

Spirit of Rugby

Final Report - November 2017

Submitted by - David Barrett, Robbie Millar, Lee Edmondson and Lizzie Christy

Submitted to - Alex Teasdale and Jenny Box

Rugby Football Union
Rugby House
Twickenham Stadium
200 Whitton Road
Twickenham
TW2 7BA



Contents

SPIRIT OF RUGBY

Final Report - November 2017

CONTENTS	1
1 INTRODUCTION	2
Aims and Objectives	8
2 METHODOLOGY	8
3 THE SPIRIT OF RUGBY PROJECTS	12
The Overall Picture	12
Birmingham - Connecting communities and empowering young people	12
Brighton - Challenging perceptions of disability	13
Bristol - Connecting communities	14
Croydon - Overcoming Isolation	14
Cumbria - Overcoming Isolation	15
Darlington - Connecting Communities	16
Exeter - Empowering young people	16
Folkestone - Connecting Communities	17
Liverpool - Connecting Communities/Overcoming Isolation	18
Loughborough - Empowering Young People/ Connecting Communities	19
Luton - Connecting Communities	20
Manchester - Overcoming Isolation	21
Norfolk - Connecting Communities/ Overcoming Isolation	21
Northamptonshire - Connecting communities	22
Portsmouth - Empowering young people / connecting communities	23
4 THE VOLUNTEERS	24
5 THE STAKEHOLDERS	30
A daunting sum of money for the volunteers	30
Support from local RFU staff	31
Volunteer roles and responsibilities	31
Unintended outcomes	32
6 KEY THEMES	32
Staying Bound On	32
Bind! Engage!	33
Match Stats	35
Sustainability	38
Resilience	39
Employment	40
7 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	41
Selection Policy is Crucial	41
Match Stats Make a Difference	42
No Need to Stay on the Sidelines	44

Executive Summary

This report presents findings from the monitoring and evaluation of the Spirit of Rugby programme over a two year period between 2015 and 2017. The project started in 15 cities based in and around Rugby World Cup host cities, team bases and communities isolated from the direct impact of RWC2015. Its purpose was to inspire communities that were not previously engaged in Rugby. The projects were led by young volunteers aged 16-24 who were charged with developing new and interesting opportunities for their peers to engage with the sport, through projects based on the theme of Rugby, which were either cultural, volunteering or participation-based, or focussed on community development. The core values of Rugby were intended to be at the heart of these projects.

SIRC was tasked with providing the Rugby Football Union with regular reports of *Spirit of Rugby* throughout the lifespan of the programme. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

1. Report the outputs of Spirit of Rugby including:
 - a. Participation in Rugby Union.
 - b. Project activities.
2. Report impacts and resulting outcomes of Spirit of Rugby on volunteers, participants and the communities the projects serve in line with the Spirit of 2012 outcome measures.
3. Report potential challenges which may impact negatively on achieving certain outcomes.
4. Identify the critical success factors which enable projects to achieve reported outcomes.
5. Test a number of hypotheses relating to delivering successful project outcomes
6. Recommend how the Spirit of Rugby programme can be improved and sustained in communities.

Methodology

SIRC's approach to monitoring and evaluation on the Spirit of Rugby project evolved over the two years that the scheme was active. Project monitoring then focused on quarterly reporting using a template containing a suite of indicators relating to project inputs and outputs, including the number of activities staged, the number of participants attending, volunteer recruitment levels and engagement on social media. In addition, SIRC researchers conducted regular open-ended telephone interviews with the lead volunteers and stakeholders from the projects. Volunteers were consulted formally at the beginning, middle and end stages of the programme. Participant monitoring was a requirement of the funding conditions for Spirit of Rugby, though success in this regard was limited.

The 15 Spirit of Rugby Projects

Over a two-year period, the fifteen projects delivered 358 events and activities to 9,999 participants. This equates to an average of 28 people at each event put on by a Spirit of Rugby group, though in practice there was considerable variation, from a weekend touch rugby festival with 250 participants in Norfolk, to a project launch event which attracted only 2 visitors.

The programme engaged with 218 volunteers, of whom 92 were still actively involved by the summer of 2017. Of these, at least 60 undertook some form of formal training, with over 30 volunteers going on to employ these new skills in their projects in some way.

The groups produced a combined total of over 2,000 social media posts in support of their promotional efforts, including 15 YouTube videos. By the end of the programme, over 1,100 people were following at least one of the 12 project Twitter feeds.

There were a number of key points which emerged from the projects, including:

- Focussing on outcomes for the volunteers supports successful project outputs through continued engagement
- The lead stakeholder is the crucial link in developing networks of contacts and , partners
- Care must be taken to ensure stakeholders have sufficient capacity to lead a project
- Stakeholder support becomes more important when setbacks occur
- Projects of this nature can only work if volunteers are able to commit time
- Ensure there are contingency plans in place in case the core volunteers leave the project
- Consideration of the post-funding period is necessary while a project is still 'live'
- Target setting and milestones are effective motivational tools for volunteer projects
- Local people often have the clearest sense of local needs
- Clarity of responsibility between stakeholders and volunteers is essential
- Accountability and clear leadership often translates into good project progress and positive results
- Linking with local rugby networks and club infrastructure can give projects a head start, and accelerate progress
- Consideration needs to be given to where student volunteers will take their skills and experience after graduating from university
- Disengagement from monitoring and evaluation can be a sign of disengagement generally
- Intrinsically well motivated volunteers are more likely to remain engaged with a project
- When working with a specific community group, it is important to identify and negotiate with that community's 'gatekeepers'
- As volunteers develop new skills, the chances of them entering paid employment increase, requiring further recruitment
- RFU training has equipped volunteers with coaching skills which they can exploit elsewhere

The Volunteers

One of the objectives of the Spirit of Rugby programme is to encourage the personal development of volunteers who support the individual projects. Engagement in volunteering is known to have a range of personal and professional benefits and the Spirit of Rugby programme is no exception in this respect. Volunteers were asked

to respond to a survey at three points over the course of the programme - at project initiation, at the midpoint of Summer 2016, and as their projects draw to a close.

The development of transferable soft skills featured more prominently. The majority of volunteers reported improved time management, better planning and co-ordination and improved problem-solving abilities as a direct consequence of engaging with the programme. Significantly, a clear majority of the volunteers had met new people (81%) and developed new contacts (73%) who they felt would be supportive in their future career.

A key finding from the most recent survey is the shift of from full-time education and part-time work to full time work among the volunteers. Participation in sport among the volunteers remained consistently high during the project, although the frequency of participation in rugby specifically, and sport generally has declined, which is an understandable consequence of the flow of volunteers into full-time employment. In terms of personal interactions, by meeting and engaging with new people, negotiating and agreeing plans and actions, and working in partnership, the Spirit of Volunteers have developed an improved sense of their self-worth and value to society. Furthermore, volunteers responding to the survey report improved levels of wellbeing, as defined by the ONS. The overwhelming majority of volunteers report they are satisfied with their life (86%); that the things they do in their life are worthwhile (86%), and that they are happy (84%); and these percentages have increased quite markedly since 2015.

The Spirit of Rugby programme appears to have had a positive impact on volunteer wellbeing, though it is important to note the small sample size, and that the survey cannot isolate Spirit of Rugby from other positive influences on volunteers' health and wellbeing. Nevertheless, it is notable that volunteers continued to be physically active, have become more connected with their communities, and have reported improved wellbeing as the projects have progressed.

The Stakeholders

Stakeholders felt that handing over control of a significant budget to groups of young people, with few apparent limitations on how to spend it was daunting for the volunteers, and resulted in some poor decision making. The lack of accountability was not necessarily due to a shortage of volunteer capacity. While all stakeholders agreed that the Spirit of Rugby projects had benefitted their organisations, the dangers of poor internal communication in relation to financial information were clear. The stakeholders were firm in their belief that the projects would benefit from using the first quarter to develop a more detailed project plan, before funding is released.

There were some cases however, where Spirit projects failed to engage with their the local RFU delivery teams. While this did not hold progress back, the opportunity to connect with local networks, and embed the work of the volunteers in the local rugby community was potentially missed. Where there has been support from their local RFU staff it has accelerated project progression.

Stakeholders recognised that the Spirit projects were likely to encounter issues with volunteer turnover at some point over the two-year period. Clarifying roles and responsibilities at the beginning of the project helps to

identify volunteers who will commit to seeing a project through to its conclusion, and encourages the development of a committed volunteer group.

The diversity of purpose among the Spirit projects has been well documented, and there have been several unintended positive outcomes. The stakeholders enjoyed coming together and sharing their experiences. Particularly the key learnings from each project, as the stakeholders can take these back to their volunteer groups.

Key Themes

From the outset, there were clear differences between the groups in terms of their enthusiasm and engagement with the fifteen projects across the country. The negative impact of volunteer turnover was apparent throughout the Spirit of Rugby, with some groups having to continually find and engage new volunteers.

As the various projects progressed, it became increasingly clear that the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers was dependent on the level of stakeholder engagement. Out of fifteen projects, six were forced to find a replacement stakeholder, after the original withdrew. Six of the Spirit of Rugby projects took the decision to use some of their funding to employ a member of staff for 1 or 2 days a week to provide administrative support. Liverpool and Manchester, both suffered from stakeholder disengagement, which resulted in the volunteer group acting as their own stakeholders, underlining the risk of volunteers acting as their own gatekeepers. Broadly, those projects where stakeholders have made a more formal commitment of time and resources and in which volunteers are more engaged, appear to have a higher level of activity and more participants as a result.

Tracking the performance of the Spirit of Rugby projects across the programme presented a challenge, both logistically and statistically. In consultation with RFU staff, SIRC developed a project 'health check' spreadsheet as a means of comparing the progress of the projects. The health check tool became central to monitoring project progress, as it highlighted both inputs and outputs. The use of Key Performance Indicators is commonplace throughout the sport industry, and the monitoring of project progress is another way in which Spirit of Rugby volunteers have been able to gain valuable experience of a workplace environment. The development of these data collection tools was considered an important part of the process of monitoring and evaluation of the Spirit of Rugby project.

As the projects entered the final quarter before the Spirit support ended in June 2017, attention turned to longer-term sustainability. This legacy may be personal, relating to outcomes for individual participants, volunteers, and to a lesser extent, stakeholders. Equally, sustainability may be linked with the infrastructure which groups have established as their projects have developed. Some leakage of volunteers from the game of Rugby Union is inevitable, but this does not mean that the investment of time and resources is wasted, with indirect benefits evident in some cases.

The resilience these volunteers showed in response to their setbacks was in many cases, encouraging. The RFU team organised a series of away-day events for the volunteer groups to encourage groups to share

information about progress and setbacks, and help the volunteers to learn from the experiences of other projects.

Volunteering is known to have a positive effect on average incomes, regardless of education or participation in sport. Employers and employees alike understand the importance of 'soft' skills to employability, such as team working, communication, networking, motivation, competitiveness and resilience. The surveys of volunteers conducted during the programme confirmed that respondents had not only grown in confidence, but that they had also developed many of these soft skills. Direct testimony from Spirit of Rugby volunteers suggests they have achieved personal development outcomes that align with those highlighted by employers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In putting together a programme of this nature, one of the first management decisions is also one of the most crucial. The recruitment of volunteers and stakeholders to the individual projects had implications throughout the Spirit of Rugby programme. One of the causes of this volatility was undoubtedly the need to recruit volunteers in a short period of time at the start of the project. To some extent, turnover among the volunteers was inevitable, given the age range of those involved, which includes a number of significant milestones that have a bearing on individuals' ability to maintain a commitment to volunteering.

There are three policy responses which would help to prevent or at least alleviate some of the issues which arose as a result of the turnover of volunteers and stakeholders in the Spirit of Rugby programme. The first is to formalise the selection process, by inviting interested groups to consider what their project would consist of **before** funding is awarded. The second response, more specifically in relation to the volunteers, is to seek to build resilience as projects develop, and the RFU has a clear role to play here. Finally, the recruitment of stakeholders with direct experience of planning and delivering sports development programmes involving young people is clearly beneficial.

Monitoring and evaluation techniques are fundamental to successful delivery in the sport industry, because over time programmes are rarely delivered exactly as designed. While some groups were quick to engage with the process of providing quarterly updates to the both the RFU and SIRC, there was a noticeable reluctance on the part of several stakeholders and volunteer groups to respond to requests for information. In order to resolve this issue, it is crucial to develop a list of agreed core indicators **before** full implementation begins. A brief monitoring and evaluation workshop could also be built into a more general project induction and commissioning meeting for the main stakeholders.

The intention of the RFU from the outset was to give stakeholders and volunteers as much freedom as possible to develop projects. The nature of the volunteer groups in terms of their age and relative inexperience meant that RFU staff were regularly required to respond to requests for intensive support. Spirit of Rugby stakeholders readily referred to the risk of handing over responsibility for a significant funding stream to volunteers who were unused to handling and perhaps more importantly accounting for their own budget. The risk posed by a lack of accountability was enhanced when groups lacked an external stakeholder. Stakeholders were clear that as

the ultimate project sponsor, it was the RFU's role to be proactive in ensuring that projects considered potentially negative outcomes. Stakeholders felt that there was a need for the RFU to be more prescriptive, and insist upon each group taking the time to develop and submit a detailed project plan, including a phased approach to delivery.

There are a number of ways in the RFU, as fund holder, could influence the design and delivery of the fifteen projects developed under the Spirit of Rugby programme, including proactively steering groups away from planning high risk events and activities, and providing an increased level of support and supervision where necessary. The financial consideration is sufficient incentive for the RFU to be more robust in requiring groups to develop more detailed project plans, and to be fully accountable for the outcomes which result from them.

1 Introduction

This report presents findings from the monitoring and evaluation of the Spirit of Rugby programme over a two year period between 2015 and 2017. The project started in 15 cities based in and around Rugby World Cup host cities, team bases and communities isolated from the direct impact of RWC2015. Its purpose was to inspire communities that were not previously engaged in Rugby. The projects were led by young volunteers aged 16-24 who were charged with developing new and interesting opportunities for their peers to engage with the sport, through projects based on the theme of Rugby, which were either cultural, volunteering or participation-based, or focussed on community development. The core values of Rugby were intended to be at the heart of these projects.

Aims and Objectives

SIRC was tasked with providing the Rugby Football Union with regular reports of *Spirit of Rugby* throughout the lifespan of the programme. The objectives of the evaluation were to:

1. Report the outputs of Spirit of Rugby including:
 - a. Participation in Rugby Union.
 - b. Project activities.
2. Report impacts and resulting outcomes of Spirit of Rugby on volunteers, participants and the communities the projects serve in line with the Spirit of 2012 outcome measures.
3. Report potential challenges which may impact negatively on achieving certain outcomes.
4. Identify the critical success factors which enable projects to achieve reported outcomes.
5. Test a number of hypotheses relating to delivering successful project outcomes
6. Recommend how the Spirit of Rugby programme can be improved and sustained in communities.

