



Equality and Sport Research

Final Report

sportscotland

Horizons Research

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Executive summary

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 **sportscotland**. 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 **sportscotland** 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 **sportscotland** 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 **sportscotland**.

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 **sportscotland'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.

Introduction

sportscotland commissioned Horizons Research to undertake a research project on equality and sport in Scotland, building upon previous **sportscotland** research into equality and sport published in 2016 and 2020¹ as well as other key **sportscotland** workstreams related to this issue including its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) approach², the Sport for Life Strategy and its 2021-25 Equality Outcomes.³

The overall aim of the project has been to help improve work within the sporting sector in Scotland in relation to advancing equality, eliminating discrimination and fostering good relations. In particular, the project sought to:

- update and extend **sportscotland**'s existing equalities and sport evidence resources;
- engage directly with the sport sector to understand whether and how equalities is embedded into all aspects of **sportscotland**'s work;
- gather evidence of the sports sector's understanding and awareness of equality issues in sport;
- gather feedback on existing tools and resources on **sportscotland** website; and
- identify practical recommendations to progress and help prioritise improvement in this area.

The project consisted of two main phases. Phase 1 (review of existing evidence base):

- a desk-based literature review of current and recent research and policy documents related to access to sports participation;
- update sportscotland's existing database of research around sport and equality;
- update existing learning notes covering current protected characteristics; and
- creation of new learning notes for some additional priority groups.

Phase 2 (Key partner engagement):

- engage key stakeholders and partners across Scotland's sporting system through a combination of interviews, focus groups and surveys to:
 - gather evidence on how well embedded equalities are across Scotland's sport sector;
 - assess the sport sector's understanding and awareness of equalities in sport; and
 - gather feedback on existing **sportscotland** tools and resources.

The project took place between May 2024 and December 2024, with most of the primary research with the sector taking place in September and October 2024. This Report presents findings and evidence gathered across all phases of the research, as well as recommendations to help prioritise and progress improvements in this area based on the research. In addition, a collection of new and updated Learning Notes were developed, as well as the updated Sport and Equality database. These are available separate to this report [LINKS TO BE ADDED - Learning Notes / Research Database as appropriate].

¹ **sportscotland** (2024), [Equality and sport research](#)

² **sportscotland** (2023), [Sport for Life and our approach to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion](#)

³ **sportscotland** (2023), [New Ideas - Our equality outcomes](#)

Policy context

As Scotland's national agency for sport, **sportscotland** is committed to helping the people of Scotland become active and get the most out of the sporting system. **sportscotland** works with partners from across Scotland to deliver sport and physical activity through school, community or performance-sport settings.

However, **sportscotland** has also recognised that 'not everyone feels included in sport' and it has set out a number of commitments and work-streams to address this issue. This includes **sportscotland**'s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) approach⁴, which is aligned with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

As a national body, **sportscotland** is held accountable by the Equality Act (2010)⁵, as well as the PSED. This accountability has led to a number of significant changes to its national strategic approach to equalities, as highlighted in the previously commissioned research conducted in 2020⁶. As part of its commitment to inclusion and to consistently improve access to sport, **sportscotland** has developed their corporate strategy 'Sport for Life'⁷.

Sport for Life is shaped by a commitment to inclusion and equality in sports throughout Scotland and incorporates six key principles: inclusive, accountable, responsive, person-centred, collaborative, world class. These principles align closely with the Equality Act (2010), and not only aims to enhance sports participation amongst all groups, but also to utilise sport to realise broader social benefits, including improved health and wellbeing, community cohesion, increased productivity and skills development, and social mobility.

sportscotland's approach to EDI has three strands to build a system that is inclusive by design. These include 'our people', 'our system' and 'new ideas'. As highlighted in their equality outcomes 2021-25:

We've adopted these because we want sport to be inclusive by design and we want to help us all experience the benefits of equality.
This is transformational, systemic change.

As part of this strategic direction, **sportscotland** has identified four groups who may experience disadvantages when participating in sport, and who are underrepresented in their programmes. These include:

- people who live in poverty and low income,
- people who experience mental health problems,
- people who are over 50 years of age, and

⁴ <https://sportscotland.org.uk/about-us/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/>

⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>

⁶ <https://sportscotland.org.uk/about-us/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/equality-and-sport-research>

⁷ <https://sportforlife.org.uk/>

- people who are part of diverse ethnic communities.

sportscotland has also adopted an intersectional approach to equalities, recognising that disadvantage and barriers may be overlapping.

In addition, whilst these four focus groups have been highlighted as part of **sportscotland**'s New Ideas approach, it is important to highlight **sportscotland**'s broader approach. This focuses on all protected characteristics (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation), in addition to other personal characteristics such as socio-economic status, Care Experienced, deafness, mental health and rural exclusion.

Following their publication of the 'New Ideas: Our equality outcomes'⁸ strategy, **sportscotland** identified that as needs evolve, and as society evolves, so too does the need for understanding and our evidence base. As part of this, there is a need to update and extend the current equalities and sport evidence resources, to enable ongoing improvement.

As part of the previous research, a database of existing literature has been compiled, and is now hosted on **sportscotland**'s website. This database was created by Research Scotland and includes key pieces of research around sport and equality. This database is a valuable resource but needs updated with new research that has taken place during the last nine years.

It would also be helpful to fill some gaps within the database. For example, the category of 'disability' accounts for 21.8% of the literature available within the database, however the research conducted in 2020 states that there is a lack of literature regarding the experience of the deaf community when participating in sport. Additionally, rural exclusion, as a discrete category, requires further research in order to provide understanding of how this may cause barriers to participation.

Both pieces of previous **sportscotland** research have highlighted key outcomes and recommendations. From the 2016 research⁹ key recommendations for the organisation included: improved leadership, consistency in equality initiatives and improving viability of resources. Future research recommendations included studies exploring sexual orientation and transgender.

Key outcomes and recommendations from the 2020 research¹⁰ highlighted that there was a challenge with translating policy into practice. Whilst the workforce operating across Scotland's sporting system had high awareness of the challenges faced by people from deprived areas, girls and young women and disabled young people, knowledge of "faith, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, rural exclusion, and marriage and civil partnership inequalities were understood the least". Furthermore, understanding and interpreting changes in law, policy and politics into operational and strategic actions was highlighted as a challenge.

Further recommendations from the 2020 report included addressing the **lack of evidence and literature surrounding key groups, including transgender, deafness and ethnicity, ideally by conducting research that captured the voices and experiences of individuals within identified disadvantaged groups.**

⁸ <https://sportscotland.org.uk/about-us/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/new-ideas-our-equality-outcomes>

⁹ <https://sportscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-publications/archive/equality-and-sport-research-2016>

¹⁰ <https://sportscotland.org.uk/about-us/our-publications/archive/equality-and-sport-research-2020>

Similarly, **there exists a need to explore the experiences of the current sport system workforce. As highlighted by both the 2020 and 2016 research, whilst the workforce was enthusiastic about removing barriers to participation in sport, challenges remained about how to ‘practically’ achieve this.**

Following the publication of the 2020 research, **key groups were identified as requiring additional investigation or focused initiatives to advance equality in sports. These included: women and girls, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, the LGBTQIA+ community, people from low-income backgrounds, and older adults.** Furthermore, the research found that there was a specific need to understand the **impact of deafness, mental health and rural exclusion on sports participation and inclusion.**

Protected characteristics

sportscotland is committed to reducing inequalities within the context of the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act 2010 safeguards individuals from discrimination based on protected characteristics. These characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

sportscotland emphasises these aspects within their "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Toolbox"¹¹ to provide guidance on creating a more inclusive environment in the sporting system. The toolbox is designed to help individuals understand and apply principles of equality, diversity, and inclusion in sporting contexts. Promoting inclusive design and better engagement across all levels of sport. At the same time, in its EDI strategy, **sportscotland** states that,

“Our mainstreaming approach won’t be tied to the protected characteristics within our equality outcomes. This leaves us free to look at how we make the system inclusive by design for all equality groups.”

As such, **sportscotland** is looking to include people beyond those protected by the Equality Act who may experience structural disadvantage or obstacles to participating in sport. These may be as a result of other social, economic, geographical, health-related, or family-based characteristics, such as socio-economic status, Care Experienced, deafness, mental health or rural living. More details on each of these outlined in **Annex A.**

Assessing the wider research landscape

The following explores the landscape of equality-related research within the Scottish sporting sector since the publication of the Equality and Sport Research (2020) report. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on research activities, a large volume of evidence has emerged, exploring how various protected characteristics intersect with access, participation, and experience in sport.

