Equality and Sport Research 2020

KEY FINDINGS DOCUMENT FOR **sport**scotland

NOVEMBER 2020

Introduction

This key findings document presents the **general findings and recommendations** from the research and then key findings for each of the twelve equality topic areas.

This research links to **sport**scotland's Corporate Strategy, Sport for Life, which is underpinned by their commitment to inclusion. **sport**scotland defines inclusion as:

> *…at its simplest is 'the state of being included'. For us, it is about ensuring people feel they belong and are welcome, engaged, and connected. It is about valuing all individuals, giving equal access and opportunity to all and removing discrimination and other barriers to involvement.[1]*

This project builds on previous research exercises by the Scottish Government [2] who completed a review of quantitative data around equality in sport in Scotland and Research Scotland[3] who completed a review of qualitative data around equality in sport in Scotland. Alongside these, this research has also examined a number of other publications on the delivery, investment and supported activities across the sport sector, such as **sport**scotland's coaching in Scotland evaluation and research.

The research was commissioned by **sport**scotland and they appointed Counsel Ltd to conduct this project in March 2020. In the future **sport**scotland will commission further research in the area of sport and equality, to focus on participants and other non-workforce stakeholders.

Research Overview

The equality and sport research project 2020 explored ways to help improve work within the sport sector in Scotland, to **advance equality, eliminate discrimination** and **foster good relations**. The project aims were to:

- Update and extend existing equalities and sport evidence resources;[4]

- Engage directly with the Scottish sport sector to understand whether and how equalities are embedded;

- Identify practical recommendations to progress and help prioritise improvement in this area in Scotland.

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[1] **sport**scotland (2019) Equality mainstreaming and outcome progress report. Available via: https://sportscotland.org.uk/

[2] Scottish Government (2015) Active Scotland Outcomes: Indicator Equality Analysis. Available via: www.equalityevidence.scot

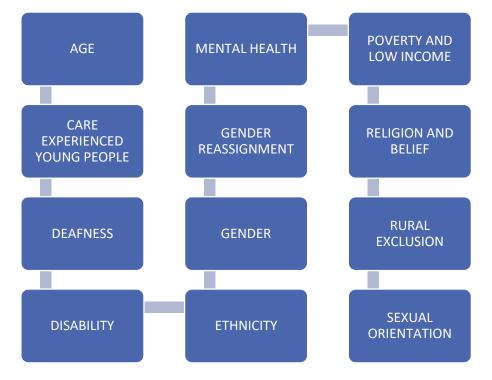[3] Research Scotland (2016) Equality and Sport Research. Available via: https://sportscotland.org.uk/

[4] To focus on Scotland and Scottish sport.

The project aims were achieved by conducting[5] (1) an integrated review of existing research and evidence; (2) an online survey; (3) virtual interviews; (4) outputs and learning note consultation and feedback.

Across the research there was input from staff and partners in the sporting system in Scotland[6] (including **sport**scotland, Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport, local authorities and major third sector partners). This included input from a cross-section of sports, environments (schools and education, club and community, high performance sport), geographic areas and staff who are both operational and strategically focused.

In the project brief the scope extended beyond the nine protected characteristics[7] and **sport**scotland's public sector equality duties[8] to include five further areas to explore:

AGE	MENTAL HEALTH	POVERTY AND LOW INCOME
CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE	GENDER REASSIGNMENT	RELIGION AND BELIEF
DEAFNESS	GENDER	RURAL EXCLUSION
DISABILITY	ETHNICITY	SEXUAL ORIENTATION

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[5] The overall context of attempting to conduct such an exercise during the COVID-19 pandemic proved very challenging. For example, the amount of staff targeted and response sample size for the survey was smaller than previous studies, though the representation across organisations, depth and quality of responses was very high.

[6] **sport**scotland supported the researchers to facilitate access to its networks and partners.

[7] For presentational purposes in this graphic, gender also covers 'marriage and civil partnership' and 'pregnancy and maternity'.