As the final report in the series, this paper outlines the broad methodological approach taken throughout the evaluation, detailing how the process evolved over time, and how this impacted on the programme. The fifteen individual projects are reviewed in summary, with key learning points identified in each case. The impact of engagement on volunteers is outlined in Section 4, drawing on surveys carried out at the beginning, middle and end points of the programme. Section 5 summarises the views of project stakeholders, while section 6 discusses key recurring themes which emerged over the course of the programme. The report concludes with a series of recommendations for future work of this nature.

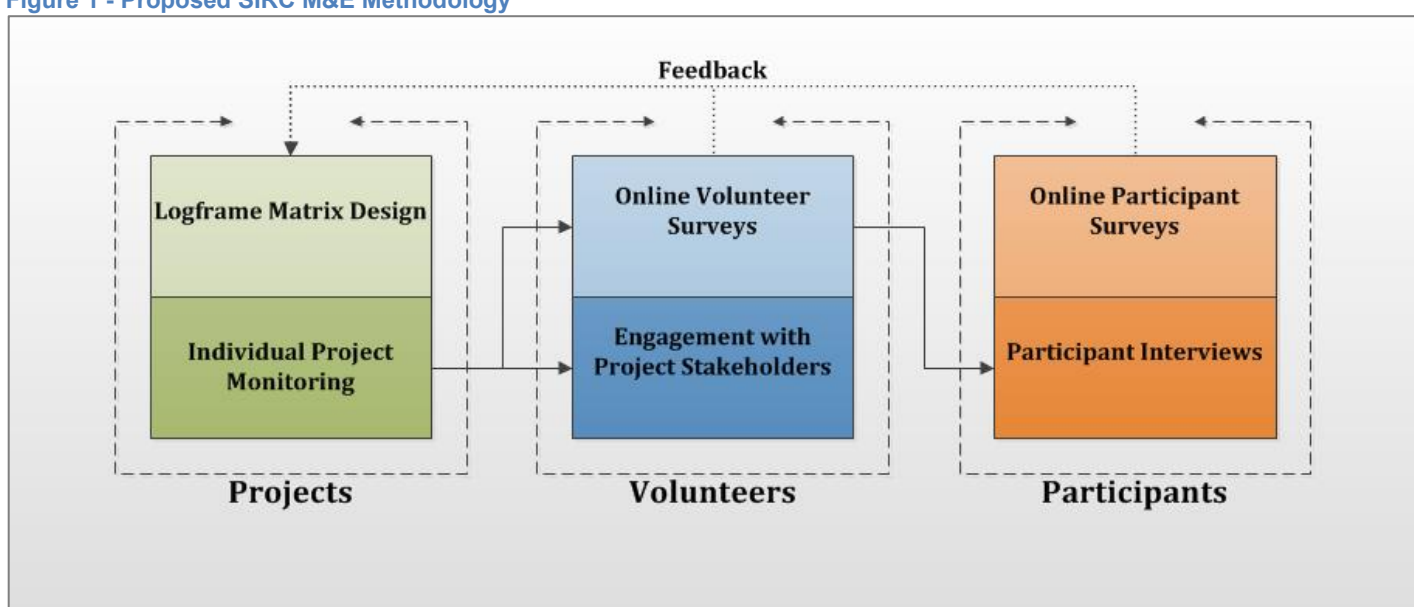
2 Methodology

SIRC's approach to monitoring and evaluation on the Spirit of Rugby project evolved over the two years that the scheme was active. At the outset, the projects were expected to cover a diverse range of rugby-related activities, including arts and cultural engagement alongside more conventional sports development and coaching. As time progressed, the groups focused their efforts on a narrower core of activities which had shown promise in the early stages of the programme. In response, the monitoring and evaluation processes shifted

in emphasis to develop a suite of quantitative performance indicators which could be used to provide objective benchmarks for project outputs, while retaining an element of reflective, critical review every three months.

In the original research design, monitoring and evaluation of Spirit of Rugby was to consist of three elements (Fig. 1). First individual project progress would be monitored against a detailed plan developed using a log-frame matrix - a document which breaks down the key features of a successful project and identifies the indicators and data sources which will be used to measure progress towards the target. Second, volunteers were surveyed at three points during the programme: at the outset; after one year of engagement, and at the end of the programme. The aim of the surveys was to understand the impact of volunteering on personal and professional development, and to measure the extent to which engagement with Spirit of Rugby had changed their perceptions of vulnerable and isolated communities. Third, an online survey of participants was planned with the intention that this would be supplemented by more detailed face-to-face conversations with selected individuals.

Figure 1 - Proposed SIRC M&E Methodology



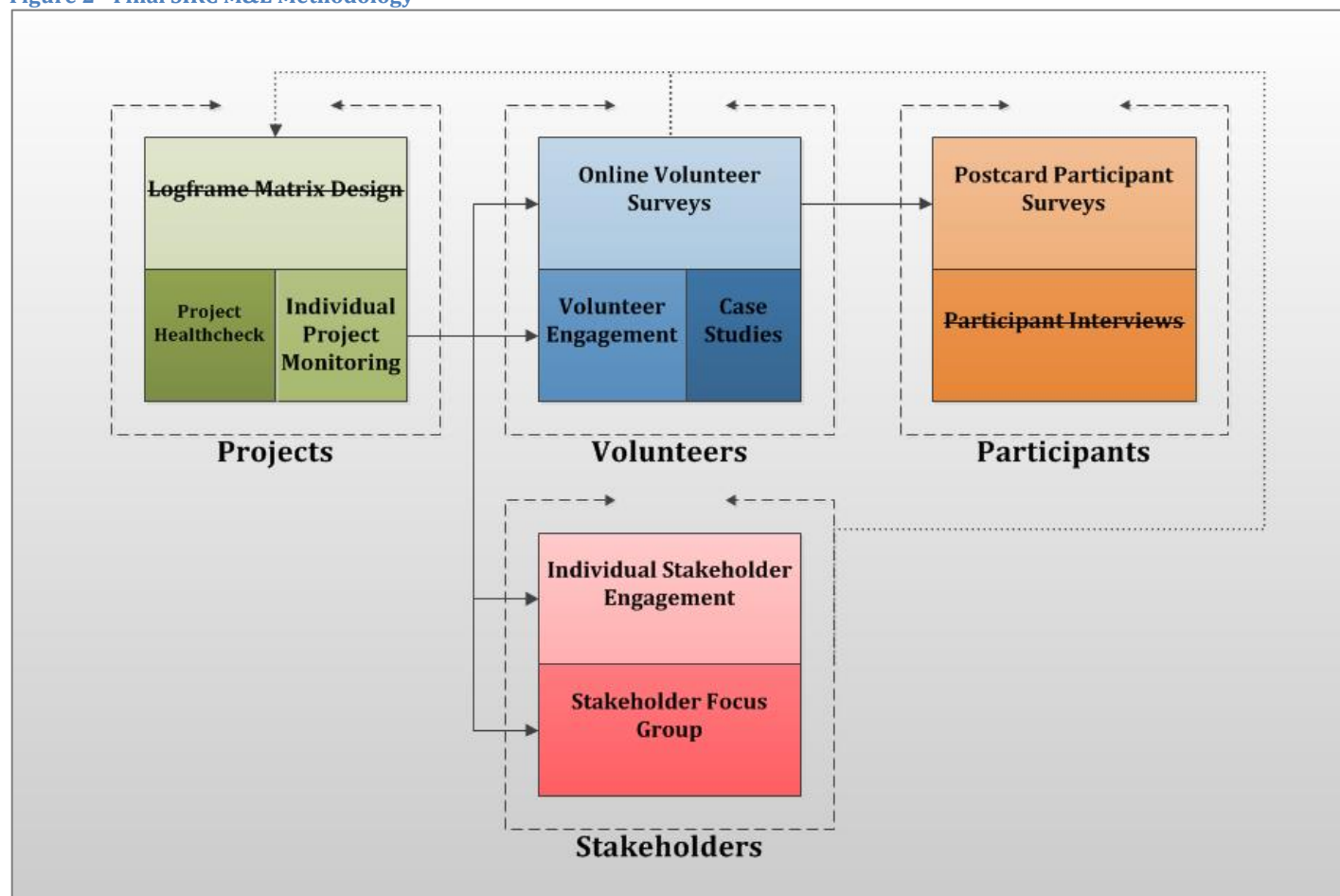
In the early stages of the programme, efforts were made with volunteers and stakeholders to promote the logframe matrix to support the project planning process. By the summer of 2015, all but one of the project groups (the exception being Luton) had completed their matrix, but from this point onwards there was little if any further engagement with the process. Project monitoring then focused on quarterly reporting using a template containing a suite of indicators relating to project inputs and outputs, including the number of activities staged, the number of participants attending, volunteer recruitment levels and engagement on social media. In addition, SIRC researchers conducted regular open-ended telephone interviews with the lead volunteers and stakeholders from the projects to generate more detailed, qualitative information about project progress, successes, setbacks and responses. A summary of each of the fifteen projects is provided in [Section 3](#).

Volunteers were consulted formally at three stages of the programme. A baseline position was established early on by conducting a survey both at the volunteer launch event in early 2015, as well as online. This was

followed in early 2016 by a midpoint survey, and a final round of interviews in the spring of 2017. As the project progressed, the surveys were subject to the law of diminishing returns, with smaller samples in each successive round of research. Nevertheless, the results were informative and were used, in combination with the continuous volunteer engagement which had been underway from the start of the programme, to shape a series of seven case studies with key individuals from a selection of projects. More information can be found in [Section 4](#).

Participant monitoring was a requirement of the funding conditions for Spirit of Rugby, though success in this regard was limited. The original intention was to design and implement an online survey which could be accessed via participants' smartphones or tablet devices, but this proved to be technically unfeasible. In response, SIRC designed a postcard survey template which could be tailored to suit individual project requirements. Over 1,500 postcards were sent out to 12 of the 15 projects, but fewer than 200 were returned over the two years of the programme. As a result of the low level of engagement from project participants, the plan to conduct participant interviews was eventually abandoned. Nevertheless, some analysis of the responses was possible, and the findings are presented in [Section 6](#).

Figure 2 - Final SIRC M&E Methodology



The one group which had been overlooked in the original research design was that of the project stakeholders, and as work progressed, it became increasingly clear that their input and reflections were an important source of feedback. During quarterly telephone interviews many stakeholders shared details of their own experiences,

and their observations of the volunteers and impact of the programme on their personal development. This data took on additional significance as individual projects went through a series of 'reboot' processes in order to try and reinvigorate the groups and their activities. In some cases, the original stakeholders were replaced by individuals with more experience of planning and delivering sports development programmes. In order to capture an overview of stakeholder opinions, a focus group was organised towards the end of the programme, the results of which are presented in [Section 5](#).

3 The Spirit of Rugby Projects

The Overall Picture

- Over a two year period, the fifteen projects delivered 358 events and activities to 9,999 participants. This equates to an average of 28 people at each event put on by a Spirit of Rugby group, though in practice there was considerable variation, from a weekend touch rugby festival with 250 participants in Norfolk, to a project launch event which attracted only 2 visitors.
- The programme engaged with 218 volunteers, of whom 92 were still actively involved by the summer of 2017. Of these, at least 60 undertook some form of formal training, with over 30 volunteers going on to employ these new skills in their projects in some way.
- The groups produced a combined total of over 2,000 social media posts in support of their promotional efforts, including 15 YouTube videos. By the end of the programme, over 1,100 people were following at least one of the 12 project Twitter feeds.

Birmingham - Connecting communities and empowering young people

Birmingham's aim was to engage children from deprived and under-privileged areas of East Birmingham in Rugby via holiday activity camps provided by FITCAP, a local charity delivering sport and Physical activity sessions for young people. The project generated significant throughput (nearly 1,900 attendances at 48 sessions), although only 113 attendances were from participants within the 16-24 age group targeted by Spirit of Rugby. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Rugby on FITCAP's programme of activities has been extended beyond the narrow geographical area in which the group were working. Having purchased kit and equipment to support their session delivery, FITCAP now have a resource which is not only available to their own staff, but can also be hired out to other groups, generating income which can be used to fund further interventions around the city. This is particularly important in an area where the majority of residents are among the most deprived in the UK.

The key to the Birmingham group's success lay in accepting that the key beneficiaries of the project were the volunteers who supported it, as much as the participants at the sessions which they provided. To that extent, the members of the team who are now pursuing apprenticeship opportunities in sports development with Sport Birmingham and B-Row, can be thought of as 'products' of the project. Twins Luke and Elliott were particular good news stories in this sense, having overcome a challenging home environment and behavioural issues at school, in order to stay engaged with the project (see case study).

The lasting legacy of the project lies in the number of children who have been introduced to rugby, who might otherwise never have taken part in the game. Three quarters of the attendances were by children from the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country, where participation in all sports is low compared to the national average, and club infrastructure is relatively weak. The links established with Yardley and District RFC, who acted as a partner host for the group, offer some hope that rugby activity in the area can be sustained for some

time. More broadly, the connection between the FITCAP charity and a voluntary sports club presents new opportunities for partnership working, irrespective of the future direction of the Spirit of Rugby group. FITCAP are committed to including Early rugby as part of their FITCAP's holiday activity 'offer' with 184 young people taking part in rugby-based sessions over the summer.

Key Learning points

- **Focussing on outcomes for the volunteers supports successful project outputs through continued engagement**
- **Investment in infrastructure and network development creates opportunities for long-term partnership working**

Brighton - Challenging perceptions of disability

The Spirit of Brighton project has directly challenged the perceptions of disability in Brighton and surrounding areas. Although the project may not have held as many sessions or engaged with as many young people regularly as originally planned, over the last 12 months significant progress has been made in terms of developing a network for mixed ability (MA) rugby across the county, with a volunteer workforce in place to support delivery.

The Spirit of Brighton project has hosted two feature events; Mixed Ability Exhibition Match Fun Day (September 2016) and Mixed Ability Rugby Celebration Day (July 2017). These events help build relationships with various RFU staff, local rugby clubs and local sporting organisations.

Project lead, Gemma Finlay has been influential in the development of the project, utilising CSP local partners and contacts to create networking and practical opportunities to push the project forward. Project progress slowed during Y2 as a direct result of core Spirit volunteers moving away due to university placements, which meant most of the work fell to Gemma; a challenge in itself due to capacity issues. A larger volunteer support group was trained via two training workshops delivered by IMAS (International Mixed Ability Sports) to equip 30 students from Brighton, Hove and Sussex Sixth Form College (BHASVIC) with the skills to be 'mixed ability facilitators' to support sessions alongside coaches and Spirit volunteers.

As part of the sustainability plan, resources and training tools will be shared and promoted to those clubs and organisations that are keen to continue engagement. The plan is for a student from BHASVIC to take a more proactive role in managing the project, and continue to link volunteering to the YRA scheme with the Sussex RDO.

