this report (Forward Trends: the role of data and digital tools) the overall skills level in Greater Lincolnshire is somewhat lower than the average for the East Midlands and for Great Britain in general. According to the Annual Population Survey published by the Office of National Statistics, in 2021 there were far more people holding NVQ1 and NVQ2 level qualifications as their highest level of qualification compared to the rest of the region and the country; and far fewer people holding NVQ4 and above when compared to the rest of the region and the country.

	Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland %	East Midlands %	Great Britain %
All people aged 16-64: NVQ1	13%	12%	9%
All people aged 16-64: NVQ2	19%	17%	15%
All people aged 16-64: NVQ3	17%	18%	17%
All people aged 16-64: NVQ4+	32%	36%	44%
All people aged 16-64: None	8%	7%	7%
All people aged 16-64: Other Qualifications	7%	6%	6%
All people aged 16-64: Trade Apprenticeships	4%	4%	3%

The 2021 annual population survey, there were a total of 28,000 people potentially working in the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector in Greater Lincolnshire. (The data for Rutland was anonymised.) The majority of workers engaged in the Sport, Physical Activity, and Leisure sector appear to be employed in the “caring, leisure, and other service occupations” (34% of all employees) followed by “skilled trades occupations (19%) and “associate professional and technical occupations (18%). This distribution appears to be in line with regional and national percentages, but skews towards the less senior roles. Specifically, the roles described as “caring, leisure, and other service occupations” represent only 23% of all roles in Great Britain, and 30% of all roles in the East Midlands, compared to 34% of all roles in the industry in Greater Lincolnshire.

	Greater Lincolnshire		East Midlands		Great Britain	
	Number	%	Number	%	number	%
Managers, Directors and Senior Officials (SOC2010): R-U Other services ¹	2,300	8%	11,800	11%	171,800	10%
Professional Occupations (SOC2010): R-U Other services	2,800	10%	12,200	11%	279,800	16%
Associate Prof & Tech Occupations (SOC2010): R-U Other services	5,000	18%	17,500	16%	405,800	23%
Administrative and Secretarial Occupations (SOC2010): R-U Other services	1,300	5%	9,200	9%	157,900	9%
Skilled Trades Occupations (SOC2010): R-U Other services	5,200	19%	12,500	12%	137,500	8%
Caring, Leisure and Other Service Occupations (SOC2010): R-U Other services	9,600	34%	32,200	30%	400,500	23%
Sales and Customer Service Occupations (SOC2010): R-U Other services	!		2,000	2%	67,700	4%
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives (SOC2010): R-U Other services	!		1,600	1%	22,100	1%
Elementary occupations (SOC2010): R-U Other services	1,800	6%	7,800	7%	134,500	8%

Further breakdown by age bracket shows that 61% of all the people employed in the industries in Greater Lincolnshire are 25-49 years of age (compared to 57% in the East Midlands and 56% in Great Britain). According to the same data source, 69% of all people working in these industry classifications were registered as “employed”, 26% were registered as self-employed, and 5% were registered as “other flexibility.” There were slightly more people registered as self-employed or working in other flexible arrangements when compared to the rest of the East Midlands or Great Britain, but not to an extent where it represents a significant difference.

	Greater Lincolnshire		East Midlands		Great Britain	
	Culture, Media and Sports Occupations	Leisure, Travel and Related Personal Service Occupations	Culture, Media and Sports Occupations	Leisure, Travel and Related Personal Service Occupations	Culture, Media and Sports Occupations	Leisure, Travel and Related Personal Service Occupations
All people	7,400	8,300	34,100	39,600	649,800	557,200
Full-time	2,600	4,600	20,600	22,000	418,700	333,000
Part-time	4,800	3,700	12,900	17,500	229,600	224,000

An examination of the NOMIS data on occupations and flexibility shows that there were more people in Greater Lincolnshire working part-time in culture, media, and sport occupations; which appears to be in inverse to the regional or national trends. The breakdown by flexibility for leisure, travel, and related personal service occupations, however, follows the same trends.