[8] Equality and Human Rights Commission. Background to the equality duty. Available at:
https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/public-sector-equality-duty-scotland/background-equality-duty

An equality group is made up of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic. An equality topic includes individual characteristics with further information about their circumstance, such as geographic location.[9]

General Findings

1. Translating policy into practice:

Equality and sport in Scotland have connections to a number of long term national and sport sector specific policies and regulations, for example the Equality Standard for Sport (launched in 2004).[10] Since 2015, **sport**scotland and the Scottish Government have made significant changes to national approaches to equality. For example, the Scottish Government has introduced an Equality Evidence Finder and **sport**scotland has produced updated equality outcomes:

> **OUTCOME 1:** Young people from our most deprived areas, girls and young women and disabled young people will have access to improved sport and physical activity opportunities, enabling them to participate and progress in school sport and club sport
>
> **OUTCOME 2: sport**scotland and Scottish sport are supported to embed equalities and inclusion in their work
>
> **OUTCOME 3:** Sports organisations and people working in sport will have an improved understanding and awareness of the needs of people with protected characteristics.[11]

1.1 A challenge for the sport sector is to understand and interpret changes in the law, policy and politics into operational and strategic actions around equalities. For example, it is a challenge to interpret the connections between the Equality Standard for Sport, Active Scotland Outcomes Framework and the Sport for Life document. During fieldwork, when asked about the impact of Sport for Life, one respondent said:

> "We are aware that inclusion should underpin everything that we do which is why it is reflected on paper. Ensuring that it underpins everything in reality is a greater challenge", Community Sport Hub staff member

1.2 The findings from the fieldwork demonstrated the influence of policy and funding on the workforce. For example, Outcome 1 of the current **sport**scotland equality outcomes is "Young

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[9] Use of the term 'topic' in this project was informed by the National Records of Scotland: Scotland's Census 2022. Available at: https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/question-development

[10] Equality Standard for Sport. Available at: https://equalityinsport.org/equality-standard-for-sport/

[11] **sport**scotland (2017) Equality Outcomes 2017-2021. Available via: https://sportscotland.org.uk/

people from our most deprived areas, girls and young women and disabled young people will have access to improved sport and physical activity opportunities, enabling them to participate and progress in school sport and club sport."

Unsurprisingly, people working within Scottish sports organisations have a better awareness of inequalities in sport faced by women and in particular by teenage girls, as well as by those with disabilities and a socio-economic disadvantage. Faith, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, rural exclusion, and marriage and civil partnership inequalities were understood the least. This closely mirrors the picture in relation to overall data and evidence.

- o Rural exclusion, for example, poses an interesting challenge as the interpretation of this community and topic is mixed, but the need to identify the contrasting demands and issues between rural and urban areas in Scotland is growing more important. Greater evidence and discussion around this area would be beneficial.

1.3 The range of sport sector planning, action and research on equality, diversity and inclusion is improving. However, from the review of evidence, more needs to be done to confirm how the Sport for Life[12] statement "our commitment to inclusion underpins everything we do" is understood and brought to life by staff and partners in the sporting system in Scotland.

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2. Availability and access to evidence and literature:

It was notable that Scottish sport specific evidence and examples are becoming more widely available, but some gaps remain in evidence especially around gender reassignment, deafness, and ethnicity. As discussed in the previous research, some groups (e.g. women and girls or young people) due to their size and visibility are easier to reach and measure.

2.1 This project overall found that more quantitative and qualitative evidence and research on the twelve topics was available and accessible. There has been an increase in Scottish based qualitative research beyond sport and sport organisations (such as research in health and social care) which we have identified as being useful to the **sport**scotland and the sport sector.