Key learnings

- **The lead stakeholder is the crucial link in developing networks of contacts and partners**
- **Volunteer turnover puts pressure on the project lead, and can reduce impact**
- **Niche market activities may require a larger catchment area to be sustainable**

Bristol - Connecting communities

The original aim of the Bristol project was engage 100 new participants from the St Pauls and Knowle West neighbourhoods, which are among the most deprived in the country. Physical activity rates in both areas are low, and residents have traditionally been considered to be disinterested in rugby, compared with other parts of the city. After some encouraging early successes in providing introductory taster sessions in the local park, the project effectively stalled for several months, with a lack of engagement with the monitoring and evaluation process acting as an early warning signal of further difficulties.

Almost from the outset, the Bristol Spirit of Rugby project was beset by issues of volunteer retention. Consequently, establishing a clear set of aims and objectives was a significant challenge, and with only two volunteers remaining, the original stakeholders from Whitehall RFC withdrew towards the end of the first year. The RFU sought support from local professional club Bristol Rugby, who agreed to take on the stakeholder role in early spring, 2016. From then on the Spirit of Rugby activities dovetailed with Bristol Rugby's community programme. Four further taster sessions were staged between February and June 2017 for various youth groups across the city, generating around 100 attendances in total.

Objectively, the Bristol project achieved one of its main aims, by engaging with 175 participants over the course of the project. The secondary target of the project was missed however, since few if any of these participants made the transition to club rugby. By focussing on one-off sessions, the project struggled to provide an exit route from taster activities into regular participation. The absorption of the project by Bristol Rugby was a convenient solution to the problem of stakeholder support, but the volunteer team never recovered from the early setbacks.

Key Learning points

- **Failure to engage with monitoring and evaluation may be a sign of a project in difficulty**
- **Care must be taken to ensure stakeholders have sufficient capacity to lead a project**

Croydon - Overcoming Isolation

The Croydon Spirit of Rugby group was one of several that underwent significant changes after inception. Nevertheless, the main objective; that of overcoming isolation; remained unaltered even after a number of team members left the group to take up paid employment. In the early stages of the project, the group developed plans to use rugby-themed art to engage with young people in the local community. After a change of stakeholder, and the recruitment of new volunteers however, the group planned to deliver a series of rugby-themed fitness sessions targeted at young, inactive women in the area.

In early 2016, Croydon's volunteers staged a pilot of their 'Try Fit'-branded fitness sessions at Waddon Leisure Centre. Promotion was primarily through social media, but the number of posts was very low, and had only limited reach. Attendance at the sessions was in single figures, although the group was encouraged by the fact that they had engaged with their target audience. The programme was given a soft launch in the Spring of 2016, but attendances did not meet expectations, with the consequence that newly recruited volunteers lost

motivation and began to drift away from the group. Lead volunteer Laura Stansfeld found it increasingly hard to engage with the rest of the team, and with the effective withdrawal of stakeholder support in late 2016, the decision was taken to cease activity.

Croydon was one of three groups which folded during the funding period, for a number of reasons. First, volunteer turnover was a consistent issue throughout. Second, there was a poor level of support from the project stakeholder, with the result that much of the work of co-ordinating the group's activities, negotiating with suppliers and promotion fell on the shoulders of the lead volunteer. Finally, the group targeted a niche market without giving due consideration to the measures of success; specifically, the balance between the quality of participant engagement (i.e. depth and extent), and quantity (i.e. numbers attending).

Key Learning points

- **Stakeholder support becomes more important when setbacks occur**
- **Niche markets may require different ('softer') measures of success**

Cumbria - Overcoming Isolation

Cumbria's Tri-Spirit project aimed to increase rugby participation within the cadet forces through tag and touch rugby sessions. Initially, the group produced a clear plan for the two-year project, wanting to produce a bespoke tag and touch training booklet and kitbag that will be given to each squadron. Alongside these 'kit-drops', the group planned to organise several 'rugby activator' training events, these 'rugby activators' would deliver the tag/touch sessions in the various squadrons. However, progress slowed and it was clear there were issues with volunteer engagement. In June 2016, there was positive progress when the group organised a trip for 30 cadets to watch an U20 World Cup match in Manchester. For most of the cadets, this was the first time they had been to watch live rugby.

The lead stakeholder was keen and wanted the project to succeed. However, it was clear they were not able to give the Spirit project the time and resource it needed. Consequently, it was not until December 2016, when the stakeholder had more time to give the project, that significant progress was made. The lead stakeholders placed an initial order for 10 kitbags and organised a StreetGames rugby activator course in February 2017 to educate 15 'rugby activators' from various cadet squadrons from across the county. The training event was a great success, the cadets that attended the course were given the kitbags to allow sessions to be delivered straight away. The initial feedback was positive, with the rugby leaders engaging 250 cadets, which met the project's initial goal. As a result, the stakeholders have placed an order for a further 30 kitbags and organised another training event for another set of cadets to be trained as 'rugby activators'.

Key Learning points

- **Projects of this nature can only work if volunteers are able to commit time**
- **Start with the end point in mind**
- **Ensure the stakeholder has the time to commit to the project before starting**

Darlington - Connecting Communities

Across all the Spirit projects, Darlington was one of the quickest to get off the ground. The project attracted a group of committed volunteers who all played rugby for the two local community clubs. The volunteers branded the project 'Scrum Down Scrub up' and aimed to engage females aged 16-24 from the local area in rugby, with a longer-term view to create more local female club teams. With a clear plan in place, the group organised a launch event that was held at Darlington Rugby Club in January 2016. Various tag/touch sessions were planned, with Women's World Cup winner Tamara Taylor assisting the delivery of these sessions alongside the Community Rugby Coaches. After the sessions, the group had organised lunch and nail and beauty treatments to be provided for the participants. Unfortunately, due to poor weather conditions, the event was poorly attended, attracting only three participants.

After this setback, the group decided to delay a follow-up event until the summer in the hope of better weather and hold activities in the town centre to reach more participants. This follow-up event was much more successful, with the Spirit of Rugby Ambassador Maggie Alphonsi supporting the volunteers; the event engaged 250 participants in various rugby activities. It was expected this event would act as a reboot for the project. However, with the majority of the volunteers about to start University, they could not commit time to the project and ultimately the momentum was lost. As there were no volunteers available to replace the original group, it was decided the project had reached its organic conclusion in October 2016.

Key Learning points

- **'Turn up and play events' require high footfall to generate significant interest from passing 'trade'**
- **Ensure there are contingency plans in place in case the core volunteers leave the project**
- **Attempt to understand the local market and when attempting to engage this market, ensure their needs are being met**

Exeter - Empowering young people

Exeter Spirit has successfully met both their objectives. Over the course of the project, Exeter Spirit have held a number of promotional events, supported the delivery of local rugby and delivered training opportunities to develop young people; all aged 16-24 years (Spirit of Rugby target age group). As a result, 46 people have transitioned into local community rugby clubs; more specifically Wessex RFC now has two senior teams as a direct result of the voucher system. In addition, 28 young people from Exeter College and the University of Exeter have received training to support their involvement in Spirit of Rugby, and this local volunteer workforce have gone onto to deliver in the local community at schools, rugby clubs and tournaments.

Project lead, Katy Leonard has been a key figure in the development of Exeter Spirit, bringing with her knowledge of local contacts and partners, plus networking and training opportunities which allowed the project to 'hit the ground running' and now be in a sustainable position to ensure project progression post-Spirit. Throughout the project, the demands on the capacity of Katy were often higher than expected. Therefore, in

order to combat this moving forward, volunteers are going to be assigned specific roles to ensure regular input to the new website rather than relying solely on Katy. The development of a 28 strong volunteer workforce will also further support local delivery.

A number of key relationships have been established with local rugby clubs, higher education institutions, and Devon RFU, which will be important in building on the success of the project so far. Moving forward the project looks set to work with Exeter Chiefs and Devon RFU, by linking the voucher initiative with Exeter Chiefs programme 'Project Rugby' to target disability groups, deprived areas and BME aged 14+yrs to engage and transition new players to local clubs.

Key learnings

- **Consideration of the post-funding period is necessary while a project is still 'live'**
- **Development of volunteer workforce through training of students at local colleges/universities important to continue project delivery over a wider network**
- **Promotional material important to promote and demonstrate the impact of the project beyond funding period**

Folkestone - Connecting Communities

In East Kent, the volunteer group originally comprised a group of students from Folkestone Academy who were also members of the school's rugby squad. Led by ex-professional player Darren Molloy, they were considered to be well-motivated initially, and had made some headway in planning a series of park- and beach-based events, before a disagreement among team members led to the disintegration of the original group. Management of the project was subsequently taken over by Shepway Sports Trust, who took advantage of their existing sport development networks to recruit a new team of young local volunteers, and shifted the focus of the project slightly.

The group took an innovative approach to promoting Rugby in Folkestone, purchasing a 'speed cage' which was taken to a number of popular recreational locations around the town. Volunteers invited participants to test their passing speed, asking them to register to receive information about weekly touch rugby sessions, staged at a local indoor cricket facility. These sessions ran throughout the winter, attracting between 15 and 20 people per week, leading to a team being entered into the Spitfire Nines Tournament at Folkestone RFC in the spring of 2017. As a direct result of their experience of competitive rugby, six players have since made the transition to club rugby.

Lead stakeholder Aidan Willis gathered together a diverse team of volunteers, from a wide variety of backgrounds, generating a uniquely inclusive and supportive ethos. Keen to develop their personal and professional skills, he gradually gave them increasing amounts of responsibility, and the project culminated in a primary school rugby festival in May 2017, attended by 160 children from 13 schools. In common with Birmingham and Norfolk, Folkestone's activities continued into the summer, with a continuation of their Speed-cage events and weekly touch rugby sessions. Though these have since subsided, the volunteer group has

been absorbed into the wider team, and rugby will continue to feature in the trust's activities for the foreseeable future

The Folkestone project recovered well from a significant early setback, underpinned by the knowledge and expertise of the replacement stakeholder. It is no coincidence that a school-based stakeholder struggled to commit the time and resources necessary to deliver on the early promise of the original team of volunteers. The Shepway Sports Trust performed admirably in identifying appropriate and realistic targets for the group, and the milestones that would signify progress towards their end-goal of promoting Rugby Union in an isolated community. Promotional activity was linked to sound marketing processes, while the 'product' - weekly touch rugby sessions - was simple to establish and delivered effectively. Most importantly, the diversity of the group's volunteers gave them a common bond, which reinforced a sense of togetherness, and was transmitted to participants.

Key Learning points

- **Identifying the right stakeholder can have a transformative effect on project progress**
- **All of the group's efforts were directed, in different ways, towards delivering on the strategic objective**
- **Target setting and milestones are effective motivational tools for volunteer projects**

Liverpool - Connecting Communities/Overcoming Isolation

The Liverpool project initially aimed to increase participation and raise awareness of rugby within the city's student community. However, with a lack of guidance from the lead stakeholder and no committed volunteers, the project stalled in the first year. The RFU Spirit team took interim leadership to reboot the project and organised a 'pitch up and play' event at the Liverpool One shopping centre in August 2016. At this event, discussions between the Community Rugby Coaches and Spirit team identified the project could support the development of an entirely new inclusive rugby team: the Liverpool Tritons.

With the support of the Manchester Spartans, the Tritons were created in August 2016. The club's committee acted as the Spirit volunteer group and their aim was to establish themselves as a club and be in a position to enter the local league in September 2017. The club initially used the Spirit funding to purchase kit, training equipment and pay for training facilities, whilst also trying to recruit members. The Tritons played their first competitive friendly against the Manchester Spartans in October 2016 and sustained a core group of 30 members at training sessions. In early 2017, the club were asked to donate items of merchandise to the Museum of Liverpool, to be part of a permanent exhibit displaying the contemporary history of culture and sport in the city.

The group have produced two promotional videos displaying the positive impact playing rugby has had on members of the club and individuals overcoming the fear of being LGBT in a club environment. The club has now grown to 40 playing members, with around 40-45 participants attending weekly RugbyFit sessions, established as a result of interaction with volunteers from the Norfolk project at a Spirit of Rugby national

event. Perhaps the most significant impact has been on individual players, several of whom have overcome issues of severe personal isolation and low self-esteem. One player who relocated to Liverpool from Trinidad and Tobago explained:

"For the first time I can confess not only do I belong here, but I feel really included. Tritons are responsible for that."

Key Learning points

- **Local people often have the clearest sense of local needs**
- **Clarity of responsibility between stakeholders and volunteers is essential**
- **Accountability and clear leadership often translates into good project progress and positive results**

Loughborough - Empowering Young People/ Connecting Communities

In Loughborough, the Pass It On project aimed to create a sustainable legacy out of interest in Rugby World Cup 2015. The student volunteers, led by Abbie Brewin, developed a multi-pronged approach to engaging with new markets for the game in the area, with four themes: playing, coaching, volunteering and spectating. The majority of the Loughborough team came from rugby backgrounds, and therefore had a good understanding of what works in a rugby context. As a result, they made an early effort to engage with local clubs who were quick to offer their support and encouragement.

The project provided opportunities for individuals to develop their interest in rugby through a series of activities under each of the four strands. Touch rugby was used to provide a relaxed and enjoyable introduction to the basics of the game. Young people were encouraged to complete RFU-accredited courses, not only to deepen their understanding of rugby, but also to increase the number of coaches and volunteers supporting and enhancing the local rugby infrastructure. This resource was critical in organising a primary schools touch rugby festival, which also drew on the network of local clubs who engaged with the project from the start. Finally, the group organised a number of trips to Premiership games at Welford Road and international matches at Twickenham. These were used, at least in part, as a means of rewarding participants and volunteers for their continued involvement in the project, as well as including people whose interest in the game was more 'casual'.

The Loughborough project can be considered a qualified success, having provided more than 20 separate activities to 435 people. While this total is lower than other groups such as Folkestone and Birmingham, the real legacy of the Loughborough project is the number of volunteers and coaches that were produced, some of whom went on to join the Loughborough team. While the majority of volunteers have left the area on graduation from the university they are still able to contribute their new found skills to the game in general. Furthermore, one of the key volunteers, Maria Crowfoot, found paid employment with the local County Sports Partnership as a direct consequence of her experience as a Spirit of Rugby volunteer. More importantly still,

her new employer has encouraged her to make every effort to keep the Pass It On project going, believing that it contributes to her continuing professional development.

Key Learning points

- **A multi-pronged approach provides a wide range of interlinked opportunities**
- **Linking with local rugby networks and club infrastructure can give projects a head start, and accelerate progress**
- **Consideration needs to be given to where student volunteers will take their skills and experience after graduating from university**

Luton - Connecting Communities

Luton's Spirit of Rugby project was intended to introduce rugby into the town's substantial population of South Asian (mainly Pakistani) heritage. This community was considered to be a viable target group by virtue of its relatively low participation rates in sport generally, and in Rugby Union more specifically.