Please note, SIC and SOC codes are imperfect ways of estimating the size of an industry. Depending on the interpretation, the actual size of the Greater Lincolnshire Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure sector is anything between 15,700 and 28,000 people employed across all possible occupations and all types of contracts (leisure, art, culture, media, administrative, elementary, and managerial roles).

¹ R-U Other services include: arts, entertainment and recreation; other service activities; activities of households as employers; and undifferentiated goods and services producing activities of households for own use, and activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies.

However, what is relevant for this analysis is the distribution of these occupations and skills in Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland when compared to the rest of the East Midlands and Great Britain.

The size of the labour force in Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland for the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector is more seasonal than in other parts of the country. It also appears that ages 25-49 are more represented in the area than in the rest of the region. Finally, there is a lot more flexibility, as evidenced by the proportion of self-employed people, and people on other flexible contracts.

Recruitment and retention

Participants pointed at recruitment and retention as one of the biggest, if not the biggest challenge for the sector. Funding and the cost of overheads were common themes in both survey and interviews, but it was the challenges of recruitment and retention that came up for every participant.

Recruitment is a challenge for many sectors in the UK economy, and at the time of writing, the August labour market statistical bulletin from the Office of National Statistics shows there are 1,274,000 job vacancies across the UK. The number is a slight decline from the previous quarter, but still represents about half a million vacancies more than in January-March 2020².

Nevertheless, as participants noted, there were several factors that exacerbated the recruitment and retention challenges for the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector:

The seasonality of the labour force, particularly in the leisure sector on the Lincolnshire coast, resulted in the sector being impacted by COVID-related furlough and redundancies.

Many of the staff that were then made redundant or furloughed took the time in 2020 and 2021 to retrain and enter the workforce in another industry. As documented in both secondary data and participant testimonials, many experienced workers who were previously occupied in the sport, physical activity and leisure sector sought employment in less seasonal occupations.

Many of the workers who stayed in the sector had the ability to negotiate higher salaries, particularly sports coaches and personal trainers. This, in turn, drove the prices of labour even further up.

The rollout of digital tools for the sector during the pandemic presented many opportunities for innovation and the introduction of digital skills. Many of the tools introduced in the sector also made many roles obsolete – notably, reception staff and hospitality staff. Consequently, participants in this research project note that a lot of roles that would have been done by multiple workers are now being filled by just one or two people, sometimes to the detriment of service quality.

There were no incentives for skilled workers to return to the sector after COVID and furlough. As explained by the research participants, the seasonality of the sector combined with the

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/august2022>

lack of clear career path meant that for many workers, other industries were a better, safer investment of their time and effort.

Taken together, these five factors have resulted in a significant skills shortage in the sector, combined with a very high turnover of staff. What participants observed was that it was a lot harder to fill the positions they had, and it was a lot harder to keep the staff they did hire. In addition to hiring skilled people into the roles they did need to fill, participants also found there was now a need for many new skills that had hitherto not been developed in the sector.

Incentives: “More than a job, but a career”

In response to the challenge of recruitment and retention, many workplaces have started offering enhanced incentives for people to join in, including more workplace training and higher salaries. However, some of the good practices shared by the participants include strategies aimed at actively developing their workforce and creating long-term careers. In other words, they approached the problem of recruitment as “not just giving a person a job, but a career.”

An example of what this strategy might look like is workplace schemes, multi-skill training programs, and developing parallel career paths in the company. A person might join a leisure centre as a lifeguard for a summer, but receive training for multiple other roles (for example fitness training, physical therapy, mental health first aid.) That person would then have the option of developing their career on its original track, or to transition into a different role if they find that it does not actually suit them.