2.2 When asked about a series of equality and sport support statements for their job role, respondents selected 'evidence about existing inequalities' (60%) and 'good practice examples which demonstrate possibilities' (84%) as the most applicable. During fieldwork, when asked about current support, one respondent said:

> "SGB [Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport] Equality and Inclusion forum is a great networking support and pathway for best practice. However as above, more accessible updates, statistics and potentially recognised online training courses", Scottish Governing Body of Sport staff member

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[12] **sport**scotland (2020) Sport for Life – Summary of progress. Available via: https://sportscotland.org.uk/

2.3 A high level of evidence and literature is accessed through partnerships, including local partners and national partners. When asked to describe the work that is being done across the sector to reduce inequalities in sport, one respondent described:

> "Minimal to date, however there has been a recent ground swell and there are some really good partnerships that have been established to move forward, for example with SAMH in terms of Mental Health and LEAP in terms of LGBTQI", Local Authority staff member

2.4 A strength is the foundation and growth of partnerships at a local and national level between sporting and non-sporting organisations. For example, those working in Scottish Governing Bodies frequently cited the Equality Standard for Sport and the work **sport**scotland does with Plan4Sport and other partners, such as LEAP Sport and Scottish Disability Sport to deliver training, resources and support. However, there is still a need for the different sporting environments (schools and communities; performance sport; clubs and communities) to establish more points of cross-over and new links.

3. Awareness raising and responsibility:

The research highlighted that the Scottish sport sector is, understandably, not always equipped to interpret evidence and to navigate complex, emotive and ever-changing social debates – for example, around women's rights and transgender rights. Plus, as discussed in previous research responsibility for taking forward these challenges does not lie with **sport**scotland alone.

A prominent response around work being done across the sector is illustrated by one respondent's thought here:

> "I think inclusion underpinning everything we do from a national perspective is a very promising and strong statement. I also feel that the provision of multiple Equality Training opportunities gives those in the sector enough opportunity to learn about equality. However, I feel there's a bit of work to be done in enabling people to learn how to genuinely embed equality and inclusion in their sports by way of sharing examples of programmes and interventions that others have implemented", Scottish Governing Body of Sport staff member

3.1 The confidence about thinking about equality and inclusion generally was high across all of the data and there was real strength in informal networks to exchange ideas when issues arise. There where was a lack of confidence and barriers around:

- o Putting research into action;
- o Finding the time and resource to focus on specific individuals or communities;
- o Confusion about who has the responsibility to drive solutions.

As demonstrated by this quote, there is a recognition of equality but also recognition that given the challenges above, this is a long term area to develop:

> "I think we are starting to give this area more of a focus in the industry, but it feels like we are more towards the beginning of a long road. Most clubs have the policies in place which would indicate that they are an inclusive and welcoming organisation, but in reality based on the make-up of their members and volunteers we know that many are not represented by those most marginalised in our society", Local Authority staff member

3.2 There is a trend to 'conflate' – for example putting disability issues together and not fully appreciating the considerable diversity within this group – this also applies to faith and religion, sexual orientation and more widely. The sense of the majority population and 'other people' can be very unhelpful and distract focus from the need for a nuanced and specialist response to each topic area.
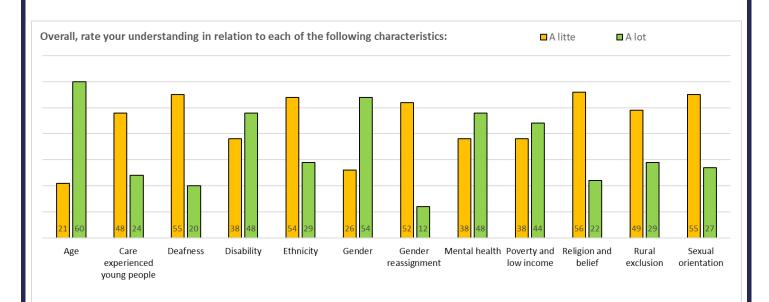
3.3 A less positive trend in this research was a lack of awareness of the equality and sport research undertaken by **sport**scotland. The survey data here illustrates a trend that the workforce is not aware or do not know the value or relevance of existing **sport**scotland research on equality and sport.