This section of the report will focus on areas that have received the most attention and those with relevance to promoting inclusion in Scottish sport.

In 2020, Counsel LTD released a report for **sportscotland** titled ‘Equality and Sport Research 2020.’ The report explored and highlighted ways to “help improve work within the sport sector in Scotland,

¹¹ <https://sportscotland.org.uk/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/equality-diversity-and-inclusion-toolbox>

to **advance equality, eliminate discrimination, and foster good relations**¹² Since their report in 2020, at least 75 new research reports have been published around the nine protected characteristics identified by the Equality Act of 2010, and an additional (and further inclusive) four characteristics incorporated by **sportscotland**. Some of these new pieces of research cover more than one protected characteristic, and while many focus on the UK, and sometimes more specifically Scotland, a small handful also look at an international experience when a UK-centric lens was not possible:

Age - 8	Sex - 9
Marriage and Civil Partnership - 0	Pregnancy and Maternity - 1
Gender Reassignment - 8	Race - 25
Religion and belief - 2	Disability - 10
Sexual orientation - 5	

sportscotland's additional equalities characteristics:

Rural exclusion - 4	Care Experience - 2
Poverty and low income - 4	Social inclusion - 1

A summary of key research for the equality groups with the highest number of research reports since 2020 (race, disability and transgender and non-binary) outlined in **Annex B**. This includes results from a literature review on race and ethnicity carried out by Sporting Equals in 2024 for **sportscotland**.

Summary

Although approximately 75 reports over four to five years may seem modest, it's crucial to consider the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research across all sectors faced significant disruption, with funding cuts leading to project delays and cancellations. This explains the lower output in 2021 (nine publications) compared to 2020 (19 publications), which likely reflected pre-pandemic research efforts.

¹² **sportscotland** (2020), [Equality and Sport Research 2020](#)

Despite these challenges, important and timely research continued to emerge. Notable examples include studies on the sporting experiences of Care Experienced youth (Sandford et al.)¹³, the impact of rural poverty and social exclusion on children's access to sport (Glass et al.)¹⁴, initiatives to increase female participation in sport (SportEd's Project 51)¹⁵, and the post-COVID challenges faced by vulnerable young people in accessing sport (Scottish Sports Futures)¹⁶.

¹³ Sandford et al. (2022) <https://bera-journals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/berj.3907>

¹⁴ Glass et al. (2020) https://pure.sruc.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/34056820/CYP_Rural_Review_02112020.pdf

¹⁵ <https://sported.org.uk/project-51-makes-groups-more-confident-and-gets-more-girls-active/>

¹⁶ <https://ssf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Trauma-and-Poverty-Scottish-Sports-Futures-September-2022.pdf>

Research process and methodology

Our research utilised a multi-step approach:

1. **Literature Review and Database Update:** A comprehensive literature review, accompanied by updates to an existing Excel database to ensure relevance to current sector dynamics.
2. **Focus Groups:** Three focus groups were held in September 2024 with a total of 20 participants. One group involved internal **sportscotland** and sportscotland institute of sport (sis) staff, while two engaged external stakeholders connected to equality in sports.
3. **Interviews:** Eighteen semi-structured interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams from September to October 2024. Participants included seven **sportscotland** staff and 11 external leaders in equality-focused roles across the third sector, local authorities, and Scottish Governing Bodies of Scotland. [Link to [Annex B](#) for questions]
4. **Survey:** A workforce survey was conducted from August 26 to October 8, 2024, receiving 114 responses. Figure 2 below provides a breakdown of the organisations survey respondents work for. Around four in 10 respondents (41.7%) worked for **sportscotland** and a further quarter (26.9%) for Active Schools, with others working for organisations including Scottish Governing Bodies, Community Sport Hubs, local authorities, further/higher education institutes, and third sector groups. [Link to [Annex A](#) for questions]

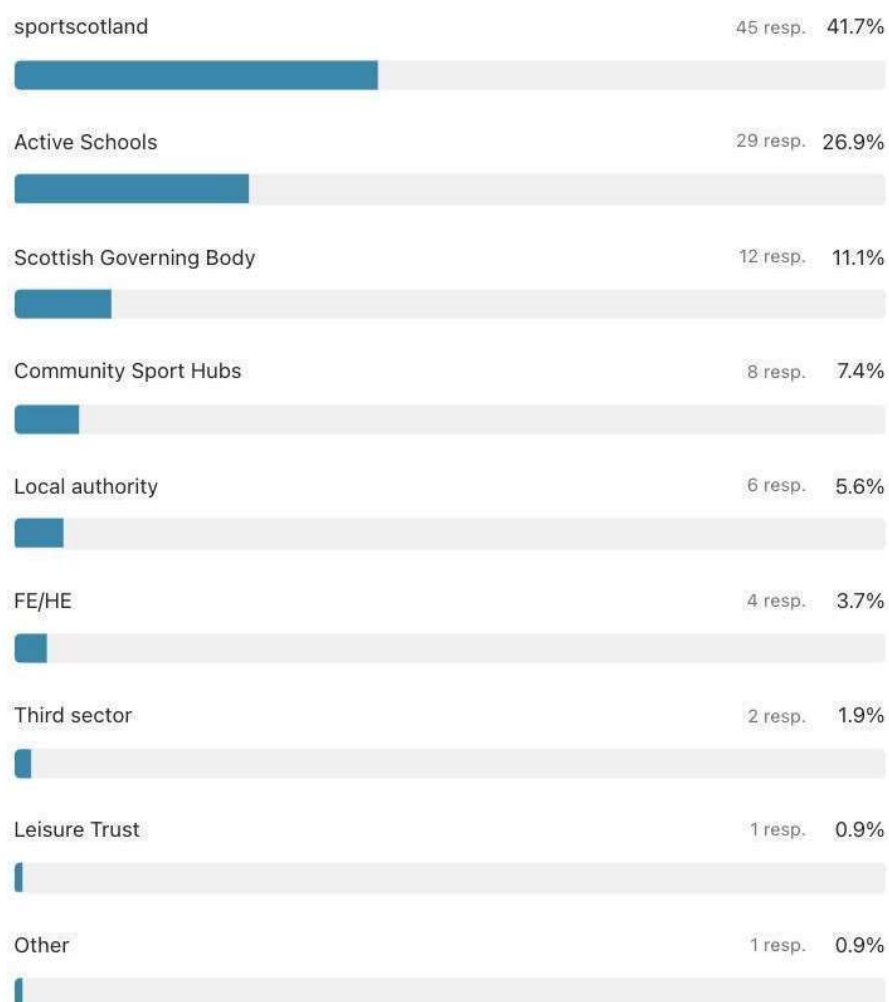


Figure 2: Responses to survey question “What type of organisations (or network) do you work in?”

Figure 3 provides a breakdown of the roles of survey respondents within their organisations: as can be seen, the most common job roles were middle manager (29.6% of respondents) and officer (29.6%), followed by senior manager or team leader (13.9%).