At the same time, participants stressed the importance of showcasing people in senior leadership roles whose career path was unconventional. For those participants, a crucial part of raising aspirations for staff was demonstrating how a person might be successful if they pursue a career in this organisation (as opposed to viewing this as a stopgap job between school and university).

This strategy – the pursuit of developing cadres and putting them on a long-term career track – is valuable not just because it is likely to reduce the overall training bill for a company, but also because it could positively impact employee morale, increase loyalty, and encourage people to stay in their role instead of changing jobs every 3-6 months.

Furthermore, the rapid turnover of staff is a considerable concern for employers in the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector. Far from being a temporary phenomenon, participants expressed concern that this may become commonplace, especially as the cost-of-living in the UK continues to increase. However, rapid turnover is not the only major threat perceived by participants. Indeed, as described by some participants, this threat is not one that can be addressed by an individual employer.

“It’s too expensive to work”

While some employees appear to have taken advantage of the current labour market to “jump between jobs” and negotiate higher salaries for themselves, some of the participants in this study have noticed a phenomenon where people are taken out of the workforce, not because they don’t want to work, but because it is too expensive for them to do so at their current level. Reasons driving this phenomenon include:

- The cost of fuel: At the time of writing, the cost of gasoline in the UK is round £1.711 per litre³, bringing the cost of filling a family car between £80 and £120 per trip.
- Cost of childcare: A part-time place in a nursery for a child under 2 works out at £137 per week, or £263 per week for a full-time place. For a 49-week term, this adds up to £6,762 per year for a part-time place and £12,887 for a full-time place. Registered childminders cost a little less (£118 per week for part-time care and £228 for full-time care), but a live-in nanny can cost up to £650 per week, plus tax, National Insurance contributions, as well as room and board.⁴
- Cost of care for sick family members: According to Carers UK, there are approximately 11.5 million people in the UK providing unpaid care to a person who is elderly, seriously ill, or disabled.⁵ Additionally, a large percentage of people will provide care for more than one person (like a child and a sick family member) over their lifetime. With the cost of home care starting at £15 per hour, it could cost between £375 and £750 per week to have a professional carer supporting family members.
- Cost of being ill: At the time of writing, statutory sick pay is at £99.35 per week for up to 28 weeks.⁶
- Not being able to afford to work remotely: As discussed by the participants, not everyone working in the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector can do their work remotely to accommodate childcare and family caring responsibilities.

These challenges are universal to all workers, but they impact young women and early career workers disproportionately. According to the Annual Population Survey (Q1 22 results) the most common reasons for women in Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland to be economically inactive were looking after the home and family, or long-term illness. (For males, the most common reason to be economically inactive was long-term illness or being in higher education.) Women were also more likely than men to have second jobs in Distribution, Hotels, and Restaurants; as well as second jobs in Public Administration, Education, and Health. Women were more likely to work part-time than men (based on weekly hours worked) at a lower median hourly rate⁷; and even women in full-time employment earn a median of £485.70 per week, compared to £621.30 per week for men.

What this means is that the financial burden of work is likely to grow, and that financial burden is more likely to be carried by women and young people at the start of their career. While the cost of working can be somewhat mitigated by workplace schemes, participants noted that, unless the worker was a middle manager and earning a high salary already, those measures were not likely to have a significant impact on them staying in employment.

This signals a need for a sector-wide intervention – not just to drive recruitment, but to address the underlying causes of under-employment and under-use of resources. Examples of such interventions include:

- More digital opportunities.
- More training to fill digital roles.

³ https://www.globalpetrolprices.com/United-Kingdom/gasoline_prices/

⁴ <https://www.nct.org.uk/life-parent/work-and-childcare/childcare/average-childcare-costs>

⁵ <https://www.local.gov.uk/lga-libdem-group/resources/template-motions/unpaid-carers>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/employers-sick-pay>

⁷ Median hourly rate for female part-time workers is £12.75; median hourly rate for male part-time workers is £14.81

- More investment in local employment opportunities, cutting the need to travel.
- More investment in childcare and elderly care facilities.
- More investment in local transport and infrastructure to allow for seamless travel or for people to take on digital opportunities within the sector.
- More investment in the recruitment of elite coaches for the sector.