- o Equality and Sport Learning Notes (2016) – 64% had either seen but not accessed or not seen before;
- o Equality and Sport Research Report (2016) – 61.7% had either seen but not accessed or not seen before.

In the fieldwork, reasons were given for why people do not access such resources, these included:

- o A lack of **time** to keep up to date with latest sport and equality publications;
- o A lack of **capacity,** 79% of people surveyed said equality did not feature directly in their job title or job description;
- o Limited access, a reported challenge was around the **navigation** of the **sport**scotland website and channels of communication around equality and sport;
- o A limited understanding about whether publications are **targeted or useful** for their role or not;
- o A limited understanding about how the equality publications are the **connected** with targets, action plans or funding models.

3.4 The level of awareness and understanding differs around the topics. The topics where people were most likely to have 'A little' understanding in the survey were deafness (55%), ethnicity (54%), gender reassignment (52%), religion and belief (56%) and sexual orientation (55%). This is summarised in the following graph:

Overall, rate your understanding in relation to each of the following characteristics: ■ A litte ■ A lot

Characteristic	A litte	A lot
Age	21	60
Care experienced young people	48	24
Deafness	55	20
Disability	38	48
Ethnicity	54	29
Gender	26	54
Gender reassignment	52	12
Mental health	38	48
Poverty and low income	38	44
Religion and belief	56	22
Rural exclusion	49	29
Sexual orientation	55	27

Key Recommendations

1. **sport**scotland should play a greater leadership role in emphasising the importance of equality. This relates both to communication – being seen to champion equality but also to 'living' the values;

2. Equality must be approached with greater consistency of language. It must be more effectively coordinated across the sport sector, with a greater consideration given to connections between the environments (schools and education, club and community sport, high performance sport);

3. Many equality issues are deep seated and the appropriate balance between addressing these long-term issues and reflecting emerging priorities must be struck;

4. Resources connected to equality should be more visible, accessible and user-friendly;

5. The priority must shift towards valuing and measuring impact, workforce development and culture, rather than the amount of output or activity. Measuring real impact should become the norm through high quality monitoring and evaluation;

6. **sport**scotland should support, inform and provide a mechanism for more systematic peer to peer learning and knowledge exchange. It should capture the strong practice out there in the Scottish sport sector more effectively;

Suggested future discussion and research points:

- *clarity of language and the responsibility for inclusion;*

- *partnership working and building with other organisations, e.g. Higher Education Institutions, specialist groups or other sectors;*

- *improvement of the access to national and local evidence;*

- *better identification of the relevance of different sporting environments to each other* (schools and education, club and community sport, high performance sport);

- *increased ability of the workforce in monitoring and/or evaluation of equality and sport;*

- *the use of separate practical and reflective guidance to empower more people to think and act around equality and sport;*

- *further translation of the idea and understanding of intersectionality into the sport sector.*

The suggestions and recommendations made here support recent and ongoing evaluations and surveys by and for **sport**scotland. For example, an evaluation into the supplementary investment in Scottish Governing Bodies of sport concluded and recommended that for work around equality:

> • There is no quick fix – addressing the issue of under-representation in sport (at all levels) and getting the inactive active cannot be addressed overnight. Short-term projects and investment streams are unlikely to be successful. It requires a longer-term strategic approach and resources (people and finance) to make a difference and create change;
>
> • Linking with, and drawing on, the expertise and networks of specialist third sector organisations (e.g. Stonewall Scotland, Scottish Women in Sport, LEAP Scotland, etc) and/or local community groups, has been key for Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport. This helped Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport to develop a better understanding of the barriers different target groups face;
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> • There are improvements that could be made in terms of Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport being able to evidence and demonstrate the impact of their equalities projects.[13]

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[13] EKOS (2018) Evaluation of Supplementary Investment for Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport. Available via: https://sportscotland.org.uk/