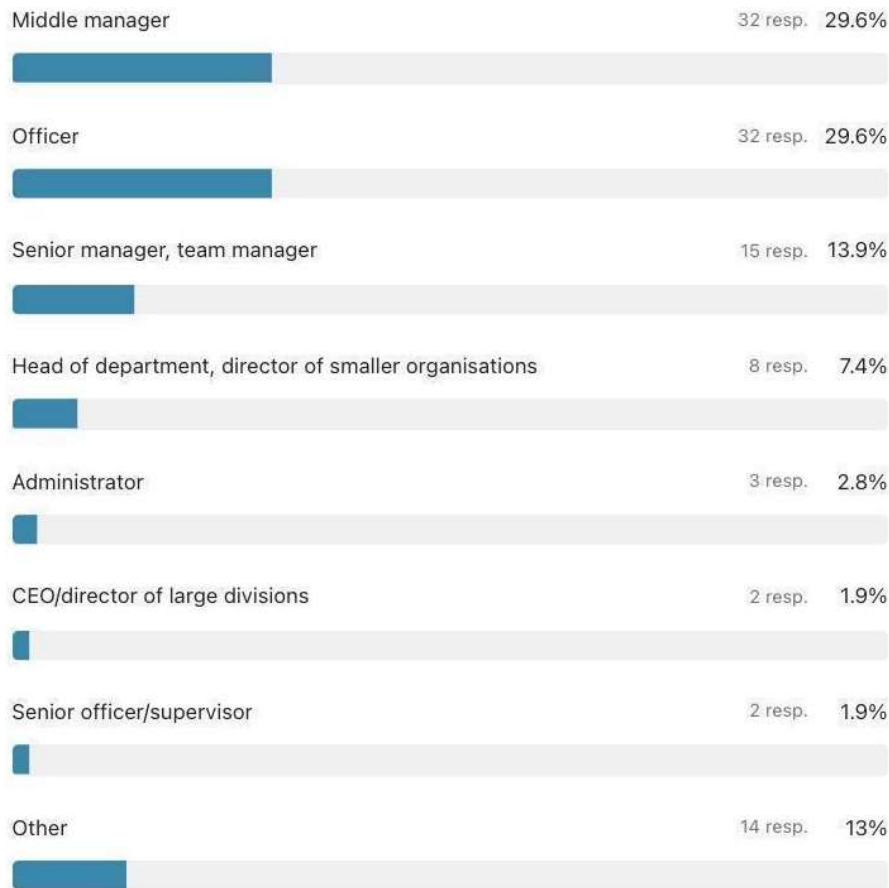


Figure 3: Responses to survey question “What is your role in that organisation (or network)?”

Most survey respondents said their current job role does not include the term ‘equality’ in its title or description: as shown in Figure 4, only 22.2% of respondents said that their job role does include this, compared to 73.1% who said that it does not.

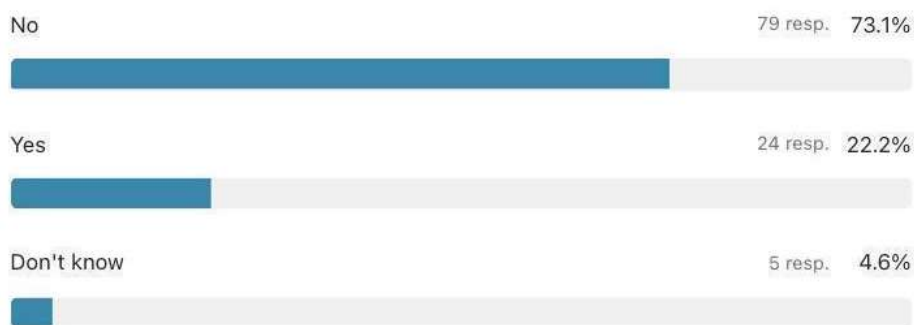


Figure 4: Responses to survey question “Does your current job role include the term ‘equality’ in its title or description?”

As shown in Figure 5, the majority (79.8%) of respondents were individuals who have been working in Scotland’s sporting system for at least five years, with 11.9% having worked in the system for two to five years and 5.5% for between one and two years.

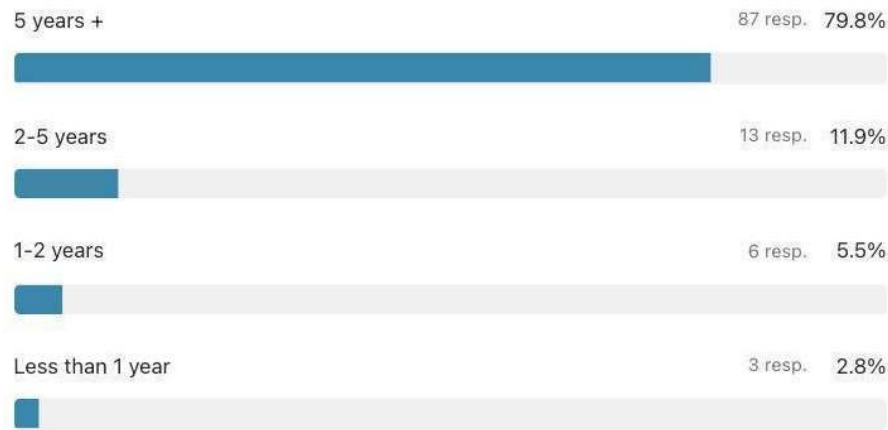


Figure 5: Responses to survey question “How long have you been working in the sporting system in Scotland?”

Evidence Database Visualisation

As part of refreshing the evidence database several interactive dashboards have been added to the spreadsheet [Include link to the update research database]. These allow dynamic filtering of equalities to see trends over time. Articles have been tagged with equality themes, corresponding with the equalities themes highlighted in **sportscotland's** EDI toolkit. The articles have been further tagged with more specific themes, which unpick some of the differences within these categories.

Figure 1 shows the overall count and source of the data within the evidence database. Sources include Academic, Government, Grey Literature and National Agency publications. It is clear that different equality themes have been of interest within the academic literature base, whilst others have had more focus through grey and national agency publications.

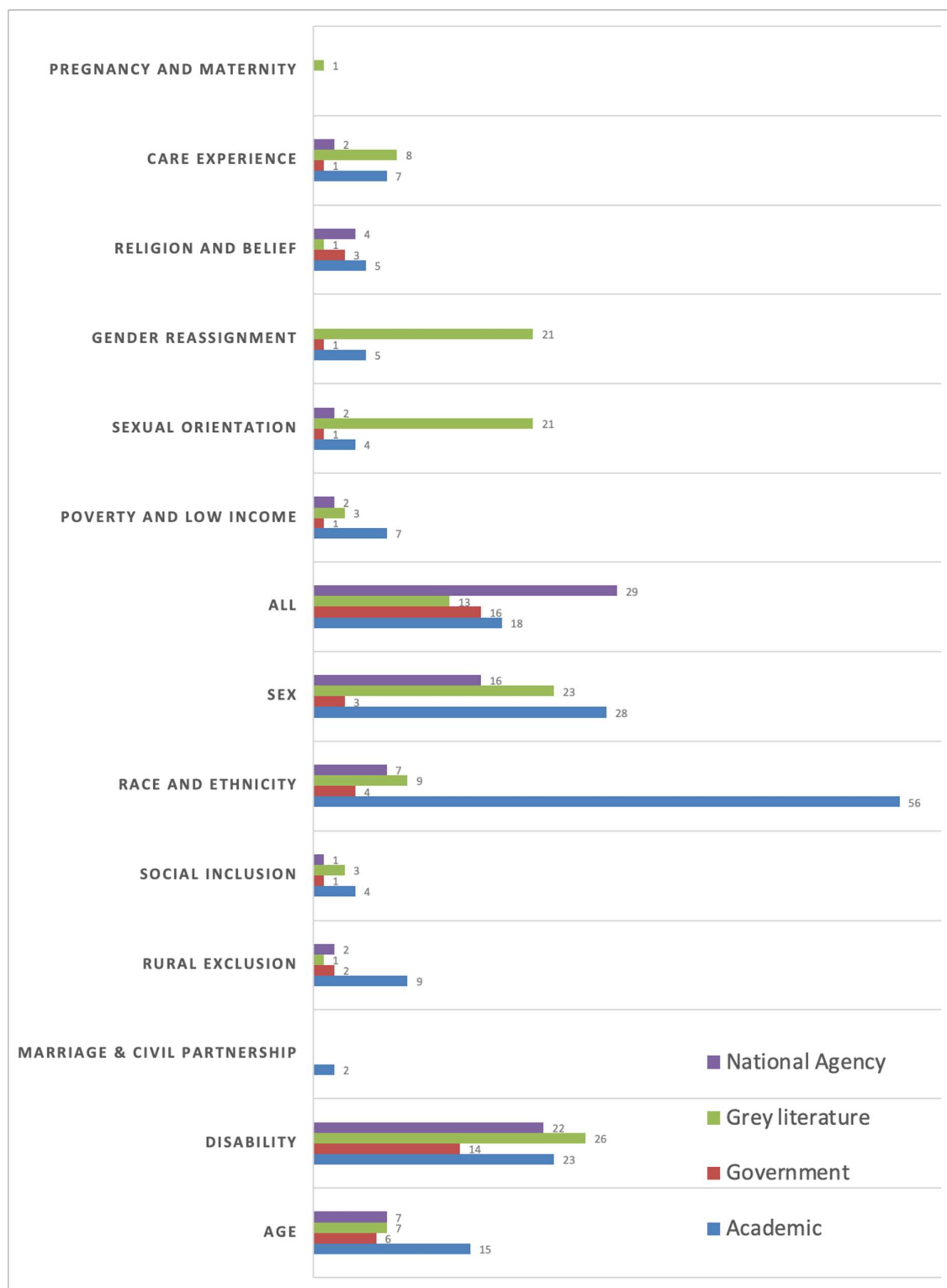


Figure 1: Overall count and source of date within the evidence database, by theme

Evidence Database Analysis of Trends

Looking at academic papers, **race and ethnicity** has been of particular interest, with a total of 56 individual papers having been written about this theme; this is more than double the 20 publications on **race and ethnicity** across grey literature (9), government (4) and national agency publications (7). This is also an area where there has been a specific refresh of the database by Sporting Equals, which likely explains the spike in entries from the last few years.

