

**Sport 21 Background Report no. 10**

This is no. 10 in a series of background reports being prepared – or reproduced from other sources – during 2002/03 to inform the revision of *Sport 21*, the national strategy for sport in Scotland.

**Sports Clubs in Scotland**

**Summary**

Research Digest no. 59

Summary of a  
research study for **sportscotland**

by

Mary Allison

Centre for Leisure Research  
University of Edinburgh

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## Further Information

This is one of a series of background reports being brought together by **sportscotland's** Research Unit to provide contextual information for the revision of *Sport 21*, the national strategy for sport in Scotland. These background reports – and all **sportscotland's** research reports and summary digests – are placed on our website: [www.sportscotland.org.uk](http://www.sportscotland.org.uk)

Background reports placed on the website to date are:

- BR1 *Public attitudes towards the importance of excellence in Scottish sport.*  
(System Three survey of the general public for **sportscotland**)
- BR2 *Public attitudes towards the importance of sport in Scotland.*  
(System Three survey of the general public for **sportscotland**)
- BR3 *United Kingdom's sporting preferences.* Survey by BMRB for UK Sport.  
(Public attitudes to sporting excellence reproduced from UK Sport's website)
- BR4 *Attitudes to physical activity by low participants.* Scott Porter for the PATF.  
(Reproduced with permission from the Physical Activity Task Force website)
- BR5 [\*Sport and the family.\*](#) Survey by MORI for the Nestlé Family Monitor.  
(Attitudes of adults towards children's participation; website link)
- BR6 *Sport and local government in the new Scotland.* Ashley Pringle & Tim Cruttenden.  
(An overview for **sportscotland** and COSLA)
- BR7 *Entrance charges and sports participation.* Fred Coalter for the PATF.  
(Reproduced with permission from the Physical Activity Task Force website)
- BR8 *Sport and minority ethnic communities: aiming at social inclusion.*  
(Summary of a report for **sportscotland** by Scott Porter)
- BR9 *Sport and people with a disability: aiming at social inclusion.*  
(Summary of a report for **sportscotland** by Scott Porter)
- BR10 *Sports clubs in Scotland: summary.* Mary Allison for **sportscotland**.  
(Summary of a major survey of sports clubs)

This report (BR10) summarises a major survey of nearly 3,500 clubs plus in-depth interviews. The full report is also available on the **sportscotland** website: [\*Sports clubs in Scotland.\*](#) Separate research digests have been prepared that provide the results of the questionnaire survey for clubs in each of the following ten sports where the sample sizes were considered large enough to justify individual analyses:

Angling (to follow)	<a href="#">Athletics</a> <a href="#">Badminton</a> <a href="#">Bowls</a>	<a href="#">Cricket</a> <a href="#">Football</a> <a href="#">Golf</a>	<a href="#">Hockey</a> <a href="#">Swimming</a> <a href="#">Tennis</a>
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Further reports are being prepared for individual sports in the *Sport 21* Background Report series. These draw on a range of sources including the clubs study to provide profiles of the sports, covering:

Athletics	Curling	Dance/Exercise	Hockey	Swimming
Badminton	Cycling	Golf	Judo	Tennis
Cricket	Football	Hillwalking/Mountaineering	Sailing	

For further information, contact:

Research Unit  
**sportscotland**  
Caledonia House  
South Gyle  
Edinburgh EH12 9DQ  
tel: 0131 317 7200  
fax: 0131 317 7202  
email: [research@sportscotland.org.uk](mailto:research@sportscotland.org.uk)

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## Objectives

In January 1999, the Centre for Leisure Research of Edinburgh University was contracted by **sportscotland** (then the Scottish Sports Council) to undertake a project to investigate and report on the nature of sports clubs in Scotland. This study of clubs was prompted by a recognition that:

The issue of club development was identified consistently throughout the consultation process for *Sport 21* as an area in need of major attention. (p77)\*

Further, and to address this issue of club development, *Sport 21* – the national strategy for sport in Scotland – established a target that by the year 2003 Scottish sport should:

establish a national programme which will identify and promote new approaches to club development and deliver a strong and vibrant club structure in Scotland. (p23)\*

This research study is intended to provide a strong information base on which to build such a national club development programme.

## Research Approach

The project was undertaken in three stages:

- Identifying the universe of sports clubs in Scotland (January-April 1999)
- A postal survey of all identified sports clubs (May-September 1999)
- Interviews and case studies to explore issues arising from the postal survey (January-March 2000)

To provide as much information as possible about the existence of sports clubs in Scotland approximately 300 organisations were mailed with requests for contact names and addresses of clubs known to them.