It is worth noting that while the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector is one where face-to-face delivery is very important, it is not the only set of skills that is in high demand, as the next section will explore.

Skills in demand

Digital skills

Participants named digital skills as some of the most in-demand for their workforce – not just for the creation of applications that people might use to engage in sport, physical activity, and leisure, but also for many supporting roles, such as:

- Social media management and marketing.
- Production of digital content (e.g. blog posts, articles, videos, graphics, etc.)
- Digital administration, such as running websites, sending out email campaigns; and more.

While the usage of digital tools dropped off in 2021 and 2022, as lockdowns began to lift and people started engaging face to face again, participants noted the increase that occurred in 2020. For some, that signalled that there was a significant opportunity for the sector to expand, and reach new clients beyond those they already work with. However, that also meant there was a need to develop these digital capabilities within their own teams.

One participant described their digital strategy as a one-person show, as he developed most of the content, uploaded it online, and pushed it to their various audiences. That appears to be the strategy of many other companies in the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector. However, that same participant noted that this was not sustainable, nor was it something they wanted to engage with on a full-time basis.

Participants named different reasons as to why they wanted to invest more in digital skills:

- Helping their message to reach more people;
- Getting a competitive advantage;
- Engaging audiences they would not have otherwise engaged with in the past;
- Publicity alignment (necessary for national campaigns and partnerships);
- More efficient working;
- Better engagement with younger audiences;
- Better return on investment for their marketing budget.

Unfortunately, participants also noted that their organisations were not at a point where they could actively invest in the training and hiring of dedicated staff members who would work on their digital

strategy. What happened most often was that one or two people in the company would do what they could in their free time to produce content, but none of the participants reported having a dedicated social media or digital strategy.

Mental health first aid

Demand for mental health first aid was high, as well as any other skill that enhanced the ability of staff to provide support to people who might struggle with their mental health. As explained by one of the participants, many people are struggling with their mental health after the pandemic. For people to be able to engage with sport and physical activity, they can sometimes benefit from an adjustment period, and some time building up their confidence before they start to attend regular classes.

LORIC came to a similar conclusion when the centre produced their 2021 report on Adult Literacy in Greater Lincolnshire. For certain populations, and in certain areas, there is simply not enough provision to allow somebody to jump into a structured activity.

Multi-skilled development and Elite Skills

While some of the participants in this project talked about the need for specific skills in the sector, most brought up the need for multi-skilled development and multi-skilled training, (i.e. the recruitment and nurturing of staff that have a variety of skills and abilities).

The skills cited by interviewees as being in demand include, but are not limited to:

- Literacy.
- Sales.
- Customer service.
- Policy document training.
- Library skills (for community centre volunteers).
- Skills to manage Long Covid.
- Skills to manage mental health difficulties.
- Skills to manage safeguarding and welfare.
- Skills to engage effectively with inactive communities.

The reasons for the demand for multi-skilled development were rooted into the needs of the individual organisations. A prevailing sentiment was that there needed to be more cohesion with education providers to equip young people with more varied skills for the workplace. While individual employers talked about how they were investing in multi-skilled training for their workforce, and creating varied career paths for their workers, they also noted that education also had a part to play.

Survey respondents also emphasised the opportunities for a joined-up approach with healthcare providers, which in turn created a demand for corresponding skills, including but not limited to:

- Understanding complex health needs.
- Helping to alleviate and mental health issues.
- Skills needed to help people struggling with obesity.

- The running of health hubs.
- Promoting benefits of healthy lifestyle on mental health.
- Working in collaboration with researchers to co-produce research that can address issues with physical inactivity.
- Pre- and post-natal course delivery.
- Working with over-55 groups.
- Working with children and young people.
- Working with families, and more.