Sex has had 28 academic papers published, whilst **disability** has had 23 papers written. Themes with the least amount of academic literature includes **sexual orientation** with 4 papers, **marriage and civil partnerships** with 2 papers, and **pregnancy and maternity** having had 0 academic papers written.

Comparatively, **disability** has received 26 grey literature publications, whilst **sex** has had 23 publications and **sexual orientation** and **transgender/gender reassignment** both receiving 21 publications. National Agencies have published 22 papers on **disability** and 16 papers on **sex** respectively. Those with the least number of grey literature publications included **poverty and low income, social inclusion, religion and belief, pregnancy and maternity, and rural exclusion**. Similar trends are present within the national agency publication data.

Trends over time, and more specifically research publications over time show interesting alignment. **Transgender/Gender reassignment**, as a theme, has interestingly seen a sharp increase in the number of different papers published. Between the years 2006-2010, there were two grey literature papers published, however between 2011-2015, six grey literature papers and one academic paper had been published. In the five-year period covering 2016-2020, 17 papers in total had been published, with 13 of these being grey literature, one national agency and three academic papers. As this category covers all forms of gender expression, it seems likely that this increase is reflective of a wider societal trend toward greater awareness of these issues.

Within the **disability** equality theme, there are notable increases in the number of papers, both academic and grey, that have been published, possibly around global sporting events. For example, there is a large increase in the number of papers published between 2011-2012 when both the Olympics and Paralympic games were hosted in London, and 2019-2020, another Olympic year (albeit during the COVID-19 pandemic).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns on the literature is unclear; however, it is fair to say that there have been less publications across the board since 2020.

Another trend of note is that within **Care Experience**, there is another significant increase in the number of papers published between 2016-2020. Interestingly, Scotland launched the Independent Root and Branch Review of Care (“the Care Review”), the first step to developing ‘The Promise’. It is possible, therefore, that this policy stimulated interest within the academic and governmental spaces, increasing the need to understand Care Experienced young people and their access to sporting opportunities.

Findings

This chapter presents our findings on the state of equality within the sporting sector in 2024 from data collected through focus groups, interviews and a stakeholder survey. These research methods explored the perceived shift in attitudes toward equality within the sporting system in recent years, highlighting the progress made. Further details on the research questions can be found in [Annex A \(Survey\)](#) and [Annex B \(Interviews\)](#). The chapter also examines how the integration of equality varies across different sporting environments, reflecting the diverse experiences of those within the sector in identifying and addressing barriers to equality and inclusion in Scottish sports.

Equality and inclusion in sport: perceptions and recent trends

It is clear there is a strong sense amongst those working in Scotland’s sport sector that there has been a very real shift in the way people in the sector think about equality in recent years. As shown in Figure 6 below, most respondents to the workforce survey (91.7%) felt there has been a shift. Amongst interview and focus group participants, there was similarly a strong feeling that the sector has undergone significant change in this respect in the past 20 years, and particularly over the past five to 10 years.

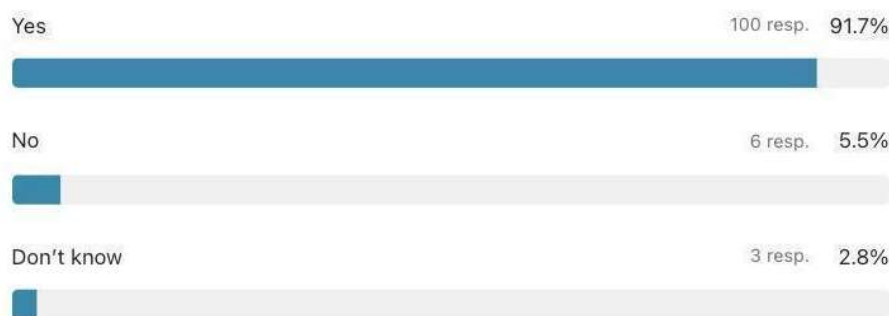


Figure 6: Responses to survey question “Do you feel that there has been a shift in the way people in the sporting system in Scotland think about equality in recent years?”

Those we engaged with felt there were a number of factors underpinning this shift. They felt there has been an increase in leadership, guidance and visibility around equality in sport, with key stakeholders including the Scottish Government and **sportscotland** playing a more active role in encouraging organisations in the sector to ensure equality becomes embedded in everyday practice. Increased funding for equality projects and financial incentives related to key performance indicators were seen as particularly important drivers leading to the implementation of equality measures:

“Previously, I don't think it was thought about at all. Whereas now I think that it is considered by nearly all governing bodies and is a focus for **sportscotland**. Decisions are largely data driven and funding can be determined by equality work.”

Practical impacts of this shift have included changes to service delivery so that sessions are more diverse and accessible to a wider range of groups, and a more widespread sense that equality is not something that is “one person’s job”, but that rather it is the collective responsibility of all those in

the sector to work to increase involvement in sport by removing barriers, understanding challenges and having more open conversations around reaching particular disengaged groups.

“There's been a real change in the last 20 years in terms of the opportunities for people with disabilities [...] I also think as a sector for the last 10 years and predominantly the last five years there has been a real acknowledgement that we need to do better.”

There was a similarly strong consensus that there is a need for further progress and improvement in this area. Figure 7 shows over 90% of survey respondents agreed that there should be more equality and inclusion in sport in Scotland.

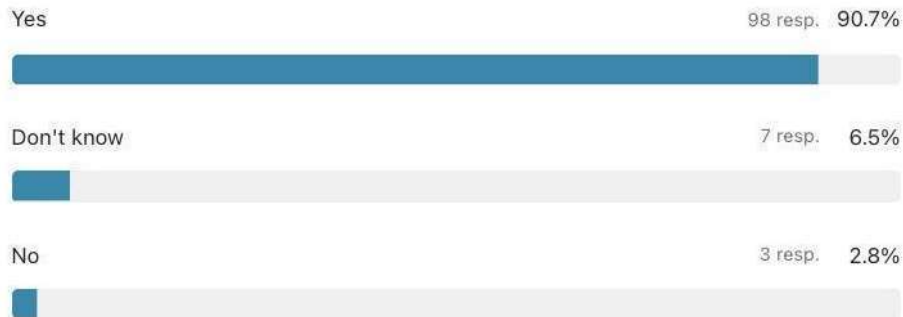


Figure 7: Responses to survey question “Do you agree that there should be more equality and inclusion in sport in Scotland?”

Many of those we engaged highlighted the benefits sport and physical activity can provide to people of all backgrounds and characteristics. It was felt to be crucial, therefore, that the sector as a whole does all it can to increase participation amongst all groups, including those currently less engaged:

“Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in sport due to the wide range of benefits sport provides. It is also beneficial to sporting organisations and their on-going sustainability to be accessible by as many groups in society as possible”

“Our vision [is] for everyone to benefit from sport in Scotland. To realise this we must ensure we are doing all we can to make everyone feel like they belong in sport and we are not there yet so yes we need to keep doing more.”

To achieve this many research participants felt there was a need for further cultural and organisational change. Underrepresentation of diverse groups at all levels of the sporting system from the workforce to senior leaders was highlighted by multiple respondents. Despite the progress made in recent years it was felt that sport in Scotland remains more accessible to those with the time, money and resources to participate. This is acting as a barrier to more equal participation across the population of Scotland (particularly in the current economic climate).

“Sport in of itself is a luxury for most people. The time taken to participate, the money to start participation, the resources needed to continue participation such as food, transport, washing facilities etc [...] From data it is clear, [the] memberships of SGBs are predominantly white and from mid-high socio-economic status (SIMD3-5).”

“The sporting system in Scotland currently serves those interested very well, it needs to engage more with organisations who support the people who aren’t able to think about physical activity as they are most in need.”