The most significant challenge to the project was in identifying a stakeholder with the necessary knowledge and capacity to take on delivery of the project. Eventually, in January 2016, the University of Bedfordshire agreed to take the lead and recruited a team of undergraduate students in sports development. After a significant delay of over six months, volunteers were recruited from an undergraduate course at the University of Bedfordshire, incorporating the project into their degree studies.

The new recruits gave the project renewed impetus, resulting in ten touch rugby sessions with a total of 100 people attending by the summer of 2016. It was evident however, that the delays to inception had 'squeezed' the timescales, restricting the ability of the group to develop and refine their plans (particularly around promotion), an effect compounded by the loss of all but one of the team upon graduation. The project then entered a second period of hiatus, as new volunteers were sought, with a second block of eight touch rugby sessions delivered to 82 people in the early part of 2017.

While the project exceeded its target of engaging with 50 young people at Luton Sixth Form College, the Luton group suffered from a lack of direction over a substantial period of time, even after a stakeholder and a team of volunteers had been recruited. There was a general lack of engagement in the monitoring and evaluation process, which masked long periods of inactivity in terms of delivery. Volunteers working on the project felt that they were not supported by the project stakeholder, and lost motivation. In contrast, the lead stakeholder took the view that the responsibility for driving the project lay solely with the students, and saw his role as advisory, rather than supervisory.

Key Learning points

- **Clarity of responsibility between stakeholders and volunteers is essential**
- **Recruiting 3rd year students solves a short-term personnel shortage, but necessitates further recruitment in the medium term.**

- **Disengagement from monitoring and evaluation can be a sign of disengagement generally**

Manchester - Overcoming Isolation

The Manchester project was unique as it was split into two groups. One group from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) focused on increasing female participation and the other group from Manchester Spartans, focused on increasing participation within the LGBT community and raising the awareness of LGBT rugby. Both groups made clear plans and organised successful launch events. However, the groups then went in different directions. The Spartans organised several taster events and set-up a stall at the Manchester Pride festival in August 2016, which generated significant interest, resulting in 40 new members signing up. Unfortunately, the MMU group lost momentum whilst all the students were away during the summer break. As a result, they did not organise any events in the second year of the project.

With the Spartans membership base growing, the group were wary that they did not want to grow too quickly and therefore changed their approach. During this time, the leadership of the project changed as the lead volunteer handed over responsibility to the club's committee. This brought a fresh impetus with a longer-term plan created of what the club wanted to achieve. In April 2017, the Spartans took three teams to the Union Cup (an international LGBT rugby tournament) in Madrid. The club used a portion of the Spirit funding to subsidise the cost of the trip to support members who would otherwise be unable to attend, the chance to do so. Overall, because of Spirit the club's membership base has doubled, a new 15-a-side team has been introduced into the local league and a 'development' squad has been created. In addition, the club has begun to target new markets and hopes to introduce a transgender team.

Key Learning points

- **Splitting the projects potentially reduced the impact of both in the first year**
- **Long university holidays can result in lost momentum**
- **When planned, a change of project leadership can provide fresh ideas and new direction.**

Norfolk - Connecting Communities/ Overcoming Isolation

The main premise of the Norfolk Spirit of Rugby group was to connect communities through the provision of touch rugby and rugby-themed fitness sessions in a number of locations in and around Thetford. Substantive planning did not begin until January 2016, by which time there had been some turnover of volunteers. The group worked hard to recover the lost time however, driven on by volunteers who understood that a successful project would reflect well on them and on their club. This had the effect of galvanising the team, who remained motivated, cohesive and productive for the remainder of the project.

Stakeholder support came initially from a member of Thetford RFC, who represented the committee of the club. Uniquely among the 15 Spirit of Rugby projects, the group found additional support from a supplementary stakeholder provided by Active Norfolk, the local Community Sports Partnership. Their backing allowed the group to tap into the Village Sports Network, which in turn enabled an expansion of the Norfolk group's programme of activities, taking touch rugby sessions to new locations in villages near Thetford.

Norfolk's volunteers staged 55 activities over the 18-month period between February 2016 and July 2017, generating 1,326 attendances, making the group one of the most productive in the programme in terms of outputs. This included two 'Ruck 'n' Roll' touch rugby festivals staged at Thetford RFC, which attracted teams from across the county. The links made between the volunteers, the club and Active Norfolk have encouraged the continuation of project related work, beyond the end of the official project period. Funding was identified to support the construction of a trim trail for public use at the rugby club, supplemented by £11,000 of match funding.

More significant however, were the wider outcomes in terms of network and volunteer development. Lead volunteer Tom Price became the face of the Spirit of Rugby programme as a result of his personal journey which resulted in him becoming a key volunteer in the club. Another volunteer, Natalie Payne, has deepened her involvement in the sport of rugby as both a participant and a volunteer, as a direct consequence of the Spirit of Rugby, albeit it at a new club:

"Through Spirit of Rugby I now have the confidence to change an idea into an action point and I know where to go within the RFU to get help or answers that I need."

Key Learning points

- **Intrinsically well motivated volunteers are more likely to remain engaged with a project**
- **Linkages with local sports development networks can accelerate project progress**
- **Partnership working increases the likelihood of a longer lasting (physical) legacy**

Northamptonshire - Connecting communities

The Northampton area is home to a significant population of economic migrants from Eastern Europe, and the project team volunteers felt that rugby was an innovative way to interact with this community. Initial efforts focussed on producing a strong brand as part of a comprehensive social media marketing campaign. The team commissioned a website (translated into 6 languages), along with video content, and social media streams, in order to drum up interest and advertise taster sessions, tournaments and other activities Northamptonshire.

The project group aimed to engage 50 participants from Albania, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland Romania and Slovakia in Rugby Union within Northamptonshire by the end of the 16/17 season. Their secondary aim was to develop the professional skills of the volunteers, with a particular emphasis on their coaching qualifications. The original intention was to take rugby to the migrant population at their places of work, but despite their best efforts, the volunteers could not persuade local businesses to sign up in sufficient numbers. Furthermore, it proved difficult to identify community leaders who might act as gatekeepers to groups of potential participants. As a result, there was a change of tack in the Spring and Summer of 2016, with local clubs coming on board to support a series of one-off events and activity days. For example, in March, Engage Try Convert hosted an Eastern European Open Day for children and families across Northamptonshire, in partnership with Harmony Corby. Around 75 people attended, with attendees from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Serbia, Northampton's greater success lay in the transformative effect the project had on its volunteers. Two of the team members

completed the RFU Level 2 coaching course, opening up opportunities for paid employment. The team also engaged with the Young Rugby Ambassadors scheme, and attended the YRA leadership conference. Two volunteers gained work experience from a three-day placement at Twickenham, while Molly Green was chosen as the RFU East Midlands volunteer of the year for her contribution to Rugby in the local community. The personal development of the volunteers in the team was instrumental in their finding other roles within the game: one volunteer is currently playing professionally in Canada, while another was appointed as Northampton Saints' head of Community Rugby.

Key Learning points

- **When working with a specific community group, it is important to identify and negotiate with that community's 'gatekeepers'**
- **Effective branding and marketing are dependent on a solid 'product'**
- **As volunteers develop new skills, the chances of them entering paid employment increase, requiring further recruitment**

Portsmouth - Empowering young people / connecting communities

Over the last two years, Portsmouth's Spirit of Rugby group has run weekly sessions, with additional events and promotional activity staged during school half-terms and summer breaks led by the volunteer workforce. The project engaged with nearly 1,000 participants and as a result reached their overall objective.

More than half (55%) of the young people attending the regular sessions are in the Spirit of Rugby target age group 16-24, with the remainder aged 9-16 (45%). The project also engaged over 50 disability participants, whilst just over one in ten participants were female, and 83% came from the PO4 postcode district (Southsea). The realisation that one out of every 6 people coming to the sessions at Bransbury Park comes from further afield has encouraged the group to consider a multi-hub approach across the city with the knowledge and experience accumulated under Spirit of Rugby.

The success of the project has largely been down to partnership working and the development of a core volunteer group overseen by project lead Iain Whiteford from Pompey in the Community (PITC). The project has also given the opportunity for all volunteers to gain RFU-accredited coaching qualifications to support and develop volunteers both on the project and prepare them for future career opportunities e.g. two volunteers have now joined the PITC team, one volunteer secured a place at Chichester University and several others have gone on to part-time employment.

The Portsmouth project won three community awards in the two years of its existence; Beth Joslin 'Young Volunteer of the Year, 2017', Tyler Foyle 'Inspiring Volunteer, 2016' and Spirit of Rugby 'Volunteering Team, 2016'.

Beth Joslin is the new project lead having taken over from Iain in June and this not only provides continuity, but also underlines PITC's commitment to the project's sustainability. PITC plan to continue to run weekly

participation sessions when the RFU funding ends under another funded youth project 'Raise Your Game', whilst alternative funding is sourced. PITC plant to seek funding from Comic Relief's 'Try for Change' programme, to maintain continuity and expand the project's reach beyond the immediate vicinity of Eastney. Future work will be based on the Spirit of Rugby model of young volunteers aged 16 - 25 years being trained and developed in grassroots level rugby with the aim of encouraging young people in the city from 9 - 16 years into grassroots community rugby.

Key learnings

- **PITC key in developing the project and ensuring sustainability i.e. contacts, partners, staffing, training etc.**
- **Project lead - provides continuity and leadership**
- **Core volunteer group - ensured consistency and low risk of volunteer turnover**
- **RFU training has equipped volunteers with coaching skills which they can exploit elsewhere**

4 The Volunteers

One of the objectives of the Spirit of Rugby programme is to encourage the personal development of volunteers who support the individual projects. Engagement in volunteering is known to have a range of personal and professional benefits and the Spirit of Rugby programme is no exception in this respect. Volunteers were asked to respond to a survey at three points over the course of the programme - at project initiation, at the midpoint of Summer 2016, and as their projects draw to a close. The following figures concisely summarise the development and progression of the volunteers throughout their Spirit experience.

Figure 3 outlines how volunteers related their volunteering experience to entry to the workplace, and demonstrates that while their project had not helped them to develop their numeracy and IT skills, there was more conviction in relation to communication. Only 32% of the volunteers felt that they had improved their numeracy skills, or that they could use IT more effectively as a result of their involvement in Spirit of Rugby, but 51% had increased confidence in their ability to communicate to a variety of audiences.

Other, softer but equally transferable skills featured more prominently. The majority of volunteers reported improved time management (70%), more creative thinking (68%), better planning and co-ordination (62%) and improved problem-solving abilities (57%) as a direct consequence of engaging with the programme. In addition, 84% of volunteers felt that they had developed new skills (as well as enhancing existing abilities). Perhaps most significantly, a clear majority of the volunteers had met new people (81%) and developed new contacts (73%) who they felt would be supportive in their future career. Furthermore, almost half of the volunteers questioned had changed their career plans as a result of their experience.