An initial total of 14,599 addresses were obtained and following a period of checking and removing duplicates a final mailing list of 10,204 questionnaires were posted out of which 561 were undelivered or otherwise ineligible. A total of 3,485 completed questionnaires were returned – a response rate of 36 per cent.

Around 80 sports were identified in the address database and clubs from 67 of these responded (of the sports for whom no responses were received, most only had either one or two clubs identified).

Following the survey phase of the project, seven sports were selected by **sportscotland** for further, in-depth study. The selected sports were:

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\* Scottish Sports Council *Sport 21: nothing left to chance*. Edinburgh: The Council, 1998.

Badminton    Basketball    Canoeing    Football  
Judo            Swimming    Tennis

In addition, the role of the commercial sector in club development was explored through interviews with two providers.

Representatives from the following organisations were interviewed:

- Governing bodies of the seven sports
- A club in each of the seven sports
- Eight local authorities

## Findings

### What is a Sports Club?

- There can be no single definition of a sports club.
- Clubs define themselves in largely cultural/ideological terms – their history, sense of place and club atmosphere.
- Clubs do not regard themselves as being in the voluntary sector and in this context it might be useful to revisit and strengthen the concept of clubs as amateur sports organisations.
- The diversity of functions, structures, resources, values and ideologies is perhaps the strength of sports clubs. Although each club can be quite narrow in whom they cater for, collectively they provide a wide range of options for sports participation.

### How Many Clubs in Scotland?

- The best guess that can be made at the total number of sports clubs in Scotland is around 13,000.
- Football (19.7%) and bowls (18.9%) comprised a fifth each of the clubs address database. Together with golf (6.4%) and badminton (4.9%) the four sports accounted for half of all the identified clubs.

### What do Clubs Provide and Why?

- Most clubs (93%) provided activity in a single sport, 5% catered for two sports and 2% catered for three sports.
- Although competition is important to clubs and for 12% of clubs was the most important value, it generally came second place to enjoyment which was the most important value for 65%.

- This does not imply that clubs are not widely involved in competition – 88% took part in competitions external to the club, 62% took part in national level competitive activity and 15% in international level activity.
- Clubs are not multi-sport environments and the possibilities for developing this type of sports provision within existing clubs seems very limited.
- However, clubs acknowledged that children would benefit from a multi-sport environment and it would be important to create links between such children's multi-sport clubs and the more adult-orientated single sports clubs. Young people are likely to gravitate towards the latter if they find a particular activity that they enjoy and wish to continue.
- Clubs also demonstrated that there are possibilities for clubs of the same sport to work together on all or aspects of what they offer and this would seem a much more realistic target given that it would require less of a cultural and more of a structural change.

## Who are the Members?

- Clubs vary a great deal in size: the smallest responding club had 4 members and the largest 1,920, the average being 133. Around half (54%) of the responding clubs had fewer than 60 members and two-thirds (68%) fewer than 100 members.
- Clubs consider the relevance of their size in relation to the facilities/areas that are used – if the facility is too crowded then they have too many members. Concerns with having too few members emerge if this threatens the viability of the club or sections within the club.
- In almost all cases, growing the club requires more facility access and this is generally regarded by the clubs as 'a real struggle'. Often growth or other changes in membership take place very slowly and this makes the changes easier for clubs to manage.
- The opportunities for non-playing, social membership of sports clubs seem very limited even for clubs that own their own social facilities (36% of clubs). However, perhaps influenced by the growth in early retirement and improved health to a longer age, there is a large proportion of clubs (44%) that cater mainly for recreational participation. In this context, it should not be assumed that only those interested in competitive sport join clubs – many whose sole involvement is recreational sport can and do join.
- This recreational element has not been evident to the same extent in team sports, perhaps because the difficulties of keeping a team together require a competitive focus but also because limited access to facilities means that competitive activity is generally given priority.
- Clubs catered for men and women of all age groups, although a greater proportion catered for adults (85%) than for younger age groups (70%). Further, 30% of responding clubs only had adult members and 15% only had junior members.

- A greater proportion of responding clubs had members in age groups 12-17 and 18-34 years than members of any other individual age group. However, the clubs catering for older and younger age groups had a greater average number of participants within these age groups – they tended to be more concentrated into the fewer clubs catering for them.
- Clubs indicated that sport for teenagers in particular may need to be supported with broader youth development expertise than that found in many clubs. Their need to try out a range of sports, have largely unstructured activity and relatively unsupervised spaces for socialising and experiment with a range of adult roles (managing, organising) suggests that some form of special provision may need to be developed to support what is already on offer in clubs.
- It is possible that this type of provision is being made through schools and youth organisations and in this context the emphasis would be on ensuring that appropriate links between these more generalist environments to more adult-orientated sports clubs are developed.