Elite skills were also brought up as being in particularly high demand for sports clubs. As explained by one of the interview participants, natural ability can only take a person so far – an elite coach can help many skilled young people reach their full potential. However, there was a “frustrating” lack of coaches with the kinds of elite skills that were needed, with families having to travel across the Humber to access the facilities and the skills that they needed. Whilst local providers explained that they did their best, they also explained that there are certain skills that can only be achieved through elite coaching and mentoring.

Finally, both survey respondents and interview participants emphasised the role volunteering had on recruitment and retention for the sector, which is what the next section will focus on in more detail.

Professional skills in volunteering

So far, this chapter has outlined the challenges and opportunities for the labour force in Greater Lincolnshire and Rutland. To some extent, these challenges have been exacerbated by COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis; others were present before the pandemic.

What has not yet been discussed in great detail is the third sector, and specifically the role of volunteers. As one interview participant noted, the third sector has been in “crisis mode” for a long time, and has been concerning itself with the problems that are now considered endemic for the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector – namely, the lack of provision for under-served populations, the rising costs of utilities, and the lack of funding for elite coaches. The third sector has been very creative, as many interviewees noted, but many organisations that didn’t used to need funding are now finding themselves in need of help.

In the survey, most respondents noted that they didn’t have salaried employees, and that their board of trustees and volunteers ran everything. There was a sense among both survey respondents and interview participants that more volunteers were needed across the board, as they provided a crucial service for the sector – from mass participation events, to the running of sport clubs, to the maintenance and upkeep of venues.

Participants also pointed out the need for more professional skills in their volunteers. While some providers only needed volunteers to help run events (like marathons, Park Runs, and fundraisers), others – such as village halls and community centres – had much more complex and comprehensive requirements, such as customer service skills and library skills.

In addition to filling any customer-facing roles they might have, many charities, Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs), and charitable trusts also struggled to recruit trustees into their boards. Participants pointed towards the difficulty of recruiting trustees as a threat to their organisations, as lack of continuity and succession planning leaves them vulnerable to long-term changes.

As seen from the previous chapter on future trends, village halls and community hubs are crucial, not just for the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector, but to local regeneration as a whole. In many rural settings, volunteer-run community hubs are the only opportunity for local residents to access library services, leisure activities, physical activity, and sport. They offer crucial services such as WiFi access and warm spaces, particularly for citizens who are struggling to pay their bills or who might not have access to the Internet to complete a benefit claim or a passport application. In communities with limited transport links, village halls offer the only means for people to socialise.

Given the role fulfilled by these spaces, it is understandable that the skills demanded of their volunteers are more complex than those of an event organisation committee. However, it also leads to a phenomenon which will be explored in more detail in the next section, which is the professionalisation of volunteering.

Volunteers

Volunteers are a core part of the Sport, Physical Activity, and Leisure sector. They are also becoming increasingly more and more professionalised, as they deliver at a standard of conduct and skill level that is comparable to those in paid-for roles.

This trend towards the professionalisation of volunteering has been observed for at least a decade now, with articles demonstrating the impact of different organisations becoming more and more volunteer-led being published as late as 2011⁸ and the professionalisation of volunteer management being observed by researchers as early as 1982⁹. In all sectors, it is becoming increasingly common for volunteers to be screened and selected for roles the same way they do for payroll jobs; and they receive training that is comparable to, if not exceeding that in salaried positions.

The sport, physical activity, and leisure sector is no exception. Of the respondents to the survey, 64% represented Charities, 14% were Community Interest Companies, and 14% more represented other kinds of voluntary organisations. Most didn't have employees, or had less than 10 employees. A vast amount of work was being done by the boards of trustees, with support from volunteers.

Participants from charitable organisations and community interest companies described the high standard to which they held their volunteers. Induction comprised comprehensive training on data management and GDPR, equality and diversity law, health, and safety in the workplace, and more. Volunteers were also expected to provide high-levels of support to customers, work to deadlines, keep to schedule, and deliver key project indicators as set by their managers.