Figure 3 - Employability Among Project Volunteers

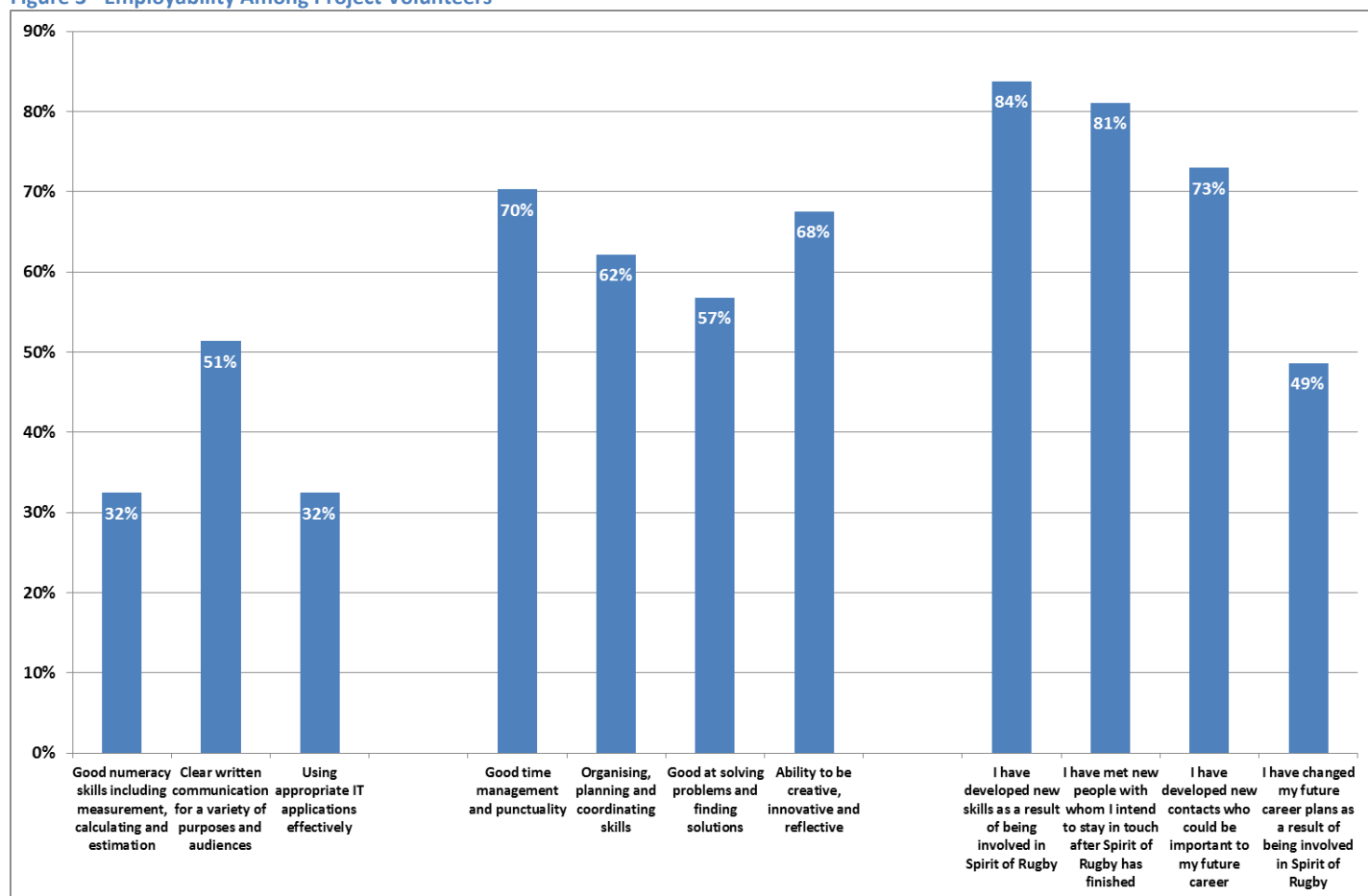


Figure 4 - Survey Sample Characteristics

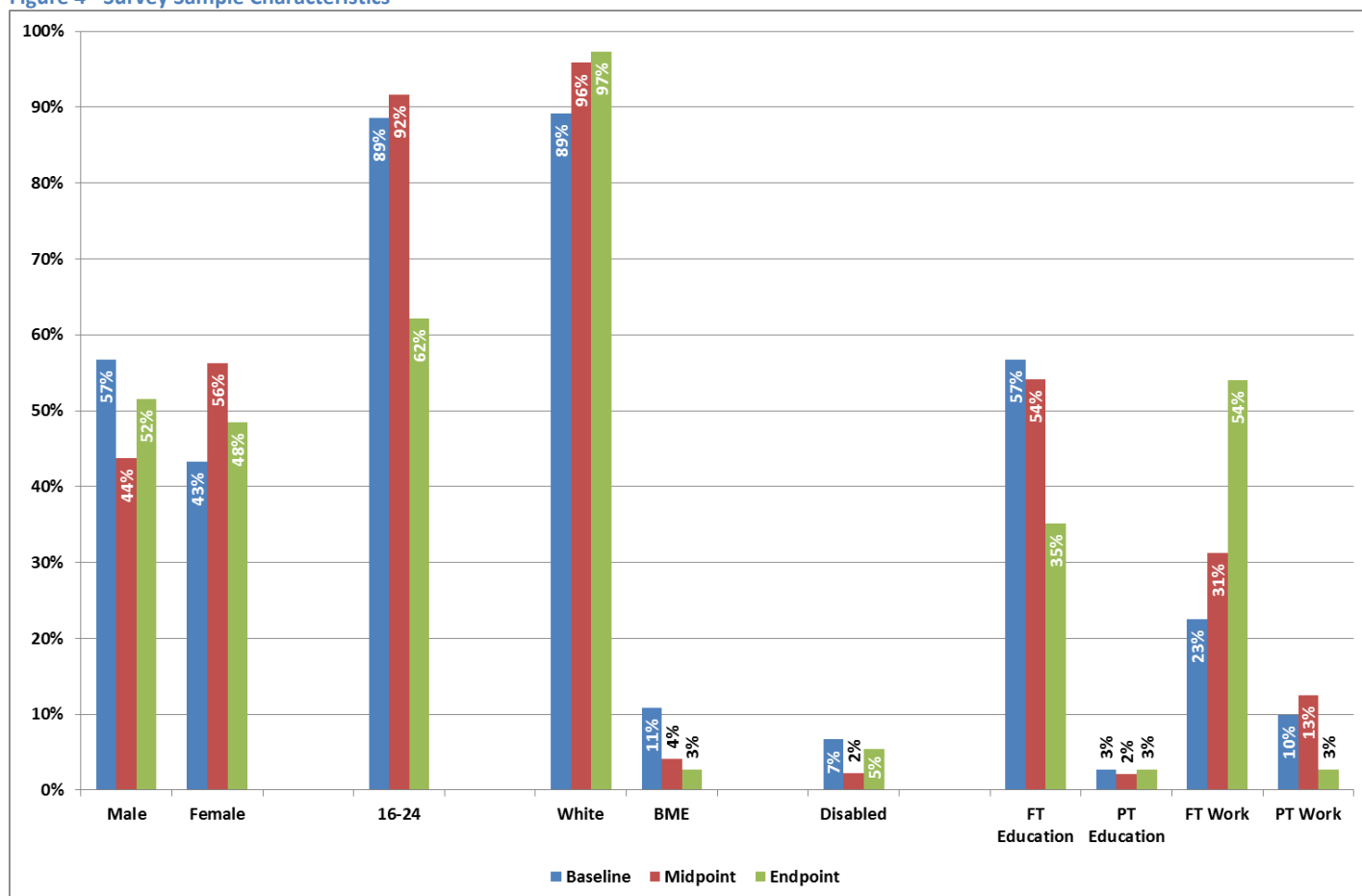


Figure 4 shows the characteristics of the volunteers. The balance of male and female volunteers has remained steady throughout the project, but there has been a notable fall in the number of 16-24 year old volunteers still involved. A key finding from the most recent survey is the shift of from full-time education and part-time work to full time work among the volunteers. Making the transition from education and part-time work to full-time work is a key milestone, irrespective of their involvement or otherwise in volunteering. Nevertheless, many of the Spirit of Rugby volunteers have made that transition over the course of the project.

Volunteers' participation in rugby and sport is displayed in Figure 5, with overall participation **rates** staying consistently high. However, the frequency of participation in rugby specifically, and sport generally has declined, which is an understandable consequence of the flow of volunteers into full-time employment; leisure time is inevitably curtailed. In addition, with a number of the volunteers taking RFU coaching qualifications, these volunteers could be taking up coaching and officiating roles, instead of solely focusing on playing. Given the known relationship between physical activity and general health and wellbeing, this decline in the frequency of sports participation might be of some concern, but it is worth noting that participation levels are much higher among the volunteer group than in the general population.

Figure 5 - Volunteer Participation in Sport and Physical Activity

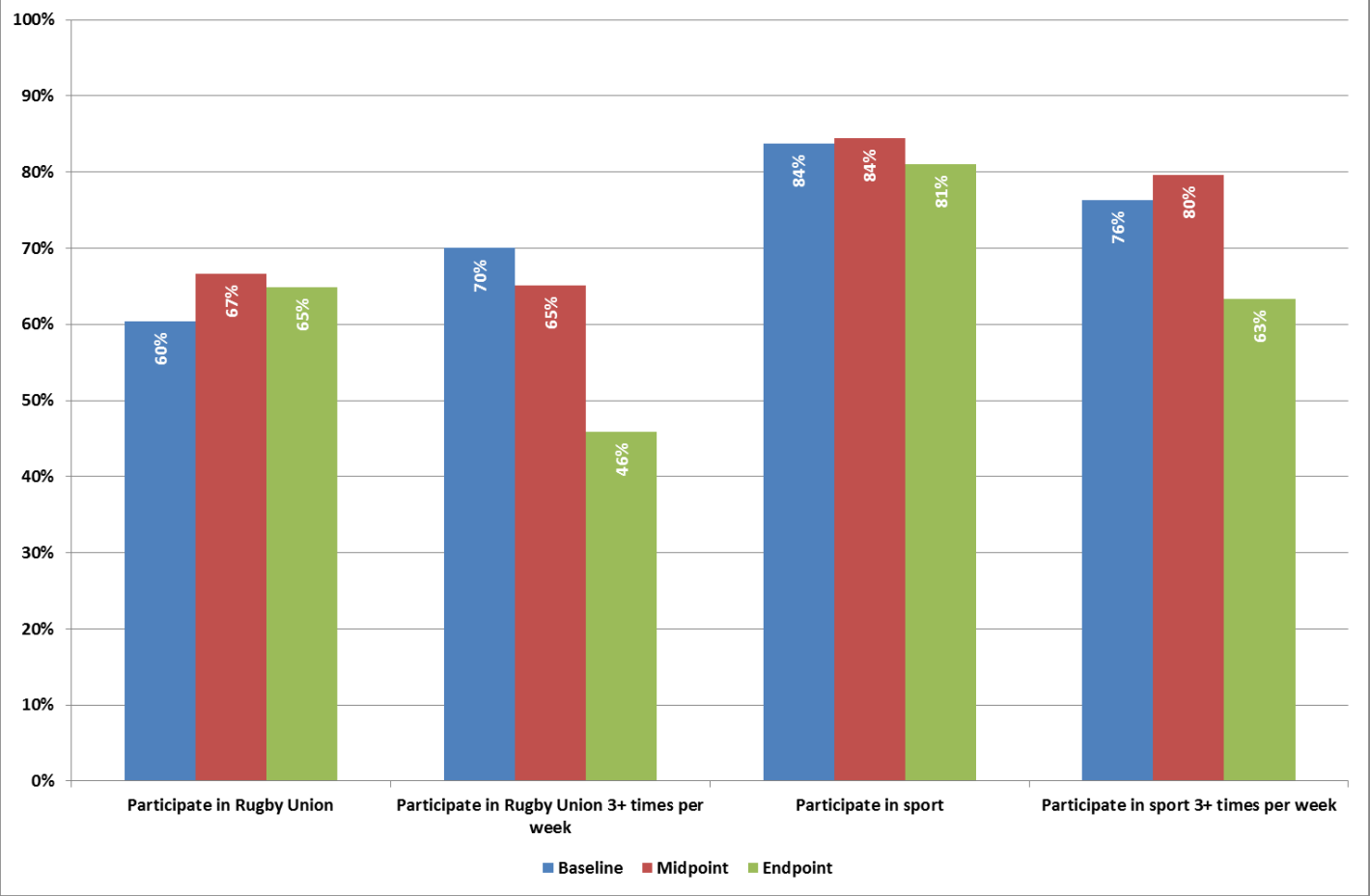
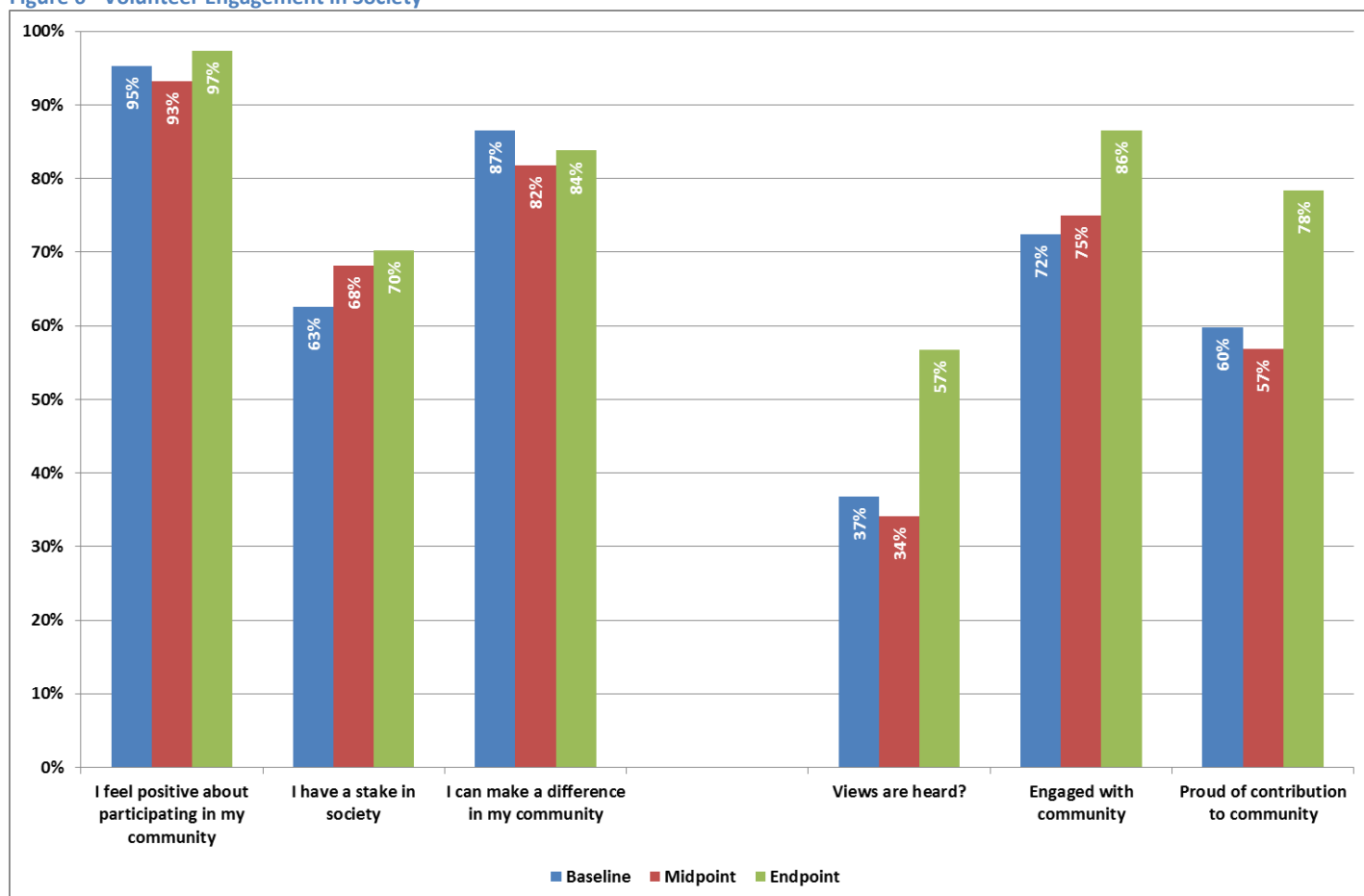


Figure 6 shows volunteers' attitudes towards their communities and wider society, and positive trends are evident across the board. Most notably, volunteers are more and more certain that their views are heard, as they engage further with the community, and are increasingly proud to contribute to their local communities. This is a particularly positive finding as it offers evidence of the value of volunteers' interaction with people from different generations and communities. In short, by meeting and engaging with new people, negotiating and agreeing plans and actions, and working in partnership, the Spirit of Volunteers have developed an improved sense of their self-worth and value to society.

