



**Innovation during the Covid-19 pandemic:
Volunteers and voluntary sports
organisations in England**

Case Study 1: Introducing technology to enhance participation

Research report for Sport England

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Introducing technology to enhance participation

Sport: Boxing

Size of club: Figures not available, although typical sessions involve around 30 members

No of volunteers: Unknown

Own premises/land: No, lease property

Age Range: Under 13s, over 14s and adults

Paid staff: Coaches only

What is the innovation?

The boxing club started using a Virtual Reality (VR) headset in their gym. This allows members to box in a virtual environment. Other members can also watch participants on a laptop and cheer them on from outside the ring.

Why was this innovation implemented?

The boxing club introduced a VR boxing game to attract members back into their club after the Covid-19 lockdown. They recognised that some members felt apprehensive about coming back to the club. The club felt that new and existing members would be drawn to the club to engage in the VR game.

“Younger people having spent the best part of the last two years sat in front of their computers, I think they found it hard to jump back into reality, and this provided a nice step.”

What impact did this innovation have on the club as a whole?

The VR headsets have been incredibly popular with members. It provided a useful hook for young people and has boosted participation numbers:

“[The VR] is so popular, we have to give the kids a number. We let them do the VR session, for 3 or 5 minutes, something like that. But then afterwards, we encourage them to get involved in some of the other activities. [VR has created] a brand-new stepping-stone for getting kids involved in our sport, who might be nervous about getting involved.”

What impact did this innovation have on sports volunteers?

The use of VR has created new volunteering opportunities within the gym, especially for those that do not necessarily have boxing or coaching skills. Volunteering to run the VR sessions simply requires the setting up of the VR equipment.

“It is a great opportunity for volunteers, because.... you have to be able to work with software, but in terms of the technical side of boxing you don't have to give a lot of feedback.”

What prevented this innovation from happening before Covid-19 restrictions?

The club said that nothing had prevented this innovation from happening before Covid-19. Covid-19 just provided the stimulus to think differently about how they could attract young people to the sport.

What were the challenges of implementing this innovation?

Financing the purchase of the VR equipment was the main challenge. Headsets cost £299 each and so the club approached private companies to fund them.



Eight short case studies that showcase innovative practices in sports volunteering:

Case Study 1: Introducing technology to enhance participation

Case Study 2: Forming buddy groups to enhance engagement

Case Study 3: Using a survey of members to spark modernisation

Case Study 4: Using social media to attract new members

Case Study 5: Purchasing own land to offer an outdoor format of the sport

Case Study 6: Getting involved in the local community

Case Study 7: Implementing club membership management app

Case Study 8: Increasing Volunteer Inclusion and Diversity