



Equality and Sport Research 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR **sportscotland**

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This executive summary presents an **overview of the research, key findings and key recommendations** from an exploration of equality and sport.

This research links to **sportscotland's** Corporate Strategy, Sport for Life, which is underpinned by their commitment to inclusion. **sportscotland** 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 Scotland³ 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 **sportscotland's** coaching in Scotland evaluation and research.

The research was commissioned by **sportscotland** and they appointed Counsel Ltd to conduct this project in March 2020. In the future **sportscotland** 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.

¹ **sportscotland** (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

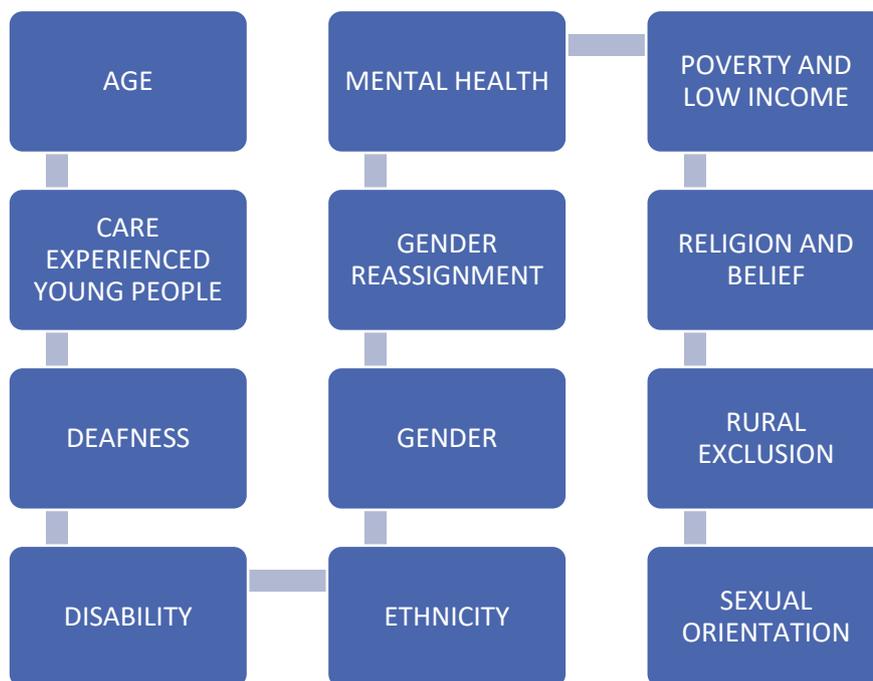
³ Research Scotland (2016) Equality and Sport Research. Available via: <https://sportscotland.org.uk/>

⁴ To focus on Scotland and Scottish sport.

The project aims were achieved by conducting⁵ (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 Scotland⁶ (including **sportscotland**, 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 characteristics⁷ and **sportscotland**'s public sector equality duties⁸ to include five further areas to explore:



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 **sportscotland** supported the researchers to 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

Headline 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, **sportscotland** 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 **sportscotland** 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: **sportscotland** 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

- 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

- 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

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 **sportscotland** (2017) Equality Outcomes 2017-2021. Available via: <https://sportscotland.org.uk/>

how the Sport for Life¹² 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.

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 previous research, some groups (e.g. women and girls or young people) due to their size and visibility are easier to reach and measure.

- 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 **sportscotland** and the sport sector.
- 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

- 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 LGBTQ!”, Local Authority staff member

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

¹² **sportscotland** (2020) Sport for Life – Summary of progress. Available via: <https://sportscotland.org.uk/>

previous research responsibility for taking forward these challenges does not lie with **sportscotland** alone.

- The confidence about thinking about equality and inclusion generally was high and there was real strength in informal networks to exchange ideas when issues arise.
- A less positive trend in this research was a lack of awareness of the equality and sport research undertaken by **sportscotland**. For example, a significant amount of individuals in the fieldwork reported the recognition or access to previous Equality and Sport research outputs as either 'seen but not accessed' or 'not seen before' as demonstrated in this snapshot of survey results here:
 - Equality and Sport Learning Notes (2016) – 64% had either seen but not accessed or not seen before.
 - Equality and Sport Research Report (2016) – 61.7% had either seen but not accessed or not seen before.

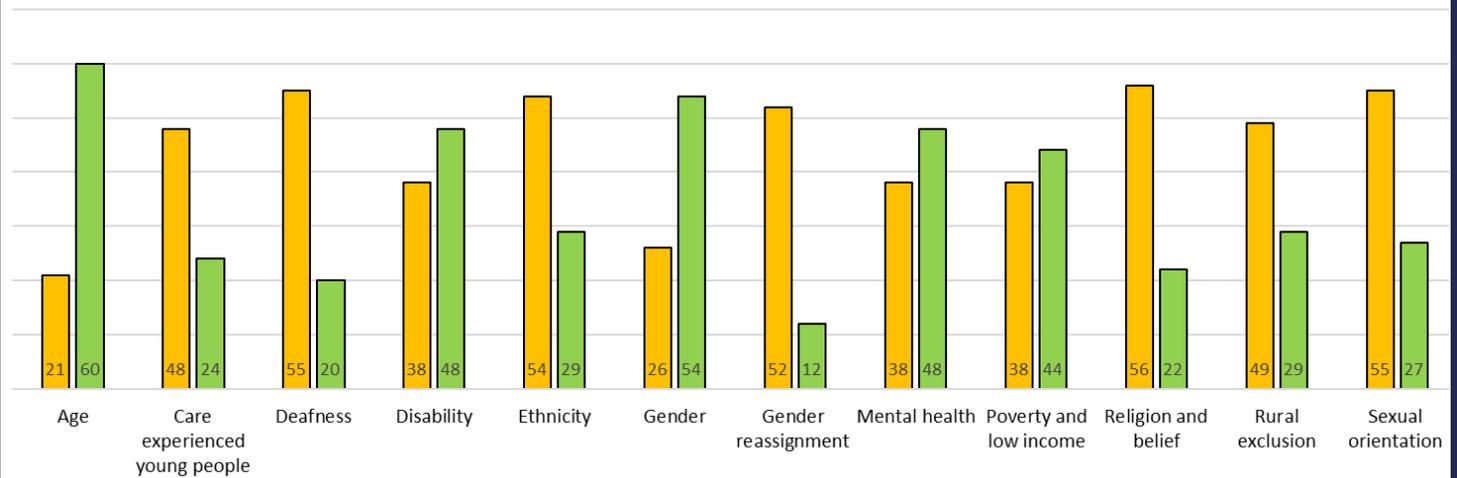
In the fieldwork, reasons were given about why people do not access such resources, these included:

- A lack of **time** to keep up to date with latest sport and equality publications;
 - A lack of **capacity**, 79% of people surveyed said equality did not feature directly in their job title or job description;
 - Limited access, a reported challenge was around the **navigation** of the **sportscotland** website and channels of communication around equality and sport;
 - A limited understanding about whether publications are **targeted or useful** for their role or not;
 - A limited understanding about how the equality publications are **connected** with targets, action plans or funding models.
- 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%). Further to this, the topics where people were mostly likely to have 'A lot' of understanding in the survey were age (60%), gender (54%), disability (48%) and mental health (48%). All the topics 'A little' and 'A lot' responses are summarised in the following graph:

Overall, rate your understanding in relation to each of the following characteristics:

■ A little

■ A lot



Key Recommendations

1. **sportscotland** 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. **sportscotland** 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.*