Some respondents also highlighted barriers that they themselves experience as members of the sports workforce in attempting to bring about greater equality and inclusion, highlighting financial limitations and expressing a desire for greater autonomy in utilising finite resources at the local level:

“I feel that local understanding needs to be greater from not only those that operate within local areas but by the key decision makers nationally. Local professionals should be afforded greater discretion to make use of resources appropriately based upon that local knowledge rather than dictated to by a national approach that doesn't necessarily work.”

“Making all sessions 'free' and reducing budgets to pay coaches, means we are relying on volunteers, which in turn reduces opportunities across the schools [...] Historically we could prioritise our operational budget to pay for targeted provision - which we can no longer do.”

Finally, thinking about the overall level of priority given to equality in the sport sector in Scotland at present, those we engaged with provided a variety of perspectives. Figure 8 shows that just over half of survey respondents (52.8%) felt that equality is given a lot of priority, and is considered in most areas; while a further 13.2% felt that equality is completely prioritised and “underpins everything in sport.” However, a notable proportion of respondents (33%) felt that equality is given a little priority, and is considered only in some areas.

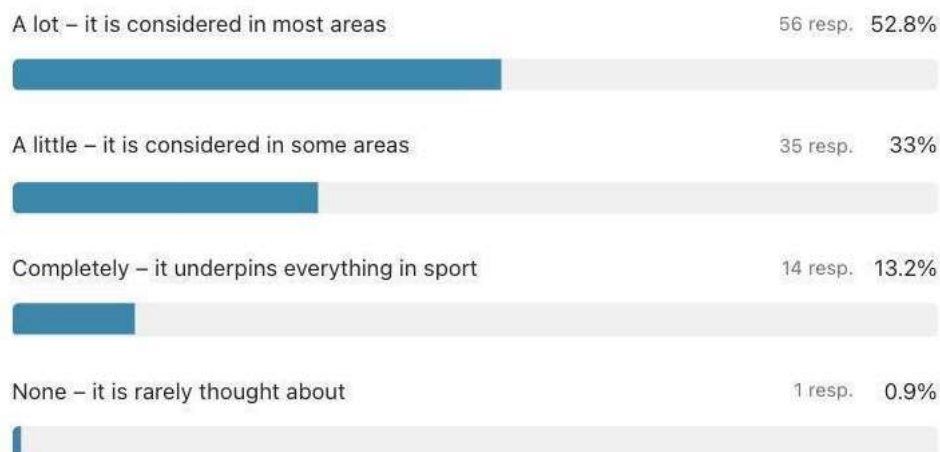


Figure 8: Responses to survey question “Overall, what priority do you feel equality has within sport in Scotland?”

While research participants identified several areas in which equality is indeed a high priority and is given strong consideration, they also pointed to other areas in which it is not so well-established, due to a range of factors. These include the uncertain funding environments faced by many sports clubs, which makes achieving financial viability the top priority for many organisations, and the prevalence of a more ‘traditional’ sporting culture focussed primarily on performance and medals.

Overall, while many participants felt there is a growing awareness of equality and inclusion across the sporting landscape, there nonetheless remain significant barriers to the full embedding of equality and inclusions in all parts of Scotland’s sports system:

“I think rhetorically and at a strategy and policy level, equality plays a central part of the national discussions around sport but clubs often struggle to make their activities as inclusive as they would like due to a lack of resources and support. The precarious funding for clubs and the cost of living crisis don't help us achieve our aspiration of creating a more inclusive and equal society through sport.”

“I think that EDI has become more of a priority, but that in some areas/organisations, it is still project based as opposed to embedded in the strategy and culture. For EDI to be authentic and successful, it needs to underpin how an organisation works day to day, and most importantly aligned to its values. We definitely miss something in influencing culture around EDI and focussing on process and policy. We need to change hearts, not just minds.”

Equality across different parts of the sporting system

The sense that different levels of progress have been achieved across different parts of Scotland’s sports system was a recurring theme throughout much of our engagement with the sector. Figure 9 (based on 107 responses) provides an overview of how survey respondents perceive equality in the different sporting environments. While a majority of respondents (71%) felt that equality is taken into account either “completely” or “a lot” within schools and education, only 29% felt the same way in relation to performance sport, while the comparable figure for clubs and communities was 49.6%.

	Completely	A lot	A little	Not at all	Don't know
Clubs and communities	7.5%	42.1%	43%	1.9%	5.6%
Schools and education	15.9%	55.1%	17.8%	3.7%	7.5%
Performance sport	2.8%	26.2%	41.1%	13.1%	16.8%

Figure 9: Responses to survey question “To what extent do you feel different environments within the sporting system take account of equality?”

Participants offered a variety of potential factors that contribute to these findings. Firstly, in relation to schools and education, research participants representing schools identified a range of guidance, initiatives and policies as aiding their ability to focus on equality, such as ‘Getting it right for every child’ (GIRFEC)¹⁷. These respondents felt informed by the work of Active Schools and other partners, and believe they are well-equipped to provide fully inclusive opportunities to those in education and make adaptations to support learning and development.

¹⁷ <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>

“Active Schools and the young people programmes have always had an inclusion focus, but that has definitely become more intentional across teams in the last few years.”

At the same time, some noted that performance targets may limit the options available by prompting schools to focus on only providing “big hitting” activities such as football to increase participation numbers, and others felt that more work is required in schools to increase opportunities for those with disabilities and those who may feel excluded by stereotypes associated with who should participate in certain sports.

“There are still unfortunately a lot of exclusionary experiences within schools.”

For clubs and communities, it was felt that some clubs take equality strongly into account and are well-placed to promote equality and inclusion in sport due to their involvement in local communities. It was also felt that they were not under as much pressure as other environments to achieve particular targets around performance and numbers. Nonetheless, it was also felt that clubs and communities face significant barriers to fulfilling this role. Differences exist in the extent to which different clubs and communities in Scotland take account of equality.

“Clubs and communities are facing significant challenges in time and resource. I feel most clubs take equality as a high priority but struggle with the capacity to make meaningful change.”

“At club and community level, unless that is a specific focus of the club/org, it's still often quite far down the list of priorities as they worry about so many other things first (unless they have an individual with a real interest who can champion equality).”

Several participants highlighted the reliance of many clubs and communities on volunteers, meaning that positive change is often dependent on the extent to which individual volunteers have the time, energy, interest or resources to undertake work aimed at promoting equality. This is in turn linked to the challenging funding environment experienced by many sports clubs and communities in Scotland, which often creates a strong dependence on the volunteer workforce.

“I think there's lots of resources and support out there, but fundamentally, clubs and communities, in particular, are led by volunteers. To make that change happen, you almost need to engage a volunteer from that demographic to fully understand and engage that audience.”

“Clubs and communities are where we are weakest, linked to volunteer workforce and scarcity of funding.”

In relation to performance sport, it was felt that the nature of ‘elite sport’ can involve a greater focus on outcomes and selection rather than participation. It also often requires significant investment on the part of individual participants in terms of time, funding, and access to facilities and coaching - all of which can create barriers to equality and put inclusion out of reach for many.

“By its nature, performance sport requires significant investment of time, money, support and access to great facilities and coaching. For some people, all of those things are out of reach.”

“As you move along the player pathway, the aim is less about participation for all and more about performance and more focussed on sport outcomes as opposed to inclusivity.”

It was felt that there had been progress in particular aspects of equality and inclusion in performance sport in recent years, including increased participation amongst women and increasing emphasis on equality for those living with disability (as well as support for para-athletes who qualify under the various categories, with athletes in this space having a higher profile and traction in the media).

“Performance sport - more females than ever. It's progressing but the whole area needs to become more inclusive around gender, sex, disability.”

Overall, there was a sense amongst many research participants that additional work will be required to more deeply embed equality and inclusion in performance sport in Scotland, something which will demand continued leadership and collaboration around equality at the national, regional and local levels.

“Is there enough? No, but **sportscotland** has taken on significant shifts and is working in partnership, which is brave and forward-thinking.”

"Is there enough? No, but we're committed to continuing this work, even when budgets are tight."

Experiences of addressing barriers to equality in sport

Those we engaged with also provided a range of perspectives on their own personal experiences of encountering and working to address barriers to equality in sport. As shown in Figure 10 below, over three-quarters (76.1%) of survey respondents said that they had observed / experienced someone facing barriers in the sports system, with only 12.8% saying that they had not seen this.