⁸ <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/229306923.pdf>

⁹ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/089976408201100211>

Moreover, while participants described encountering some pushback from volunteers, they felt that most of the people who donate their time to the organisation understand the need for more professional norms in the workplace and followed that code of conduct without complaint. Volunteers who responded to demands for more professionalism poorly were perceived as the minority. Participants described it as a relationship of needs and requirements, where the organisation requires certain standards be met by its volunteers, and the volunteers consent to work to those requirements.

That is not to say that organisations did not still offer volunteering opportunities to those who may need them for mental health or employability reasons. But participants stressed that volunteering was primarily a professional arrangement, and that volunteers ought to be held to the same standard as salaried employees, as far as skills and professional conduct went. While the participants talked about the ways in which volunteering could enrich the lives of people and support them into the workplace, the interviews focused on the need for professional volunteers, including:

- Administrators.
- Librarians.
- Sales people.
- Sales managers.
- Custodians.
- Accountants.
- Trustees.

The need for more volunteers on the trustee board – especially young trustees – was brought up as a particular concern. Most trustee boards for village halls and community centres are made up of volunteers at the end of their working life, or who are already in retirement. While that gives them the time to engage fully with the needs of the organisation, it also means that they are limited in what they can do and how they can grow. A need for professional project management, accountancy, and policy skills on the board was singled out as key to the long-term longevity of the organisation.

Many of the community centre representatives who contributed to the interviews had started up their organisations to preserve local services. Participants described how they wanted to make sure there were still activities for elderly residents, how they wanted to preserve their local library, how they were trying to make sure there were still places for people to access the internet, fill out passport applications, or access the myriad of digital-first services they could not access at home. An overarching theme for the voluntary sector was how local communities were all trying to step in to make sure local residents were not left behind.

This information provides a valuable snapshot of the current state of the volunteer labour market in Lincolnshire. Whereas the private sector is experiencing a demand for high skilled labour, the volunteer sector appears to be made up by retirees and over 55s. The perception is that the volunteer workforce is highly skilled, highly motivated, relatively secure in their relationships and housing, and in possession of a good work-life balance. While respondents did note that some of their volunteers might be worried about money and finances at present, nearly half of respondents thought that bills and funding were not their workforce's biggest concern, which is an interesting trend when compared to the rest of the labour market.

These findings appear to align with the data provided by Sport England in their Active Lives survey. The latest statistical release from November 2021 shows that volunteers are more likely to be male, aged 35-54 or 55-74, and affluent. Despite an overall decrease in volunteering in 2020-2021 compared to 2019-2020, 35% of all volunteers contributed at least 2 hours per week, 29% did so between 45 minutes and an hour, 11% volunteer for at least 3 hours, and 5% volunteered for more than 4 hours per week.

Respondents to this research – both survey and interview – noted that the volunteer workforce was highly motivated, collaborative, and responsive to the needs of the community. Long-term career planning did not appear to be applicable for the volunteer workforce, and investment in the volunteer workforce did not appear to be a high priority for respondents, as seen from the graph below.