Figure 6 - Volunteer Engagement in Society



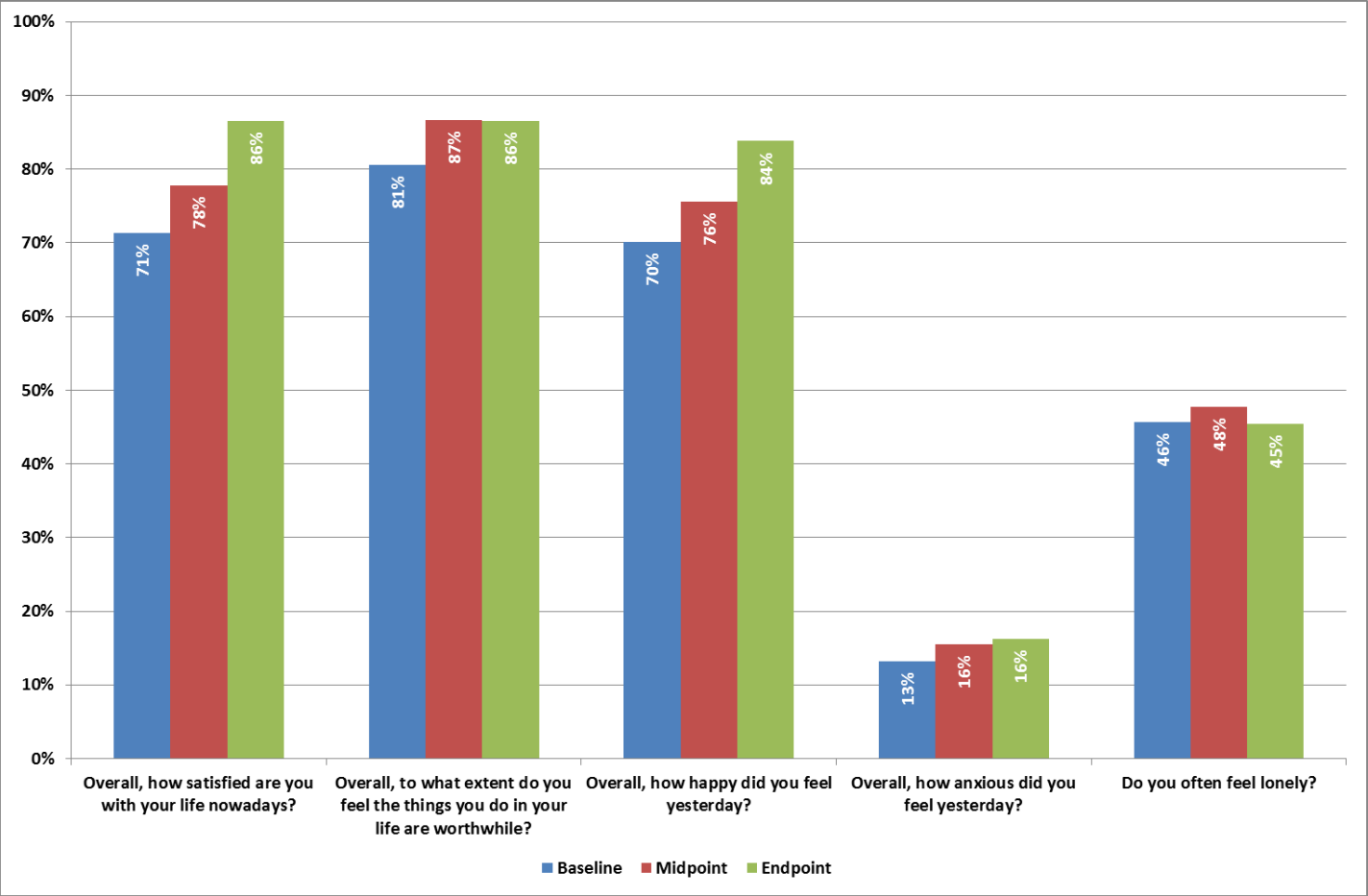
In this context, it is therefore unsurprising to discover that volunteers responding to the survey report improved levels of wellbeing, as defined by the ONS. As figure 7 shows, the trends are generally positive. Specifically, there was a marginal increase of three percentage points in the proportion of volunteers who reported that they felt anxious, which might be attributable to having entered full-time employment. At the same time, the level of loneliness reported by the volunteers has remained constant at 45%. More encouragingly however, at the end of the programme, the overwhelming majority of volunteers report that they are satisfied with their life (86%); that the things they do in their life are worthwhile (86%), and that they are happy (84%); and these percentages have increased quite markedly since 2015

Taken together, these results seem to suggest that the Spirit of Rugby programme has had a positive impact on volunteer wellbeing. It is important to introduce a cautious note or two at this point however. First, the sample size is necessarily small, and self-selecting, preventing any meaningful conclusions based on testing for statistical significance. Second, most respondents attended the celebration event at Twickenham, which may have influenced their responses in terms of objectivity. And third, while useful as a research exercise, the survey cannot isolate Spirit of Rugby from other positive influences on volunteers' health and wellbeing.

Nevertheless, it is notable, in our view, that the volunteers responding to the survey have continued to be physically active (despite a reduction in frequency), have become more connected with their communities, and have reported improved wellbeing as the projects have progressed. As the various projects have developed

and begun to achieve positive outcomes, it appears that this has been reflected in the volunteers. They have invested a considerable effort into Spirit of Rugby and they are entitled to be proud of the outcomes they have achieved, which is echoed in these results.

Figure 7 - Volunteer Wellbeing (ONS Definition)



5 The Stakeholders

A daunting sum of money for the volunteers

Each project aimed to recruit volunteers from the 16-24 year old age bracket. On reflection, the stakeholders' view was that giving control over a budget of £30,000 to a group of young people, with few apparent limitations on how to spend it was daunting for the volunteers. Several stakeholders advanced the view that receiving the money before the groups had submitted a plan led to some poor decision making. Some volunteers believed they could go out and spend the funding on whatever they wanted, and there was an early rush to buy branded clothing to distribute to volunteers. Some groups, (notably Folkestone, Northampton, Loughborough and Devon) subsequently revised this approach, so that volunteers were required to contribute a set number of hours' time to the project in order to receive their t-shirts and hoodies.

The lack of accountability was not necessarily due to a shortage of volunteer capacity. In at least one case, the volunteers who signed up for their project were on the committee of their club, but proceeded without seeking the club's approval. Control of the project and its budget rested principally with one key individual, who only sought help at a later stage. As a result, early opportunities for more experienced club committee members to provide valuable support and guidance on finance and planning were missed. As the volunteers had freedom to spend the money on different ideas, when other club members questioned this it caused unnecessary friction. While all stakeholders agreed that the Spirit of Rugby projects had benefitted their organisations, the dangers of poor internal communication in relation to financial information were clear. One stakeholder outlined how this had affected their project:

"As a club committee we already had our accountability in place. He [the lead spirit volunteer] had never done anything like this before and we know that is part of the project but he needed a little bit of direction and assistance with accountability. The club wasn't really aware on what the money was going on until some of it had already been spent. Therefore, for the first three months...the club were not really involved. As the monitoring and evaluating wasn't particularly strict, this one individual almost had too much freedom to spend the money on what he liked, without having a proper business plan in place and this led to us taking over the project. This individual remained as the lead but the committee had a lot more involvement in the decision making process. If we were to do it again, I would make sure that the club was involved from the beginning. This is because we didn't only lose three months of the project, we didn't just want to shoot down his ideas that he had just spent three months working on even though the direction wasn't always in line with the club wanted to go in each area."

The stakeholders were firm in their belief that the projects would benefit from using the first quarter to develop a more detailed project plan, before funding is released. It was suggested each project could have submitted a business plan, which would have to be approved and tweaked if necessary, with feedback from RFU staff. This would still allow the volunteers to retain their control over the direction of their projects, but it would ensure

a structured plan was in place before any money is spent, as well as helping to develop their project management skills. In addition, it would give each project time to ensure they had a committed group of volunteers in place. Another stakeholder explained:

"It can be quite tricky especially if the volunteers don't have an understanding of financial budgeting and what things can cost... it was almost too much money for them to get their heads around."

Support from local RFU staff

All of the stakeholders praised the support they received from the RFU Spirit team, who did everything possible to support the individual projects. However, as the projects were distributed across the country, it would make sense to engage with the local RFU delivery teams to provide additional support to the Spirit projects if necessary. There were some cases however, where Spirit projects failed to engage with their the local RFU delivery teams. While this did not hold progress back, the opportunity to connect with local networks, and embed the work of the volunteers in the local rugby community was potentially missed. One stakeholder mentioned:

"We haven't really had any contact with our local Community Rugby Coaches, which would have really helped because we had to have a frank discussion with Mike about a year into the project about the amount of time we could offer."

Where there has been support from their local RFU staff it has accelerated project progression. For example, in Liverpool, Community Rugby Coach Kevin Greaves has supported the group by identifying training facilities and coaches to deliver training sessions.

Volunteer roles and responsibilities

Stakeholders recognised that the Spirit projects were likely to encounter issues with volunteer turnover at some point over the two-year period. This had a detrimental impact on the project's progression, with some projects having to start afresh as a result. All the stakeholders agreed that taking more time to select volunteers at the beginning of the project would have been beneficial in the long run. Developing volunteer job descriptions, with detailed roles and responsibilities to ensure the volunteers knew exactly what was expected of them was discussed as a good approach. This clarity is particularly important when volunteers decide to leave a project, either for personal reasons, or because other (paid) employment opportunities arise. As one stakeholder explained:

"Laying down your expectations of the volunteers is important, because some of them feel they are letting you down if they have exams or other opportunities. Some of our volunteers were away on placement for a year, but still really wanted to be involved."

Clarifying roles and responsibilities at the beginning of the project helps to identify volunteers who will commit to seeing a project through to its conclusion, and encourages the development of a committed volunteer group. Additionally, if any turnover in volunteers does occur, the new volunteers can come into a stable team and take over a specific role.

Unintended outcomes

The diversity of purpose among the Spirit projects has been well documented, and there have been several unintended positive outcomes. The club-based projects have enjoyed particular success in attracting new members, which has resulted in extra subscription revenue. In Manchester's case, this has allowed the club to subsidise kit for all of their members and pay for travel costs for members who could not otherwise afford to attend tournaments. The club has also found that it has engaged with people from deprived backgrounds, which was not the original aim of the project, but the stakeholders and volunteers are pleased to have achieved this outcome. Elsewhere, many of Liverpool Tritons' players are new to rugby and as the club are not entered into the league structure, they want to give their players more match experience. Therefore, they have been in contact with local clubs to offer Tritons players if they are needed, which ultimately has benefitted these local clubs. The different projects have made numerous links with local organisations, which will continue after the Spirit project concludes. For example, in Norfolk:

"We have a strong link with the RAF Cadets as a result of Spirit and they supply us with most of our youth players, they bring down 15/16 year olds. When they hold tournaments, they will use our ground. If we are ever short then we call them up to ask if they have any extra players and it is a good link to have."

The stakeholders enjoyed coming together and sharing their experiences. Particularly the key learnings from each project, as the stakeholders can take these back to their volunteer groups. One stakeholder said:

"The power of the project as a whole is different to anything I have been involved in. The video we saw last night about diversity of the project was really powerful and I think if the RFU could produce something like that we can take it to our other teams and feed it into their programmes."

6 Key Themes

Staying Bound On

From the outset, there were clear differences between the groups in terms of their enthusiasm and engagement with the fifteen projects across the country. Projects that had stable and close-knit teams of volunteers had 'hit the ground running' and begun to deliver events to engage their target group and work towards their overall goals. In contrast, other projects needed to recruit fresh volunteers, resulting in delays to delivery. These groups were still to provide a detailed plan or group structure in place at this point. By the following quarter however, turnover had fallen to a sustainable level, with only 11 volunteers leaving the projects.

The groups quickly began to understand the importance of retention and the negative impact of volunteer turnover. As a result, University-based projects (Exeter and Loughborough) made plans to recruit new volunteers to replace those who were to graduate in the summer, and hand over responsibilities to these new volunteers. The Loughborough and Exeter teams were quick to design and distribute branded clothing as a means of underpinning volunteers' identity.

Between November 2015, and May 2016, several projects underwent a rebooting process, with new teams of volunteers recruited, and in two cases (Luton and Folkestone) a new stakeholder was engaged. The effect in most cases was to provide fresh impetus to the planning and delivery of Spirit of Rugby activities, though this new momentum was short-lived in Luton and Croydon.

The negative impact of volunteer turnover was apparent throughout the Spirit of Rugby, with some groups having to continually find and engage new volunteers. This affected not only day-to-day operations, but also the morale and enthusiasm of these groups. One of the worst-affected groups, Croydon, eventually folded at least in part because of volunteer turnover.

There were a number of reasons for the variance in volunteer retention. In some cases, volunteers had entered full-time or part-time employment, resulting in less time to commit to the Spirit project. Other volunteers left school for university, or indeed graduated from higher education. This highlights a key point that the Spirit project was attempting to engage 16-24 year olds as volunteers. This age range covers a period of significant turbulence in the lives of many young people, who face having to make decisions on education, employment and housing for the first time.

Feedback from the volunteers suggested that the support of their project stakeholders was a significant factor in deciding whether to continue to engage. For others, the sense of togetherness and camaraderie engendered by working towards a common goal was persuasive. In this respect, it is notable that some of the projects with the clearest aims and objectives (Manchester, Liverpool, Loughborough, Folkestone, Norfolk and Exeter) had less difficulty in retaining their volunteers, once established.

Bind! Engage!

As the various projects progressed, it became increasingly clear that the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers was dependent on the level of stakeholder engagement. While individual volunteers can and do have a significant impact on the successful planning and delivery of events and activities, it is arguable that the leadership role taken by project stakeholders is equally important, if not more so.

In this context therefore, it is notable that out of fifteen projects, six were forced to find a replacement stakeholder, after the original withdrew. In each case, there was a hiatus of at least 6 months, during which little if any delivery took place, with the result that the final outputs of each project were lower than they might otherwise have been. The sense of early opportunities being missed is heightened by the fact that three of these projects (Folkestone, Norfolk, and latterly Liverpool) went on to deliver a number of successful events and activities.

The projects that were supported by stakeholders with a background in sports development (often in the form of County Sports Partnerships) tended to be more successful in terms of engaging participants and organising activities. These volunteer groups were able to exploit the knowledge and expertise of their stakeholders, deploying tried and trusted techniques within existing networks.

