Equality and Sport Research

Executive summary

sportscotland

Horizons Research

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This summary highlights key findings from research into equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in Scotland's sporting sector. It explains how well EDI principles are embedded, assesses the understanding and awareness of equality issues among the sporting workforce, and evaluates the effectiveness of existing resources provided by **sport**scotland. The findings reveal areas of progress, ongoing challenges, and actionable recommendations to support a more inclusive sporting environment.

Key Findings: How Well Are Equalities Embedded in Sport?

Over 91% of respondents believe there has been a recent shift toward greater inclusivity in the sector, with improvements in leadership, guidance, and visibility around equality in sports. While progress has been made, most participants feel more needs to be done to be fully inclusive. Barriers such as financial constraints, negative attitudes toward gender identities, racism, and discrimination against individuals with disabilities persist.

Findings show that equality is more integrated in schools and education compared to performance sports and community clubs. Many professionals working in the sporting sector feel supported in promoting and embedding equality-related practices, but there is a call for increased resources and guidance.

Understanding and Awareness of Equality Issues

- Over half of respondents feel confident in their understanding of EDI issues, but 43% report a basic awareness.
- A strong understanding is reported for women and girls, mental health, and poverty, while significant gaps remain around LGBTQIA+ issues, especially transgender and non-binary inclusion, as well as ethnic diversity, deafness, and religion and belief.
- The most cited obstacles include infrastructure issues (e.g., transport and facility accessibility), stigma and discrimination, and financial constraints.
- Accessibility issues are particularly acute in rural areas and for individuals with disabilities, with rural exclusion being an under-researched topic.
- Over 70% of respondents expressed a need for more training and guidance on transgender issues, race, and religion and belief.

Perceptions of sportscotland Tools and Resources

Most respondents had accessed the EDI section of the **sport**scotland website and the EDI toolbox, while fewer had used Equality in Sport Learning Notes or Research Reports.

Resources were generally rated as "Good", with the EDI toolbox receiving higher praise for its practical usefulness. Suggestions for improvement included:

- greater visibility and promotion of resources.
- increased focus on practical examples and actions.

- expanded use of accessible formats, such as videos.

Online webinars were the most requested form of training, followed by in-person workshops and website resources.

Findings on Equality Outcome Groups (2021–2025)

sportscotland's current equality outcomes 2021-25 are person centred and focus on people that:

- Live in poverty and low income
- Experience mental health problems
- Are over 50 years old
- Are part of our diverse ethnic communities

Findings from our research show:

- Rising living costs disproportionately affect participation, particularly for low-income families and Care Experienced young people and their families. Poverty was a key factor reinforcing inequalities across all groups.
- While an understanding of mental health has improved, mental and cognitive barriers remain significant challenges, impacting participation and inclusion.
- Sport participation declines significantly with age, particularly among adults aged 65+ in deprived areas. This raises concerns about loneliness and wellbeing in an ageing population.
- Discrimination and underrepresentation remain prevalent. Race was the most requested area for training and support, with respondents identifying stigma and racism as major barriers.

We recommend **sport**scotland continue working with these groups to test new ideas, recognising that these outcomes are a small part of the overall EDI work carried out by **sport**scotland.

Practical recommendations for improvement and progress

Addressing Cost and Financial Barriers

The rising cost of living disproportionately affects participation among low-income groups, compounding inequalities. Financial constraints were frequently cited as barriers, particularly for Care Experienced children and young people and economically disadvantaged families.

Recommendations:

- introduce flexible payment models such as "pay what you can" schemes and reduced fees for low-income families.
- provide subsidies for equipment and travel costs to alleviate financial burdens.
- promote free or low-cost community-based sports programmes to encourage participation among those facing economic challenges.

Enhancing infrastructure and accessibility

Infrastructure and physical access barriers were identified as the most significant barriers to participation, cited by 64.8% of respondents. Rural exclusion and inaccessible facilities were particularly problematic.

Recommendations:

- ensure all new and redeveloped facilities are fully accessible, including features such as ramps, accessible bathrooms, and suitable changing rooms.
- address transport challenges in rural areas - create new partnerships to improve access to sports facilities.
- highlight and implement best practices for inclusive facility design and use.

Expanding targeted training and resources

The research revealed significant knowledge gaps, with only 20.7% of respondents reporting a strong understanding of issues related to transgender issues. Over 70% of respondents sought more guidance on race, and religion and belief.

Recommendations:

- develop and expand training programmes focused on underrepresented groups, including transgender, ethnic, and religious minorities.
- update inclusion guidance with real-life examples and practical tools for implementation.
- promote the UK Sports Councils initiative Moving to Inclusion which features guiding principles for developing policies around including transgender people in domestic sport

Promoting diversity and representation

Underrepresentation of diverse groups, including women, ethnically diverse communities, and individuals with disabilities, persists in senior leadership roles.

Recommendations:

- increase diversity in leadership positions by promoting equitable recruitment practice.
- implement reverse mentoring programmes to provide senior leaders with insights from underrepresented groups, supporting more inclusive decision-making.
- collect and analyse workforce diversity data to inform targeted strategies and track improvement.

Boosting volunteer support

Clubs rely heavily on volunteers, but many lack the time, resources, or training needed to address EDI challenges effectively.

Recommendations:

- provide accessible, practical EDI training tailored for volunteers, including modules on unconscious bias, creating inclusive environments, and engaging underrepresented groups.
- support capacity building in grassroots clubs through mentoring programmes, shared resources, and recognition of volunteer contributions.

Strengthening visibility and engagement with resources

Participants emphasised the need for more practical tools and formats, such as videos, to enhance engagement with **sport**scotland's resources.

Recommendations:

- actively promote resources like the EDI toolbox through workshops, webinars, and social media campaigns.
- regularly update resources with input from stakeholders and include alternative formats such as videos and interactive visuals to ensure accessibility.
- treat resources as "living documents" that evolve based on feedback and emerging needs.

Embedding Equality at the System Level

Only 22.2% of survey respondents had equality explicitly included in their job descriptions, highlighting the need for systemic change.

Recommendations:

- integrate equality-related responsibilities into job descriptions across the sports workforce to ensure accountability and collective responsibility.
- encourage sports organisations to embed EDI practices as a core part of their strategic priorities and plans.