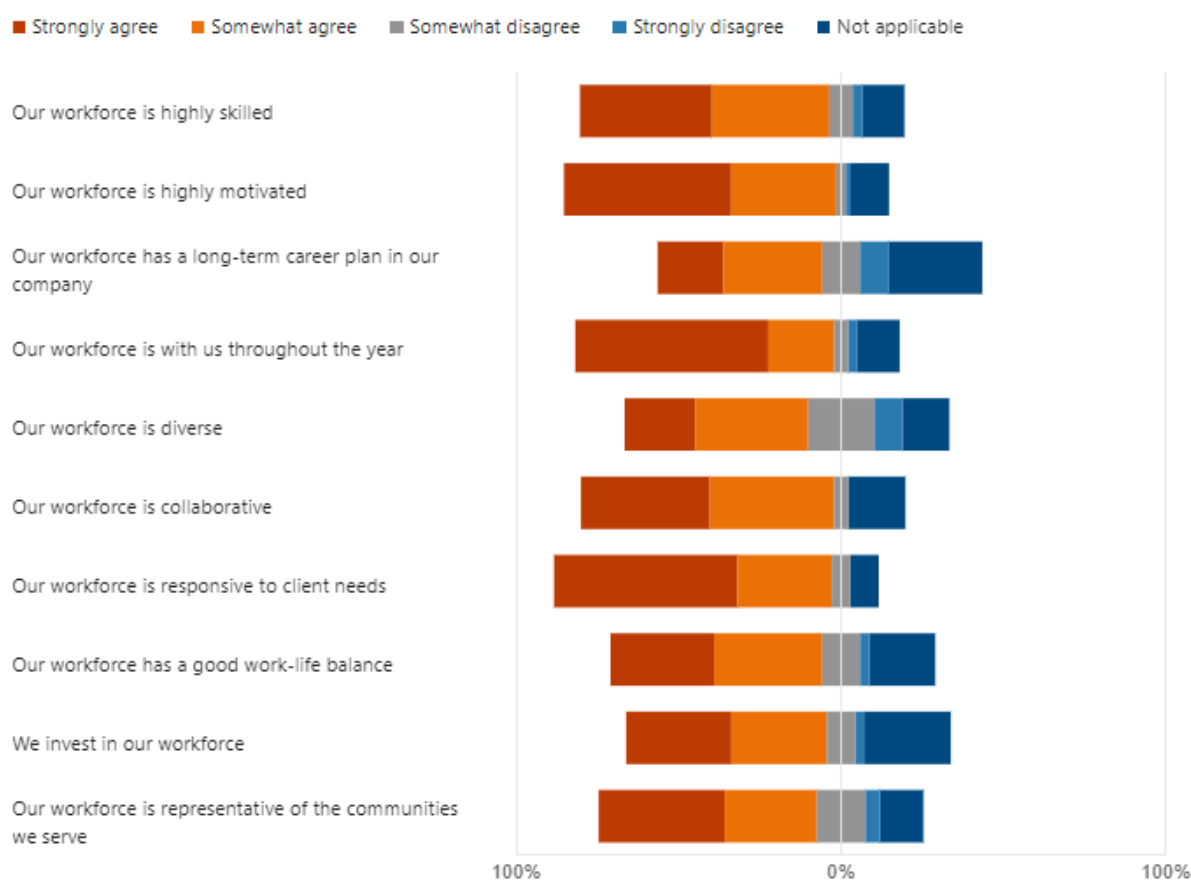


Figure 1: Survey Question 19: To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your workforce?

Both survey respondents and interview participants praised their volunteers for the hard work they did and for the ways in which they were able to pull off amazing, creative solutions to problems, before, during, and after the pandemic. At the same time, while survey respondents thought their workforce was highly motivated, interview participants had far more mixed views about morale in both their salaried workforce and among volunteers.

Morale and Motivation

An interesting aspect of the interviews which wasn't observed in the surveys were the mixed views held about the morale and motivation of the workforce. Whilst participants praised their employees and volunteers about the amazing work they did, there was also a sentiment expressed that workers were not as passionate about the sector as they used to be.

The lack of motivation manifested itself in different ways: a diminished "feeling of community"; a diminished interest in volunteering on the part of all people, but especially young people; high turnover as workers leave new jobs for better paid ones.

An ongoing theme in many of the interviews was the fear that participants perceived in their workforce, due to the lack of stability in the sector. Participants in third sector organisations described the difficulty of filling all their volunteering positions every year, and expressed frustration that members of the local community did not seem to want to take a more active part in running activities. As described by one participant, residents had lots of ideas about what their organisation should do, what events they should put on, and what changes it should make; however, none of those residents wanted to volunteer or take ownership of making such events happen.