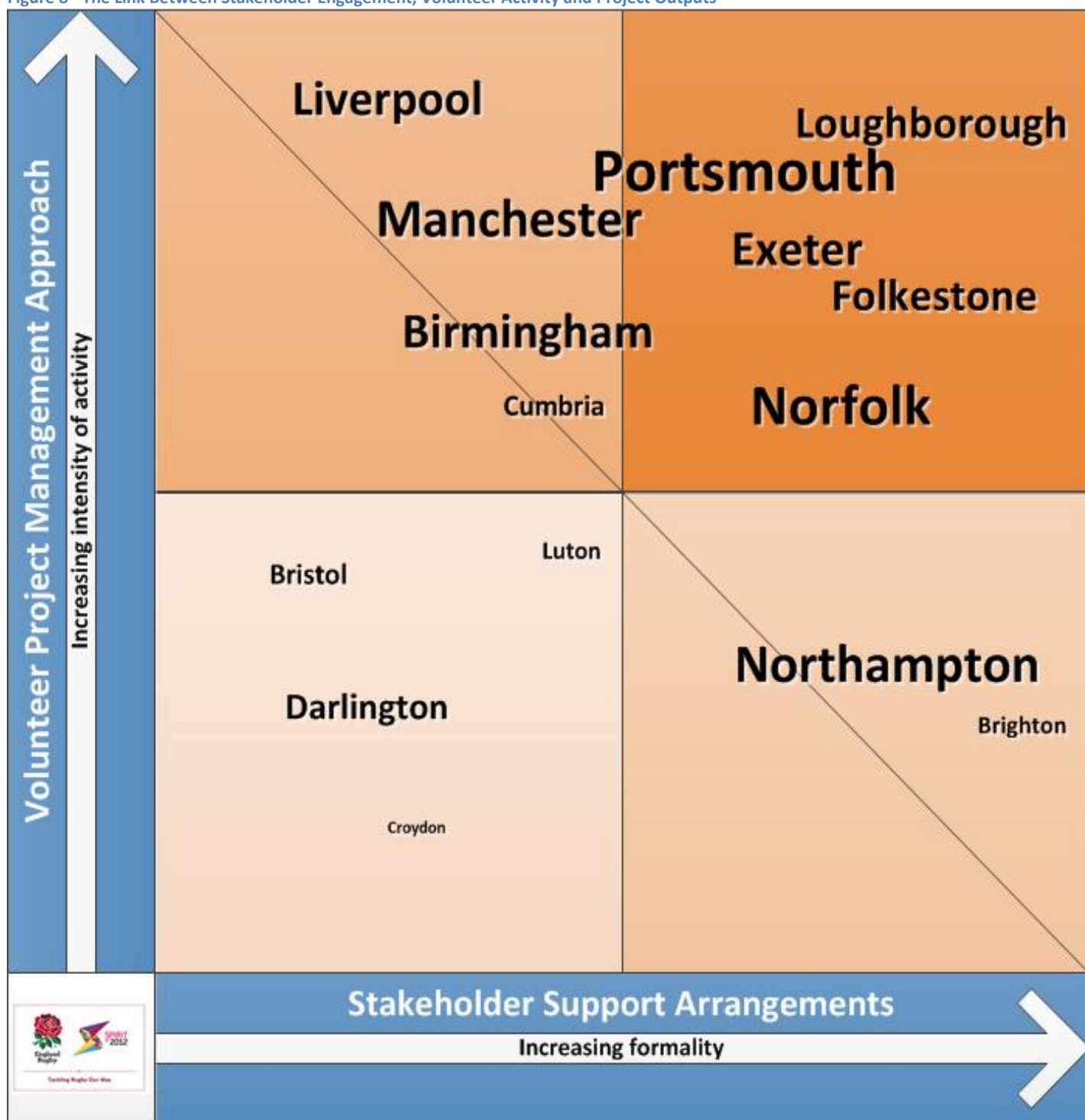
Six of the Spirit of Rugby projects took the decision to use some of their funding to employ a member of staff (usually, but not exclusively from a CSP) for 1 or 2 days a week to provide administrative support. These paid members of staff supported the stakeholder and released capacity among the volunteer teams to deliver activities. Over the course of the programme, the stakeholders tended to step back from day-to-day management of the groups, as the volunteers developed their project management skills, and grew in confidence. When asked, each of the stakeholders understood their function to be part-leadership, part facilitation, with a continuous handover of responsibility taking place as volunteers grew into their roles.

In Liverpool and Manchester, both projects suffered from stakeholder disengagement. However both were focused on niche markets (LGBT), which the volunteers represented. As both projects were club based, this resulted in the volunteer group acting as their own stakeholders. While this level of project ownership explains the significant levels of commitment shown by these groups, it also underlines the risk of volunteers acting as their own gatekeepers. The stakeholder therefore has another role as a kind of independent adjudicator, who can act as an additional check and balance on the group.

Anomalies aside, it is our contention that stakeholder involvement can be thought of as a matrix with two axes -formality of stakeholder support arrangements, and volunteer project management approach. Figure 1 shows how each of the projects can be placed on the matrix depending on how formal the stakeholder engagement is compared with how active the project volunteers are. This alludes to a dependent relationship between the stakeholders and volunteers, which is the driver of participant engagement, indicated by font size in the matrix.

Broadly, those projects where stakeholders have made a more formal commitment of time and resources and in which volunteers are more engaged, appear to have a higher level of activity and more participants as a result. The ability to influence levels of volunteer engagement is the key element in the positive relationship between formal stakeholder engagement and successful project delivery.

Figure 8 - The Link Between Stakeholder Engagement, Volunteer Activity and Project Outputs



Font size indicates number of participants engaged by each project – larger font size equates to more participants.

Match Stats

Tracking the performance of the Spirit of Rugby projects across the programme presented a challenge, both logistically and statistically. In essence, with 15 diverse projects, each with their own aims and objectives, there was a sense in the early stages of the programme that collecting common performance management information would be problematic. By early 2016 however, and in consultation with RFU staff, SIRC developed a project 'health check' spreadsheet as a means of comparing the progress of the projects. The health check

data included information on the number of activities and events staged, the number of volunteers engaged, and statistics relating to the use of social media, which most teams were using to promote their projects.

The health check tool became central to monitoring project progress, as it highlighted both inputs and outputs. One of the key indicators was the volunteer turnover rate, which remained stubbornly high in several projects, for reasons highlighted elsewhere in this report. In addition, by including the overall participant targets, it was possible to compare performance against a single key indicator. This gave volunteers and stakeholders, as well as RFU staff a simple measure of progress, highlighting not only successful projects, but also those which warranted close attention and support. The use of Key Performance Indicators is commonplace throughout the sport industry, with facilities, major events and sports development programmes all making use of benchmarking techniques to compare operational efficiency, and identify areas of potential improvement. In this context, the use of health check data to monitor project progress is another way in which Spirit of Rugby volunteers have been able to gain valuable experience of a workplace environment.

At the same time, SIRC developed a postcard survey template for groups to hand out at events and regular activities. In this way, eight of the groups collected information on the demographic characteristics of their participants, though sample sizes were limited in most cases to fewer than 50. Almost 80% of participants surveyed in this way were aged 25 or under, and 52% were female, while 18% came from minority ethnic groups. As Fig 9 shows, these percentages varied considerably from group to group, though the proportion of disabled participants was consistently low at 2%.

Figure 9 - Demographic Characteristics of Spirit of Rugby Participants

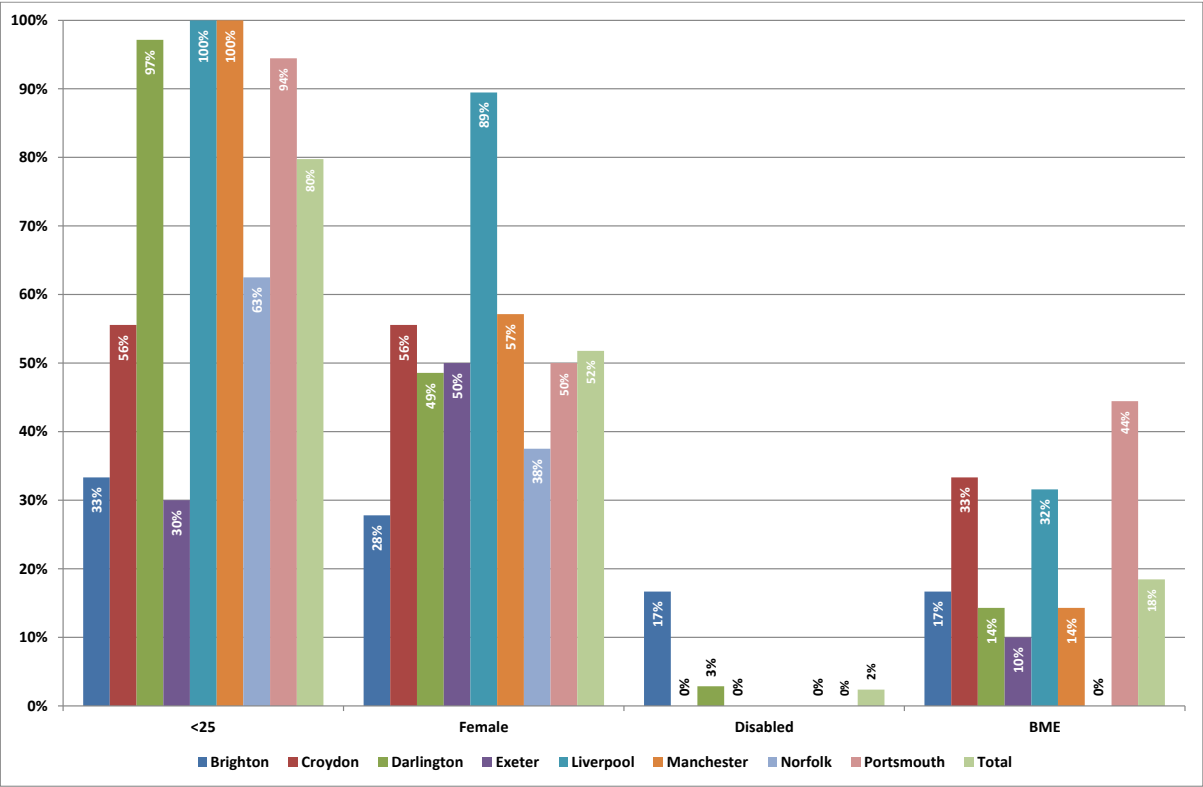
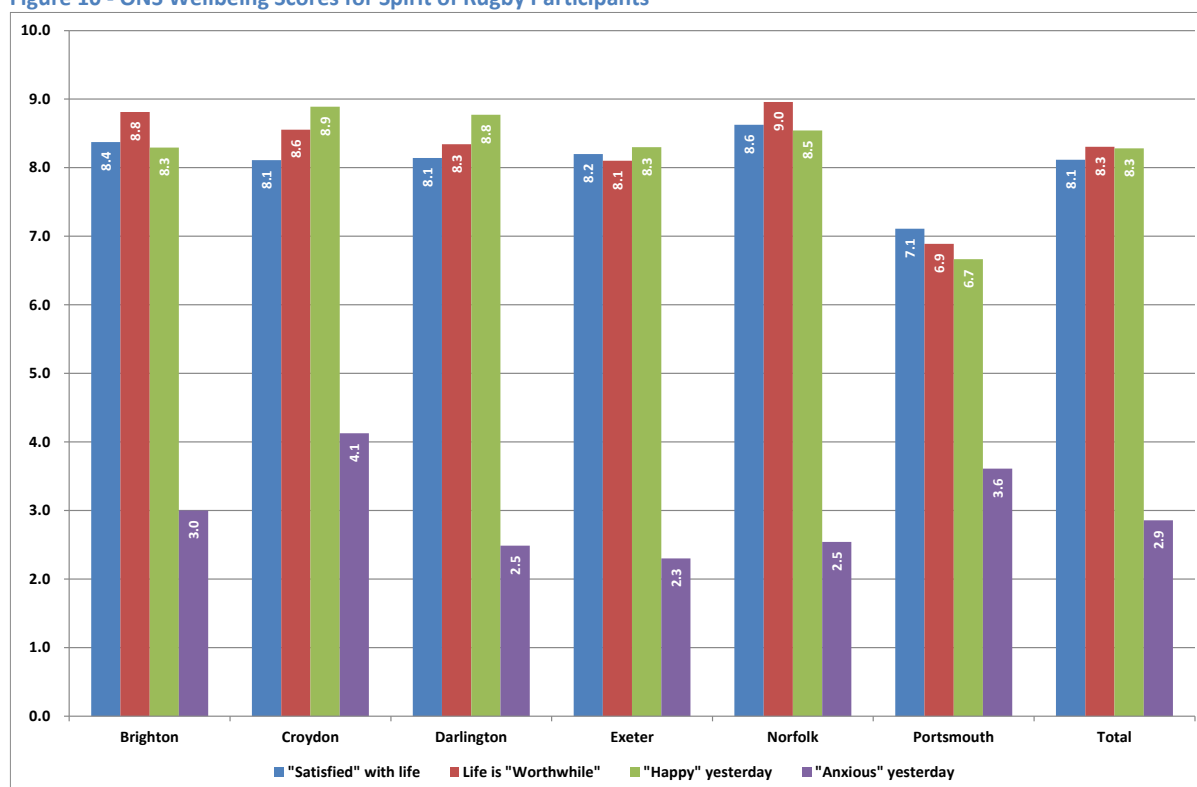


Figure 10 - ONS Wellbeing Scores for Spirit of Rugby Participants



Participants were also asked to respond to the same ONS wellbeing questions that were asked of volunteers. Figure 10 shows how, with one or two very minor exceptions, this is remarkably consistent across the projects which reported back. Participants were asked to rate the following, on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 equals 'Not at all' and 10 equals 'Completely':

- Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?
- Overall, to what extent do you feel the things that you do in your life are worthwhile?
- Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?
- Overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?

While responses were generally positive, respondents from Portsmouth were slightly less happy and more anxious compared with their counterparts in other areas. Finally, and from a rugby perspective, participants were asked how likely they were to continue to participate in Rugby Union, and/or join a Rugby Union Club (where 0 equals 'Extremely Unlikely' and 10 equals 'Extremely Likely'). Respondents scored 7.3 out of 10 when asked if they were likely to continue playing Rugby Union as a result of being involved with the Spirit of Rugby project, and 6.4 out of 10 when asked if they were likely to join a Rugby Union club.

The development of these data collection tools was considered an important part of the process of monitoring and evaluation of the Spirit of Rugby project. It is notable therefore that the response of the volunteers and stakeholders varied from project to project, and was to some extent dependent on their understanding of the process, and its importance to effective project management. Projects which were supported by people with experience of planning and delivery in the sports development field were generally more efficient in terms of

supplying the information, and had a better understanding of its significance. More significantly, the projects which generated fewer participants overall, were less engaged with the monitoring and evaluation process.

Sustainability

As the projects entered the final quarter before the Spirit support ended in June 2017, attention turned to longer-term sustainability. Norfolk, Folkestone and Exeter in particular had devised plans to continue beyond the end of the official funding period and into the summer. These projects were able to draw on the support of their CSP stakeholders to assist this sustainability planning. Some projects decided to use a portion of their remaining Spirit funding to put 'physical legacies' in place. The Norfolk group arranged for the installation of a trim trail at Thetford Rugby Club for public use, while Birmingham purchased a bungee run and a set of inflatable rugby posts that could be used by young people at their local leisure centre for a small fee.

This legacy may be personal, relating to outcomes for individual participants, volunteers, and to a lesser extent, stakeholders. In this sense, personal development, employability, and improved wellbeing could be considered outcomes which would act as an incentive to continued involvement. Equally, sustainability may be linked with the infrastructure which groups have established as their projects have developed. Examples might include physical infrastructure and equipment, organisational infrastructure (including networks and partnerships), or funding from alternative sources which could be used to support continued delivery.

Sustainability outcomes from Spirit of Rugby might be personal, professional or physical. All of the 13 Spirit of Rugby projects which were still running at the end of the programme, were able to point to some measure of sustainability against at least one of 5 strands: Participation, Volunteering, Administration, Physical legacy and Funding. Notably, Folkestone and Exeter had some form of legacy under each of the five indicators. For example, the Liverpool project resulted in the formation of a new club, while the group based in Cumbria used their final instalment of Spirit funding to purchase 40 kitbags that will be distributed to squadrons around the county for future use.