Figure 10: Responses to survey question “Have you ever observed / experienced anyone facing barriers in the sports system?”

Examples of barriers encountered by research participants in sporting environments included financial barriers (including around kit and equipment), negative attitudes towards people of particular gender identities, racism, and discrimination against people with disabilities and/or additional support needs.

Participants described a range of steps they had taken in response to observing such barriers. As a first step, some said they had reached out verbally to the individual(s) in question, listening to them describe their experiences in their own words in order to come to a fuller understanding of the barriers they had faced and potential courses of action to overcome these. Potential solutions identified in relation to some of these barriers included running specific sessions, organising transport to facilities, and providing space for athletes to pray.

“We have many students either from Care Experience or from deprived areas not able to take part in sport at college due to the lack of kit. We responded to this by launching our kit for all and boot bank to get donations which would help others participate.”

“No space for athletes to pray whilst in their training environment. I addressed this with the sport and asked them to provide a space.”

“I have physically walked someone to a community sports club from town to the hall.”

Others reached out to local and national organisations, including Disability Sport, LEAP Sports and Scottish Sports Futures or collaborated with schools, charities, clubs and other professionals with specialist knowledge.

“I have spoken directly to the person themselves to gain [a] deeper understanding of what these barriers are and what action can be taken to remove these. Linking to local/national organisations/partners to gain wider understanding which can affect policy has also helped.”

Many research participants described proactively raising issues internally and externally to improve the visibility of barriers and facilitate change. They conducted working groups, networking events, policy and equality impact reviews, in-house training, and sourced toolkits and guidance with the aim of making positive changes to address barriers.

“Raised issues internally with colleagues to open up conversations around issues and what can be done. Gender inequality is an issue in the sport I work in and while [it] is on the priority list the governing body have a big role to play in helping to shift perceptions and change the culture in the sport.”

Those we spoke to also discussed a variety of actions they had taken with the aim of further embedding equality and inclusion in their sport more broadly, rather than with the aim of overcoming one specific barrier. Some research participants had worked to embed equality more firmly in their organisation’s policies, processes or procedures, for example by adjusting meeting structures or making changes to the ways in which jobs are advertised and recruited.

“We have changed meeting formats, so every Active Schools meeting has about 50% of the meeting focused on EDI.”

“We created the policy... amended wording of adverts... we use software to make it accessible for someone with a disability.”

Others described particular projects or programmes they had helped undertake, which aimed to increase participation in sport amongst specific groups. Some research participants elaborated on their own examples, such as

“We have a ‘Fit for Girls’ program, which is a training programme for young girls, and we’ve got tutors that go to schools to help promote that.”

“Our Community Strides project was built by women and supported through their leaders to create an inclusive space.”

Lastly, others shared examples of ways in which their efforts had helped to create more inclusive, accessible spaces in sport for people of a wide range of backgrounds and characteristics.

“We’ve got a young person sport panel which, when we first set it up, it was very much the academic kids that were very sporty. Now we have a diverse range of young people from different backgrounds [in terms of] race and ethnicity, care experience, and socio-economic dynamics.”

Support for further embedding equality in sport and the workplace

Research participants shared their thoughts in relation to how supported they feel in their immediate working environments to promote, embed and understand equality issues. Figure 11 shows that around six in ten survey respondents felt well supported in their working environments to promote equality (62.6%), to embed equalities and inclusion in their work (61.3%), and to understand equality issues (61.9%). However small proportions (between 1.9% and 6.6%) said they felt they were not well supported in these respects. This is based on 107 responses.

	Well supported	Fair	Not well supported	Don't know
To promote equality	62.6%	30.8%	5.6%	0.9%
To embed equalities and...	61.3%	31.1%	6.6%	0.9%
To understand equality...	61.9%	36.2%	1.9%	0%

Figure 11: Responses to survey question “Overall, how supported do you feel in your immediate working environment?”

In general, research participants felt they were supported by colleagues, managers, local organisations, and governing bodies with access to specialist staff and resources; and felt that ongoing discussion was encouraged. The volume and quality of resources available, from online materials to seminars/conferences, was welcomed, and people felt confident to access them and seek other sources of information if they had any questions.

“I feel there are lots of resources and support and where there are gaps I know who to ask and feel confident I will get answers / resources.”

“It’s such a key focus for our service that the learning and development opportunities regarding equality issues has been phenomenal over the last few years. We engage with a

range of experts, third sector bodies and ensure that work plans not only ensure equality is embedded but that there is accountability for actions and related outcomes.”

sportscotland was highlighted as a critical player in championing inclusion by providing resources and local support.

“We have excellent support locally from **sportscotland** and we are trying locally to turn that support into opportunities but it takes time.”

“I feel quite supported. I think we’ve got some really good partners that work with us in sports like Scottish Disability Sport, **sportscotland**.”

Others reported the challenge of having time to focus on equality and a wish for direct support, insights and research to identify improvement opportunities. Some felt that the culture of their organisations led to a lack of encouragement or support for those who seek to promote equality.

“I feel supported to develop my understanding of equality issues (which is perhaps the easiest aspect of the above three to achieve), but the extent to which I am supported/encouraged to embed equality in my day to day work is limited by the challenges of prioritisation and the lack of capacity for this particular area.”

“A culture of "pick your battles" and being labelled as difficult can sometimes hold staff back from challenging inequalities.”

Where research participants felt that there was still improvement needed, some felt that this would require the adoption of new approaches to organisational structures and governance to ensure a more holistic embedding of equality and inclusion across all parts of the workforce.

“I would say it's OK, but it could be a lot better. Where we are as a service just now... it’s about using a whole system approach.”

“Feel fully supported - but think we maybe need to revisit our governance structure to refocus, revisit and reset.”

“I feel the system still prioritises/focuses on sport specific skills rather than a holistic approach to engaging individuals.”

How strong is the sport sector’s understanding and awareness of equality issues in sport?

This section discusses the research’s findings in relation to the sport sector’s understanding and awareness of equality issues in sport. This includes:

- how well those in the sector feel they understand issues around this subject,
- what those in the sector understand as being the main barriers experienced by those from different equalities-related groups when they seek to access and participate in sport, and
- what sources of knowledge, guidance, evidence and training those in the sector currently access and would like to access more of.

Understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in sport

Research participants provided a wide range of insights in relation to the understanding of issues around equality, diversity and inclusion in sport, both in terms of their own personal understanding and understanding across the sector as a whole.

Figure 12 provides a summary of how survey respondents rated their own understanding of these issues. Just over half (54.2%) felt they have a strong understanding, while 43% felt they have only a basic understanding and a small minority (2.8%) felt they still do not fully understand these issues.

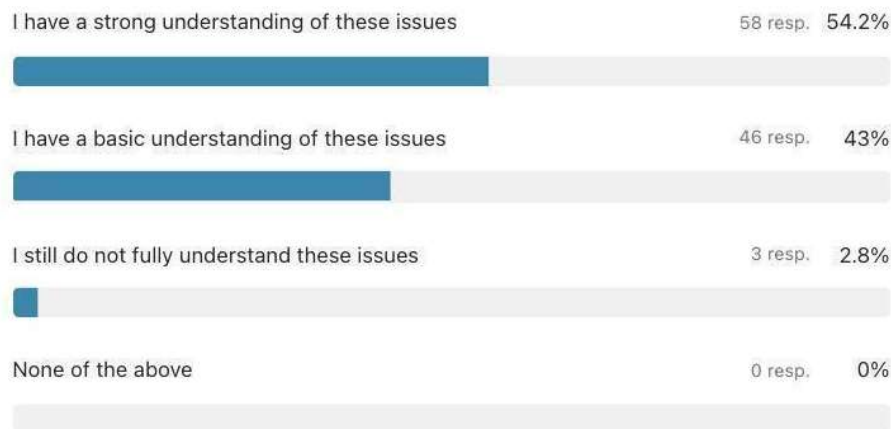


Figure 12: Responses to survey question “How well do you feel you understand issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion?”

Some research participants described ways in which their own experiences in life and work had helped them to develop their understanding of these issues, informing how their approach in their current work:

“I have worked with a range of individuals and families in this post and previous post, such as homelessness, looked after, substance misuse, young offenders, EAL, etc and feel I have an awareness of barriers to participation in sport.”

“I feel that I understand issues relating to EDI reasonably well, although I've got somewhat of an advantage as I'm visually impaired and have been since birth.”