The diminished morale and motivation were perceived as being a major problem; at the same time, though, participants did not name a singular source of this diminished morale. In the interviews, there were many themes that overlapped with the motivation of the workforce: lack of funding, lack of training opportunities, automation of work, failure on the part of employers to recognise the value of volunteering, and a lack of aspiration. Some participants described volunteers coming in with a bad attitude towards their role – "this isn't my job, I'm just a volunteer, I'm not responsible for that". However, those participants also stressed that these incidents tended to be a minority – an exception, rather than the rule.

More often than not, participants described a feeling of exhaustion in the sector. Some felt that COVID-19 had given the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector a major opportunity to overhaul the way it approached employment and training. Indeed, as one participant described, the sector was already losing 80% of its workforce every 5 years pre-pandemic; in other words, the conditions for the poor morale and low motivation were present before lockdowns and the gradual re-opening of the economy accelerated the workforce problems that are being observed now.

As for how the problems could be addressed, participants pointed out that most solutions require money, both directly and indirectly. For example, while some participants wanted more young people to be involved in their local community, they also acknowledged that young people had more financial pressures and more demands on their time than those who were recently retired. The rising costs of utilities and fuel were also seen as limiting people's opportunities for being involved in volunteering, or taking up entry-level roles. While volunteering was seen by many as a great way to get into the sector, participants acknowledged that it is not something everyone can afford to do.

However, participants agree unanimously that the cost-of-living crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic have had an impact on morale and motivation of the workforce. As such, the next chapter of this

research will focus specifically on these two ongoing challenges and their specific impact on the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector.

Recommendations

As demonstrated by this chapter, the workforce of the sport, physical activity, and leisure sector is staffed by many talented and skilled employees and volunteers. However, there is a growing demand for complex skills, limits to what training can be undertaken, and structural challenges to recruitment and retention. As such, the recommendations that are put forward are aimed at addressing these challenges:

- Funding and partnership support to provide training and upskilling, particularly in the areas where there are skills in high demand. Examples include:
 - Upskilling existing workforce where possible.
 - Actively developing long-term career paths for employees.
 - Helping businesses overhaul their income model without penalizing employees.
 - Lobbying for better salaries, especially for entry-level workers.
 - Courses and mentoring to help existing employees learn about digital skills.
 - Integrating Mental Health First Aid into the training of employees.
 - Making Multi-Skilled Development and Multi-Level Career Paths the norm, rather than the exception.
 - Increase funding to attract Elite Coaching to the county.
- Raising the profile of volunteers and volunteering within the sector, with the view of increasing collaboration between stakeholders. Examples include:
 - CSR schemes to encourage volunteering, both in entry-level positions and on Trustee Boards.
 - Raising awareness of the value of skills developed during volunteering to support entry to the labour market where possible.
 - Provide business training and business support for the third sector.
 - Increasing collaborations between businesses and the third sector.
 - Working with public sector partners to encourage more volunteering. (For example, for people who might have been out of work for a while.)
- Targeted support towards aiding stakeholders in recruiting and retaining staff.
 - Support for year-round employment schemes, through cross-training and various skills development.
 - Funding for eligible companies to hire people year-round.
 - Lobbying, support, and funding to increase the resilience of the sector, both as insurance in the case of another global pandemic and to make enterprises more financially robust.
 - Investment in employee retention schemes, particularly for skills of high demand.
 - Discouraging role consolidation.
- Take active steps to reduce the cost of working, particularly for entry-level workers and women. Examples of that include:
 - Childcare / elderly relative care support schemes.
 - Support for family carers in the workplace.
 - Support schemes for transport costs.
 - Creating working opportunities closer to home or allowing more hybrid working depending on the role.
 - Mentorship and training schemes for employees who might have been out of work for a while.

The above list is advisory and non-exhaustive.