Figure 11 - Sustainability of Spirit of Rugby Projects

Project	Participation	Volunteering	Admin	Physical	Funding
Birmingham	✓	✓		✓	
Brighton		✓	✓	✓	✓
Cumbria		✓		✓	
Exeter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Folkestone	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Liverpool	✓		✓	✓	✓
Loughborough	✓	✓	✓		✓

Luton	✓				✓
Manchester	✓			✓	✓
Norfolk	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northampton		✓			
Portsmouth	✓	✓		✓	✓

While from the RFU's perspective, the ideal outcome would be to maximise the sustainability benefits which accrue directly to the game of Rugby Union in some way, some leakage is inevitable. This does not mean that the investment of time and resources is wasted however. Maria Crowfoot, a volunteer on Loughborough's Pass It On project, is now working for Leicestershire and Rutland Sport as a sports development officer. While she is no longer a student, and therefore unable to commit to the same level of volunteering input, her new role allows her to continue to support the project through the CSP. Indeed, she has been encouraged to do so by her new employer.

Elsewhere, in Birmingham, three of the group's volunteers entered onto a coaching apprenticeship scheme which will enable them to develop their skills and should lead to full or part-time employment locally. The inclusion of Rugby Union in FITCAP's programme of activities, and development of infrastructure links with Yardley and District RFC, mean that it is more likely (though not inevitable) that these coaches will be able to deliver rugby-related activities in future.

Resilience

Early in 2016, several projects had delivered their 'launch events' and had begun to set out their longer-term development. Unfortunately, a handful of these launch events failed to achieve their attendance targets, although the resilience these volunteers showed in response to their setbacks was refreshing. Most notably the Darlington group, whose launch event was poorly attended due to adverse weather conditions, might have considered the setback to be terminal. The volunteers stuck together however and were keen to learn from the negative experience, planning a follow-up in Darlington town centre event during the summer months, which was much more successful.

One of the themes that emerged from these launch events was the groups that expected their target markets to come to their activities had a less than successful outcome. The volunteer groups quickly realised that they had to adapt and take their activities to their audience. Both the Darlington and Norfolk groups identified a target market for their activities and organised their activities in a location that maximized the exposure to this target audience.

During the programme, the RFU Spirit team organised a series of away-day events for the volunteer groups; at Loughborough, Birmingham and then Twickenham. One of the aims of RFU was to encourage groups to discuss progress and setbacks, and to help the volunteers to learn from the experiences of other projects. A

number of volunteers stated this informal knowledge sharing was particularly useful as it could be relayed to their own projects. Volunteers who attended these sessions began to understand that setbacks were part and parcel of the process of planning and delivering events and activities. Indeed, at the final event at Twickenham in July 2017, there was a feeling amongst the lead volunteers and stakeholders present that more knowledge sharing opportunities between projects would have been beneficial.

Employment

The findings of research carried out for British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) show conclusively that graduates who take part in sport have a higher annual household income than graduates who do not take part in sport, to the tune of more than £6,000. This salary premium is higher still (by nearly £3,000) for graduates who take part in sport and undertake volunteering activity related to that sport. Most significantly for some of the Spirit of Rugby programme's volunteers, this also applies to people who have not attended university, and consistently, to people who do not take part in sport. In short, volunteering is known to have a positive effect on average incomes, regardless of education or participation in sport.

Employers and employees alike understand the importance of 'soft' skills to employability, such as team working, communication, networking, motivation, competitiveness and resilience. Employers in particular placed a high value on the leadership and organisational skills developed through involvement in student sport. One volunteer reported:

"Something that stands out is that everyone has got into their roles by doing that something extra and volunteering. For example, what I am doing now and volunteering on this project, it shows that it does matter when it comes to getting jobs. It is clear that just relying on my degree isn't enough and I need to stand out."

The surveys of volunteers conducted at the beginning, middle and end of the programme confirmed that respondents had not only grown in confidence, but that they had also developed precisely the kind of soft skills highlighted by the BUCS report. The most frequently reported new or improved skill was 'networking', and there were specific examples from a number of projects of how this had had a positive impact on individual volunteers. Less tangible, but no less important, was the increased confidence of project volunteers.

In summary, research suggests a causal link between volunteering in sport and employability. Sport volunteers are less likely to be unemployed, and to earn higher salaries, regardless of whether or not they participate in sport themselves. Employers understand that the most significant benefit of volunteering is the development of 'soft' skills relating to networking, communication, problem solving and resilience. Further, direct testimony from Spirit of Rugby volunteers suggests they have achieved personal development outcomes that align with those highlighted by employers.

7 Conclusions and Recommendations

As the Spirit of Rugby programme has come to an end, so it is appropriate to highlight three key conclusions which the monitoring and evaluation process has helped to identify, with a view to helping the RFU and Spirit of 2012 refine their programme design for future projects.

Selection Policy is Crucial

In putting together a programme of this nature, one of the first management decisions is also one of the most crucial. The recruitment of volunteers and stakeholders to the individual projects had implications throughout the Spirit of Rugby programme. With over 200 volunteers passing through the programme, as well as around 20 stakeholders, there was a constant turnover of personnel which not only reduced capacity, but also required additional input in response. Specific projects were particularly badly affected, with delivery hampered in Luton, Croydon, Darlington, Bristol and for a long period of time, Liverpool.

One of the causes of this volatility was undoubtedly the need to recruit volunteers in a short period of time at the start of the project, in order to demonstrate progress to the primary funder. The RFU was successful in finding volunteers to make an early commitment to engaging with the programme, but by the end of 2015 a number of the initial intake had left their groups. While some of these departures were related to new employment opportunities, the turbulence generated in their wake diverted resources and attention away from the planning and delivery of the projects, with the result that morale in the worst affected teams was damaged.

To some extent, turnover among the volunteers was inevitable, given their youth. The 16 to 24 age range includes a number of significant milestones which have a bearing on individuals' ability to maintain a commitment to volunteering. Evidence from SIRC's research into employability suggests that leaving school, entering employment, leaving home and going to university all have a significant negative impact on participation and volunteering in sport, reducing the amount of free time available. Nevertheless, some of the errors made by the project groups were avoidable and therefore preventable. For example, when the Luton project was restarted after a long hiatus, the students chosen to volunteer in the group were midway through their final year at university, necessitating a further round of recruitment after six months when they graduated.

There are three policy responses which would help to prevent or at least alleviate some of the issues which arose as a result of the turnover of volunteers and stakeholders in the Spirit of Rugby programme. The first is to formalise the selection process, by inviting interested groups to consider what their project would consist of **before** funding is awarded. This would serve several purposes.

First, project managers would be able to screen the proposals for viability in advance of committing funds. Second, the RFU could ensure that the volunteers and stakeholders recruited have a vested interest in a successful rugby-themed project, either because they have an inherent interest in the sport itself, or because they have a clear understanding of the benefits of volunteering to employability. Third, as programme managers, the RFU could not only reduce the amount of duplication, but also ensure that the appropriate linkages are identified within the organisation that could underpin the project during its lifespan. This might

include Community Rugby Coaches, Rugby Development Officers and club administrators who could be engaged in advance of the project commissioning stage.

The second policy response, which applies more specifically to the volunteers, is to seek to build resilience as projects develop. Volunteers should be made aware from the outset that setbacks are inevitable, and that they will need to develop contingencies in their project planning. While this concept was a feature of the logframe matrix, it was not explicit, with the result that some groups overlooked or failed to plan for scenarios which eventually had a significant impact on their project (such as poor weather at outdoor events, or volunteer departures). In addition, the RFU has a role to play in developing resilience in individual volunteers, though this requires more intensive support. The nature of the game itself provides a useful way of getting this message across, as a recent literature review for the RFU amply demonstrates.¹

Finally, the recruitment of stakeholders with direct experience of planning and delivering sports development programmes involving young people is clearly beneficial. County Sports Partnerships and other local deliverers (such as Shepway Sports Trust) who were engaged as stakeholders, were better able to support their projects, by virtue of their expertise and professional networks. As the Spirit of Rugby programme progressed, it became evident that targeting organisations such as these to act as stakeholders was an effective way of ensuring that the right kind of support was in place at a local level.

Match Stats Make a Difference

Monitoring and evaluation techniques are fundamental to successful delivery in the sport industry. A significant body of evidence exists which outlines how the use of appropriate and accurate performance management information can help to support decision making and planning. This is particularly true in the context of projects which are funded by public sector bodies or charities, which require an additional level of accountability in their reporting. As such, the collection of data which provide proof of project outputs and outcomes is often mandatory. A 2007 Sport Scotland report suggests that:

"Monitoring of process is essential because over time programmes are rarely delivered exactly as designed." (Coalter, F. Kay, T & Lyle, J. (2007) Lessons from Evaluations of Sport and Physical Activity Programmes for Young People. Research Report 99, Sport Scotland)

Under these circumstances, the case for monitoring and evaluation among stakeholders who understand the processes and procedures of sports development, is already made. CSPs are accustomed to reporting regularly on a range of performance indicators to their primary funders (Sport England) for example. There was still occasionally a need however, to remind stakeholders that the supply of data about the numbers and characteristics of people attending activities and events provided by the Spirit of Rugby groups was just as

¹ SIRC (2017): A Literature Review on the Contribution of Rugby Union to Mental Wellbeing, Individual Development, and Social / Community Development Outcomes.

important as the provision itself. While some groups were quick to engage with the process of providing quarterly updates to the both the RFU and SIRC, there was a noticeable reluctance on the part of several stakeholders and volunteer groups to respond to requests for information. This could be suggestive of a certain nervousness about the findings of the process, or simply a management decision to prioritise delivery. Nevertheless, without credible proof of attendances, the considerable investment of time and resources in developing and delivering the fifteen projects would count for little.

As the programme developed, SIRC designed a number of tools aimed at collecting, collating and analysing performance management information relating to each project. The most successful of these was the 'Health-check' data template, which itemised a number of indicators relating to participant attendance, volunteers, promotion and finance. Over time these were refined as the projects moved from planning and promotion to delivery, but the principle of collecting attendance and volunteering data was established quite quickly, and enabled the quarterly updates to focus on 'softer', more qualitative data.

The list of agreed indicators was compiled after six months of the projects being 'live', developing organically from discussions between the RFU, SIRC and the programme funder. This was a positive outcome, but the delay was indicative of a lack of clarity about how the projects were to be monitored in advance of commissioning. For the use of performance management information to be truly successful, it should be bolted in to a project at the planning stage, rather than introduced *post hoc*. Other monitoring tools were moderately successful at best, with only limited use being made of the postcard surveys designed by SIRC to collect demographic information from participants. Only 8 of the 15 Spirit of Rugby groups returned any completed surveys, averaging 23 per project, which constrained the amount and extent of data analysis. Conversely, some groups developed and maintained their own systems for recording attendance, with Birmingham standing out in this regard by collecting postcode data which could be compared with the Indices of Multiple Deprivation. This information was collated by the stakeholder however, rather than the volunteers working on the project, resulting in a missed opportunity to develop new skills and understanding.

In hindsight, the engagement of volunteers in monitoring and evaluation was always likely to be problematic, as they saw their role primarily as deliverers, with limited buy in to the process (including understanding of the benefits to effective project management). There are two ways in which future programmes could be refined to resolve this issue. First, it is crucial to develop a list of agreed core indicators with all programme stakeholders (including funders, individual project stakeholders and RFU programme managers) **before** full implementation begins. This would help to provide clarity, identify how projects are to be measured, and answer the key question of how to define success. This does not preclude new indicators being added as projects develop, or prevent individual groups including their own performance measures: indeed, with a range of diverse project aims and objectives, this is desirable.

Second, there is significant value in providing an induction to monitoring and evaluation at the onset of each project, which would bring together all partners and volunteers to establish the principles and procedures involved. The successful application of monitoring and evaluation techniques would be a significant learning

outcome for project volunteers, providing them with transferable skills and experience to enhance their employability. A brief workshop of this type could be built into a more general project induction and commissioning meeting for the main stakeholders.

No Need to Stay on the Sidelines

The intention of the RFU from the outset was to give stakeholders and volunteers as much freedom as possible to develop projects which were appropriate to their circumstances and to their perceptions of how to respond to the particular challenges that they each identified. While laudable, the nature of the volunteer groups in terms of their age and relative inexperience meant that RFU staff were regularly required to respond to requests for intensive support, particularly in the early months of the programme.

For example, in Folkestone there was a significant disagreement between volunteers in the group as to what the aims and objectives of their project should be, to the extent that relations within the group became strained and never recovered. The entire volunteer team withdrew and a considerable effort was required to identify new volunteers, a new stakeholder and in effect, restart the project from scratch with fresh aims and objectives. It is uncertain whether this situation could have been predicted and even less certain that the project managers had any capacity to prevent this occurring, but closer engagement with the project stakeholder might have alerted RFU staff sooner, and prompted a swifter response.

Spirit of Rugby stakeholders readily referred to the risk of handing over responsibility for a significant funding stream to volunteers who were unused to handling and perhaps more importantly accounting for their own budget. Some of the decision-making in the first few months of the Spirit of Rugby programme were in retrospect, hasty. Examples included a print run of several hundred flyers which failed to reach their intended targets, and a batch of branded t-shirts ordered for a project's volunteers which was deemed to be of poor quality and quickly discarded. While it would be naïve to suggest that situations such as these are entirely avoidable, the internal structure of some groups meant that individuals were able to make spending decisions without reference to their peers, a potential source of friction.

The risk posed by a lack of accountability was enhanced when groups lacked an external stakeholder. In Liverpool and Manchester, the project volunteers were forced to operate without stakeholder supervision for long periods, effectively acting as their own gatekeepers. Stakeholders were clear that as the ultimate project sponsor, it was the RFU's role not only to intervene reactively when required, but to be proactive in ensuring that projects considered potentially negative outcomes.

More specifically, stakeholders felt that there was a need for the RFU to be more prescriptive, and insist upon each group taking the time to develop and submit a detailed project plan, which could be used as a reference point in measuring progress and assessing risk. These plans might include a phased approach to delivery, which places a requirement on the groups to deliver specific elements in sequence. For example, the release of funds for branding and promotion could be dependent on a group submitting and signing off on a programme of activities for the first six months of the project. In this context, the failure and effective abandonment of the

logframe matrix as a planning tool is all the more apparent, since few if any of the groups made any use of it after the initial submission.

There are a number of ways in the RFU, as fund holder, could influence the design and delivery of the fifteen projects developed under the Spirit of Rugby programme. At one end of the scale, this could include steering groups away from planning large-scale outdoor events which are weather dependent, towards delivering regular small-scale participation activities. The experience of the Spirit of Rugby programme suggests that the balance of risk and reward favours the latter, although there is no reason to suggest that large one-off events are entirely obsolete; merely that any such plans require closer scrutiny and possibly an increased level of support and supervision from the project sponsor.

This is not to say that volunteer groups cannot take on the responsibility of managing a two-year project with a £30,000 budget without meeting demanding pre-conditions. Over the course of the Spirit of Rugby programme, the project groups, and the individual volunteers who ran them, frequently demonstrated their capacity to respond to the challenge of delivery, learning additional skills and establishing new networks along the way. Nevertheless, the financial consideration is sufficient incentive for the RFU to be more robust in requiring groups to be more proficient in developing and delivering their project plans, and to be fully accountable for the outcomes which result from them.