Others described feeling confident in their knowledge in some respects, while also feeling more unsure about aspects of equality, diversity and inclusion (such as what are the most appropriate practical actions that can be taken to address barriers).

“I am aware of the protected characteristics and the importance of not discriminating. I am aware that when designing or delivering programmes we need to be mindful of the impact on all people. it is difficult to know what direct actions we might take to have a real and lasting impact to be more inclusive.”

“Even though I selected 'strong understanding', this will fluctuate as our population continues to be more diverse, more people become involved in sport, leading to the need to understand the nuances. Understanding of intersectional issues will be ongoing.”

When asked to describe what equality, diversity and inclusion means for them personally, common themes included ensuring equal access and opportunities for all, increasing fairness and reducing the

barriers to participation faced by some groups, and adopting a holistic approach to bringing about greater equality in sport.

“It's about equal opportunities and making sure that those opportunities are as diverse as they possibly can be and that they're available for everyone.”

“For me, it's about improving access to sport... and reducing inequalities across all the protected characteristics.”

“Equality, diversity, and inclusion is not something you do within it but is actually intrinsically driven by it.”

Participants in the research also provided a range of perspectives and insights as to their understanding of equalities issues in relation to specific equalities characteristics. Figure 13 provides an overview of how survey respondents rated their own understanding in relation to 12 equality characteristics (based on 106 responses).

There is considerable variation in the extent to which respondents felt they have a high degree of understanding in relation to each of these different characteristics. There were several characteristics which a majority of respondents felt they understood either “Completely” or “A lot”, including Gender (74.5%), Mental health (70.5%), Poverty and Low income (69.8%) and Disability (67.9%).

Whereas smaller proportions of respondents felt they understood Gender reassignment (20.7%), Deafness (25.8%), Religion and belief (31.1%) and LGBTQIA+ (34.9%) either “Completely” or “A lot”.

	Completely	A lot	A little	Not at all	Don't know
Age groups (e.g. early years,...)	16%	38.7%	41.5%	1.9%	1.9%
Care experienced young...	5.7%	38.7%	44.3%	9.4%	1.9%
Deafness	4.8%	21%	59%	12.4%	2.9%
Disability	11.3%	56.6%	31.1%	0%	0.9%
Gender	13.2%	61.3%	19.8%	4.7%	0.9%
Gender reassignment	4.7%	16%	47.2%	28.3%	3.8%
LGBT+	6.6%	28.3%	52.8%	9.4%	2.8%
Mental health	10.5%	60%	27.6%	0%	1.9%
Poverty and low income	16%	53.8%	25.5%	3.8%	0.9%
Race	9.5%	42.9%	40%	6.7%	1%
Religion + belief	2.8%	28.3%	51.9%	15.1%	1.9%
Rural exclusion	11.4%	31.4%	37.1%	18.1%	1.9%

Figure 13: Responses to survey question “Please rate your understanding of equalities issues in relation to each of the following characteristics.”

Understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) issues in sport over time

Since 2016, there have been some notable improvements as well consistent challenges in the understanding of equalities issues. The survey found the following shifts:

The most significant improvements in comprehensive understanding of the equalities issues between the years 2016-2024 are reported around race (26% increase), poverty and low income (18% increase), religion and belief (16% increase) and disability (12% increase).

The equalities issues where respondents have some understanding but lack comprehensive and confident knowledge, reporting knowing only ‘a little’ (in 2024) are deafness (59%), LGBTQIA+ (53%) and religion and belief (52%), where there has been only little change in the numbers of those reporting not knowing very much. These are followed by trans and non-binary gender (47%), race (40%), age (42%), and care experienced young people (44%).

No significant improvements in awareness between the years 2016-2024 were reported in trans and non-binary gender, care experienced young people, deafness, mental health and rural exclusion. The biggest knowledge gaps in understanding of equalities issues, measured by those reporting that they

know nothing at all (in 2024), are found in trans and non-binary gender (28%), rural exclusion (18%), religion and belief (15%) and deafness (12%). All of these areas require more attention. The area that requires most attention is LGBTQIA+. In the sub-category of trans and non-binary gender inclusion, almost one in three respondents (28%) reports knowing nothing at all, and there was no significant improvement in those that know 'a lot' which remains less than one in six (16%). Comparatively, 53% report knowing only a little and 9% nothing at all about LGBTQIA+, which suggests that better communication is needed to raise awareness about these intersecting gender and sexual minority issues. Thus overall, the survey indicated that there is further work to be done to address knowledge gaps.

Those we engaged with through interviews similarly felt there are gaps in understanding across the sport sector in relation to understanding different groups. While some highlighted particular groups they felt there were gaps in relation to, others felt that the nature of these gaps was likely to differ across different sports depending on which groups they do and do not see as a priority.

"I think there's a huge amount of gaps... I think that it's easy to be drawn to the physical aspects of disability, which would sit there as a characteristic. But there are other cultural differences between communities, religions and even some of the people who perhaps have different needs out there, which is not as clear cut and understood by the sector in itself, and I think that's really difficult."

"I think some sports probably don't care... I think there's still a stigma around homosexuality... Scotland doesn't manage religious bigotry very well."

Others highlighted the cross-cutting nature of the challenges faced across different equalities-related groups, and the consequent importance of an intersectional approach (as well as sufficient data) to addressing and tackling these gaps where they exist.

"We know that if you're living in poverty [...] 50% of people living in poverty either have a disability or somebody with a disability in their family. So again, going back to that intersectionality of poverty and disability, before you look at any other characteristics that are, there are inequalities..."

"Intersectionality is the big thing... it's about the relationships and complexity around different factors like colour, poverty and social discrimination."

"There's definitely data gaps. We know what the gender breakdown is and make up within governing body boards. We know what representation that is from minority communities and ethnic communities, but we don't know much beyond that. We also know the breakdown of demographic and senior leadership roles, but we don't know that across the total workforce."

Understanding of specific barriers faced by equalities groups in accessing sport

The research also shed light on what the sport sector understands as the main barriers that these equalities groups face when accessing and participating in sport. Figure 14 provides a summary of what survey respondents were most likely to identify as barriers experienced by these groups. Infrastructure barriers (including around transport and the accessibility of sports locations/buildings) were the most commonly-identified type of barrier, identified as such by nearly two-thirds (64.8%)

of respondents. This was seen as a particular barrier amongst those who live in rural areas, comprising large proportions of the population across many parts of Scotland.

“We have got a very rural area in the South of Moray, I feel because of the budget cuts and savings that [is] going to get worse instead of better, because public transport is reducing.”

“Affordability; transport; rurality is a real challenge.”

After this, “Stigma, discrimination and negative behaviours” emerged as the second most-frequently identified barrier faced by equalities groups, selected by over half of respondents (54.6%). Expanding on this, several research participants noted the continuing role played by stereotypes and cultural expectations in influencing who is made to feel welcome across different sporting environments.

“Sport is organised around... stereotypes that go with different sports... sports that are seen in very masculine ways.”