## Where do Clubs Operate?

- Access to facilities is perhaps the single greatest issue in ensuring both the sustainability and growth of sports clubs in Scotland. This needs to be seen in the context that 42% of the clubs used local authority leisure facilities for playing while 30% owned their own.
- Sports development interviewees believed that there may not be a shortage of facilities, simply a need to better plan and manage the use of existing facilities and educate facility managers about the needs of clubs. A general failure to see sports facility management as a central aspect of sports development planning was commented on by a number of interviewees.
- Quality of facilities will, to some extent, be compromised by clubs if the facility suits their needs in terms of access and cost. However, this compromise will tend to be in terms of the quality of décor and size of the space and not facilities that require fundamental repairs. Facilities owned by clubs themselves face major issues when such structural or large-scale repairs are required – at these times clubs consider closure as an option.
- A facility base that ‘feels like a home’ is a central element of how clubs define themselves and small features such as a storage cupboard or a noticeboard can make a major difference to clubs' sense of ownership.

## How are Clubs Managed?

- Clubs operate on a 'need-to' basis with minimum staffing, structures, income and expenditure. This is possibly because clubs are almost entirely staffed by two or three people who are not paid for the work they do. These people generally regard themselves as office bearers or people with a relatively formal role in the club.

Although they are unpaid, they do not necessarily regard themselves as volunteers – volunteers are generally thought of as a broader pool of people that undertake more casual activities such as driving teams and helping at events. This distinction between officials and volunteers is important and often overlooked.

- In some sports it is common practice to pay coaches, and clubs with their own facilities generally pay staff for maintenance/cleaning work. Coaches tend to remain the same from year to year but administration generally is undertaken by unpaid club committee members who are elected.
- Although clubs acknowledged the importance of having written documentation (19% had written development plans and 68% had a constitution), they were regarded as a useful safety net rather than a framework that guided day-to-day practice. Management in the clubs was generally regarded as a much more organic and intuitive process based on trust and experience rather than formal contracts and codes of practice.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of the clubs' main sources of income came from fees paid by the participants themselves for membership, matches/games and coaching/instruction. This relative lack of dependence on others for direct financial support makes clubs much more autonomous than many organisations in both the statutory and voluntary sectors.
- Further, the fact that almost two-thirds (63%) of clubs offer membership on a pay and play basis indicates that not only do they provide a service to the general public but that they also have a mechanism for generating income that can perhaps subsidise subscribers to the club.
- However, the interviews indicated that clubs are generally quite under-developed in terms of their finance and operate on a very basic income and expenditure account. Few have cash reserves or other assets that could be used for matching funding or longer-term investment and development of the club. In this context it was suggested by an interviewee that clubs ought to be able to use other assets such as their time that is given freely for coaching and other tasks as collateral in bids for matched funding.

## Do Clubs Need Development?

- Given that nearly half (46%) of the clubs that responded to the postal survey had been in existence for at least 30 years including a third (34%) for over 50 years, there is good reason to acknowledge and respect their view of what is required to make clubs sustainable.
- Many clubs have demonstrated a remarkable ability to maintain continuity in the face of considerable social changes; however, this conflicts with the view of them as fragile organisations needing development to survive.
- The success of clubs appears to be attributable to three factors: a focus on the needs of their members as an absolute priority; the ability to raise adequate

finances to meet these needs from within the club (autonomy); and a focus on short-term planning.

- Club development from the clubs' perspective means addressing the barriers and threats to meeting current members' needs and attracting new members. Currently, the priorities in this area are improving facility access and addressing concerns about public standards and child protection.
- From the perspective of clubs, broader and generally longer-term sports development planning was not widely regarded as relevant to their needs. This is not to say in any respect that clubs are short-sighted, merely that they believe their long-term success depends on taking care of the day-to-day business of the club. However, in some cases it is clear that the needs of clubs and broader sports development needs can coincide and development can be mutually beneficial.
- This mutually agreed and beneficial sports development work seems to be characterised by three factors: developing equal partnerships based on mutual respect; a willingness to review structures and responsibilities; and a willingness to consider the financial implications of development.
- In taking forward a club development programme, clubs would welcome support to address the barriers and threats to retaining and attracting members. Clubs can also collaborate in addressing broader sports development issues, but this must be underpinned by a willingness to understand and respect the values of amateur sports organisations.

## **The Next Steps**

Following consultations, this study will form the basis for further development and strategic approaches to assist clubs in contributing to the course of Scottish sport in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.