LEARNING NOTE DEVELOPMENT FINDINGS

From fieldwork, the Sport and Equality Learning Notes published in 2016 were seen as useful sources of evidence and knowledge:

> "When looking for problem solutions, it was a good source to see what practical examples there were as guidance. Often guidance sent out on mass isn't great to help everything at once...but useful tool to drop in and out of when looking for ideas," Active Schools staff member

However, there were strong responses around the need to improve the visibility, content and format. For example, respondents said:

> "I think the way the guidance is provided is as important as the content, it needs to be more 21st century than what we have currently", **sport**scotland staff member

> "It would be helpful to have more official national partners to sport for each area we can turn to for questions and support. For example, LeapSport have been a highly valuable organisation for me to link with in promoting their area of expertise across clubs and to further my understanding of the barriers that individuals might face or perceive in sports clubs", Community Sports Hub staff member

> "I find the equalities outcomes hard to use - not easy to align your work to these - feels more about connecting exiting work with the headings. Learning notes are good but so detailed - not the first point of call when you want to get the headline issues or facts", Scottish Governing Body of Sport staff member

An exercise to gather more evidence and feedback to "identify practical recommendations to progress and help prioritise improvement in this area" was carried out through testing the learning notes for their uses, delivery and format. Examples of previous learning notes from **sport**scotland commissioned or driven projects were considered:

These included the previous Sport and Equality Learning Notes,[14] the Achieving Inclusive Coaching Learning Notes,[15] the Changing Lives Through Sport and Physical Activity tools and activities,[16] and the Equality in Practice Guide.[17]

Key **content** takeaways:

- o Needs to be (where possible and appropriate) Scottish based and a clear rationale for the topic area;

- o Needs to be dynamic with headline information, less theory and infographics unless they were made relevant and clear;

- o Needs a clear purpose and target audience and if multiple topics, then the learning note or tool should have a consistent template;

- o Needs to link to operational and strategic aspects of other **sport**scotland documents/language i.e. be relevant and understandable to the workforce and their everyday roles.

Key **layout** takeaways:

- o Needs to have less text and no extended blocks of text;

- o Needs to embrace and showcase the use of universal design principles;

- o Should include more reflection and ways to empower the workforce not prescribe 'fix-all' solutions;

- o Should include more local/on the ground practices, i.e. go beyond national perspectives.

Key **topic and purpose** takeaways:

- o Recognise the difficulty of producing specific practical recommendations as the topics connected to equality and sport are complex;

- o It is important not to be overly directive or to homogenise (i.e. not overlooking the real differences that exist within groups sharing characteristics or in topics);

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[14] Research Scotland (2016) Equality and Sport – Learning Notes. Available via: https://sportscotland.org.uk/

[15] Ekosgen (201) Achieving Inclusive Coaching - Learning Notes. Available via: https://sportscotland.org.uk/

[16] **sport**scotland (last updated March 2020) Inclusive Community. Available via: https://sportscotland.org.uk/clubs/help-for-clubs/organised/inclusive-community/

[17] Plan4Sport and **sport**scotland (2015) Equality in Practice Guide. Available via: https://sportscotland.org.uk/

o It is important to recognise that the level of understanding differs between workforce members. The support must meet the needs of a range of experience, knowledge and understanding;

o It is important that best practice guidance can resonate with most people, i.e. create impact regardless of the level of understanding or expertise;

o It is important for **sport**scotland to further think through its role/responsibility and position the purpose of a learning note more clearly.
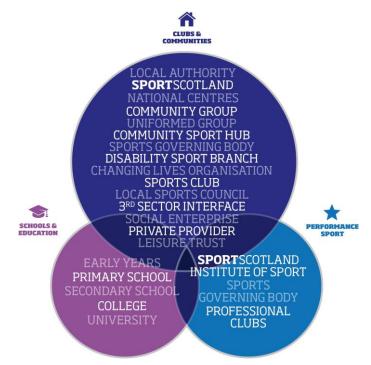
Practical recommendations to progress and help prioritise the engagement and impact of learning note content are as follows:

1. Inclusion of 'Scottish Context and Evidence' section to provide context and rationale for each topic;

2. Clear text on the purpose of the learning note (to be included consistently across content and dissemination);

3. A consistent template for each learning note;

4. Inclusion of 'Scottish Sport Context and Evidence' with the use of logos, the Sport for Life inclusion slogan and the visualisation of the Scottish map. Existing diagrams from previous research and **sport**scotland programmes would be useful, for example the Clubs and Communities environment diagram[18] (below);

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[18] Clubs and Communities environments diagram. Available at: https://sportscotland.org.uk/clubs/clubs-and-communities-framework/

5. Inclusion of 'Reflective Guidance' as well as 'Practical Guidance' and examples into each learning note;

6. To promote existing **sport**scotland tools and other organisations, e.g. the inclusion continuum; promote Scottish examples where possible;
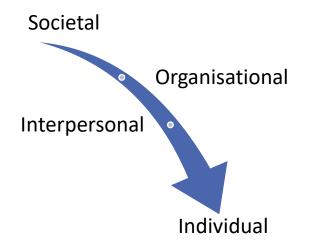
7. To encourage personal reflection to allow the reader to apply the learning note content into their own 'systems' with both practical and reflective guidance, for example:

> **Societal: What monitoring and evaluation measures are in place to measure the impact or understanding of this topic?** *Links to Leapfrog[19] 'tools and toolboxes' for creative and engaging consultation; Evaluation Support Scotland[20] for free to use impact tools; Scottish Government Equality Evidence Finder[21].*

8. Include visualised 'systems' into a diagram (see below for a basic example) to further clarify.

Workforce development and experience of equality is influenced by a variety of systems.

Equality is complex. This guidance is a point on the journey to help people to better understand these issues and to incorporate them into their work.

Societal

Organisational

Interpersonal

Individual

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[19] Leapfrog resources free to access: http://leapfrog.tools/

[20] Evaluation Support Scotland free to access: https://evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/

[21] Scottish Government Equality Evidence Finder free to access: www.equalityevidence.scot

Finally, during the fieldwork and testing, people were very impressed and pleased that **sport**scotland had consulted about the learning note use, delivery and format. It was emphasised that this must happen consistently to ensure that the content is high quality and the impact is far reaching.

> **9.** A strong recommendation for **sport**scotland is to further test equality and sport learning note content prior to and after launch. This should include a broad range of stakeholders and partners who engage in equality and diversity across the Scottish sporting system.

This links to and builds on previous recommendations, for better engagement with the expertise and networks of specialist third sector organisations (e.g. Scottish Disability Sport, Plan4Sport, Scottish Women in Sport, LEAP Scotland, etc), local community groups, and Higher Education Institutions (e.g. Observatory for Sport in Scotland).

The suggestions and recommendations made here support recent and ongoing evaluations and surveys commissioned by **sport**scotland. For example, an evaluation of **sport**scotland's support for coaches and coaching who in relation to resources recommended that for work around equality concluded:

Use available resources effectively

A strategic and joined up approach that harnesses all available resources and interventions is effective in tackling inequalities in sport participation. This multi-agency approach will ensure consistent messaging and approaches and will help to maximise the impact of the work of each partner.

Make equalities a cross-cutting theme

Embedding inclusion of under-represented groups and people with protected characteristics across all coach development content, design and delivery provides coaches with greater inclusion skills and knowledge. It demonstrates the importance of equalities, reinforces the messages and ensures that equalities is built in at every stage and level of coaching planning and delivery.[22]

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[22] Ekosgen (201) Achieving Inclusive Coaching - Learning Notes. Available via:
https://sportscotland.org.uk/media/3441/coach-wider-evaluation_-equalities-learning-note_final.pdf