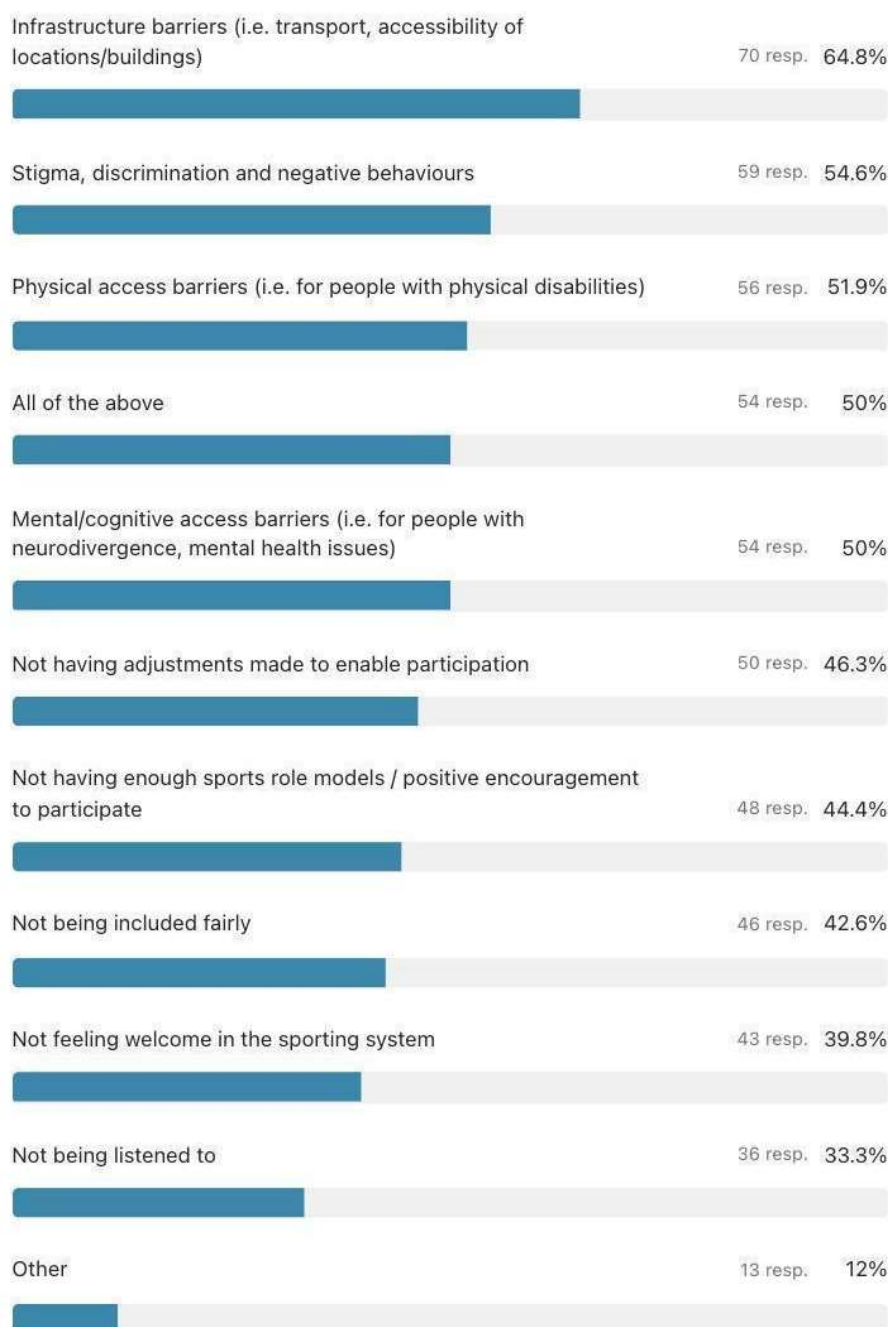


Figure 14: Responses to survey question “What do you think are the main barriers that ‘equalities groups’ face in accessing sport in Scotland?”

“We have a culture that is certainly quite football-centric, working-class type of background, and that's quite a fixed mindset that's there in lots of communities as well.”

Following this, “Physical access barriers (i.e. for people with disabilities)” was the next most frequently-identified, chosen by just over half (51.9%) of respondents. One research participant spoke from their own personal experience to describe how this can lead to an assumption that sport

is simply not an option for people with additional support needs, while another felt that financial pressures can act as a barrier to clubs providing more targeted and/or accessible sessions.

“I think that for a long time it just hadn't been something people were probably encouraged to consider. I can speak from the point of view of... as a social care provider. We have a lot of support workers who will work with people in developing, you know, their care plans and the activity plans and things and maybe sport hadn't been something that was seen as particularly accessible.”

“I think it's harder to get commercial clubs sometimes to engage or deliver more targeted sessions because they ultimately usually require more time and effort and aren't as rewarding financially. So I think that that can be a barrier.”

Other respondents also identified the main barriers as including people not having enough role models / encouragement to participate, not being included fairly, and not feeling welcome in the sporting system. Some of those we spoke to felt this was due to a lack of interest historically across parts of the sports sector in understanding the needs of and engaging with people from different equalities groups, leading to the development of a sporting system that is not always inclusive of or responsive to different needs.

“I think the biggest barrier is a lack of trust... A lack of literal models, a lack of actually being able to trust in a system, not just the people. A lack of for decision makers”

“We talk about 'seldom heard communities'... because someone once said to me, 'We're not hard to reach; you just don't bloody listen.’”

“I think the main challenge is a lack of understanding about them as individuals in their requirements. I think that is probably the most significant thing for them.”

Finally, several of those we engaged with highlighted cost and affordability as an additional crucial barrier, one which is relevant across people of different backgrounds and characteristics, and which arguably reinforces existing barriers and inequalities.

“I think the barriers are mainly depending on who you are. You know, if you live in a SIMD 1 area it doesn't matter if you've got a disability, if you have an ethnically diverse background - you've got a lack of income, so your ability to do stuff is really, really restricted.”

“The cost of sport... is quite expensive... some kids who are probably more capable than my son aren't getting access to sports.”

Access to information, guidance, and training on equality in sport

Research participants provided further perspectives on the extent to which they feel they have access to sufficient information and guidance to help them support people facing barriers in the sporting sector. Overall, while over half of survey respondents (57.8%) felt they did have sufficient information and guidance, others felt they did not have enough information and guidance (24.8%) or said they did not know (17.4%).

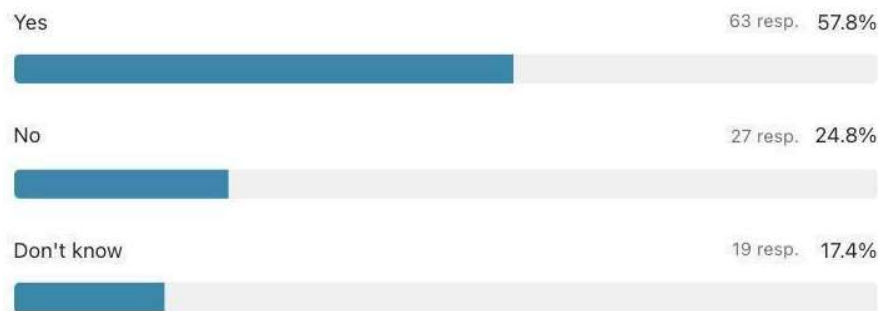


Figure 15: Responses to survey question “Do you feel you have sufficient information and guidance to enable you to support people facing barriers / people from equalities groups to access sports?”

Examples of support, training and guidance accessed in the past 12 months included equality awareness training, external training around specific issues including mental health and disability, awareness-raising activities in relation to Care Experience, and relevant independent published reports such as the Whyte Review into allegations of abuse in gymnastics. Research participants had generally found accessing these activities and resources to be useful and informative.

Those who did feel they had sufficient information and guidance often described having a network of contacts across relevant organisations such as Scottish Disability Sport, LEAP Sports and Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH), in addition to formal training available through their role or organisations in the form of workshops, documentaries, or online resources.

“Good support from Changing Lives network and good partnerships with local community organisations and charities.”

“As a sportscotland employee, we have access to a large amount of workshops.”

“I think the sector’s put a lot of focus on upskilling its workforce. More can always be done, but I’d be surprised to hear anyone working within some sort of development role in sport say they wouldn’t know where to turn to become better informed around EDI.”

On the other hand, those who did not feel they had sufficient information and guidance attributed this to a number of reasons. Some felt that the number of different equalities groups, and the wide variety of different barriers they can face, meant it was difficult to stay up-to-date and well-informed in what was seen as a fast-moving environment.

“It is such a fast changing environment we can never have enough information, but we do have good structures to allow you to speak to colleagues who are more knowledgeable, eg: SDS, governing bodies, SAMH.”

“I don’t feel comfortable on all the protected characteristics. A central place to signpost for more information would be helpful.”

“I feel that these barriers are different for all different groups so although I might have a lot of knowledge in one area, others areas might be lacking. I also feel that we need to be

constantly made aware of these and how things are developing to keep us up to date and help us remove these barriers.”

In addition, some felt there was a need for further practical guidance, tools, resources and funding to go alongside more theoretical information.

“I have enough guidance but not enough financial support to remove barriers for participants.”

“The issue is with action and facilitating the necessary change. There is a question of how these resources are used to build trust with people facing barriers / people from EDI groups. It takes courage to be able to challenge the status quo which can be incredibly challenging.”

“I would say I have lots of information on what the barriers are but not enough good practice examples of ways to overcome them and influence cultural change.”

Important differences also emerged with regards to the extent to which research participants felt they needed support, training or guidance across different specific equalities groups. Figure 16 shows the proportion of survey respondents who said that they would like help to understand how to support access to sports amongst equality groups (102 responses). Over half of respondents said they would like help in relation to all the groups, with Gender the only category just falling under half of respondents (49.5%).

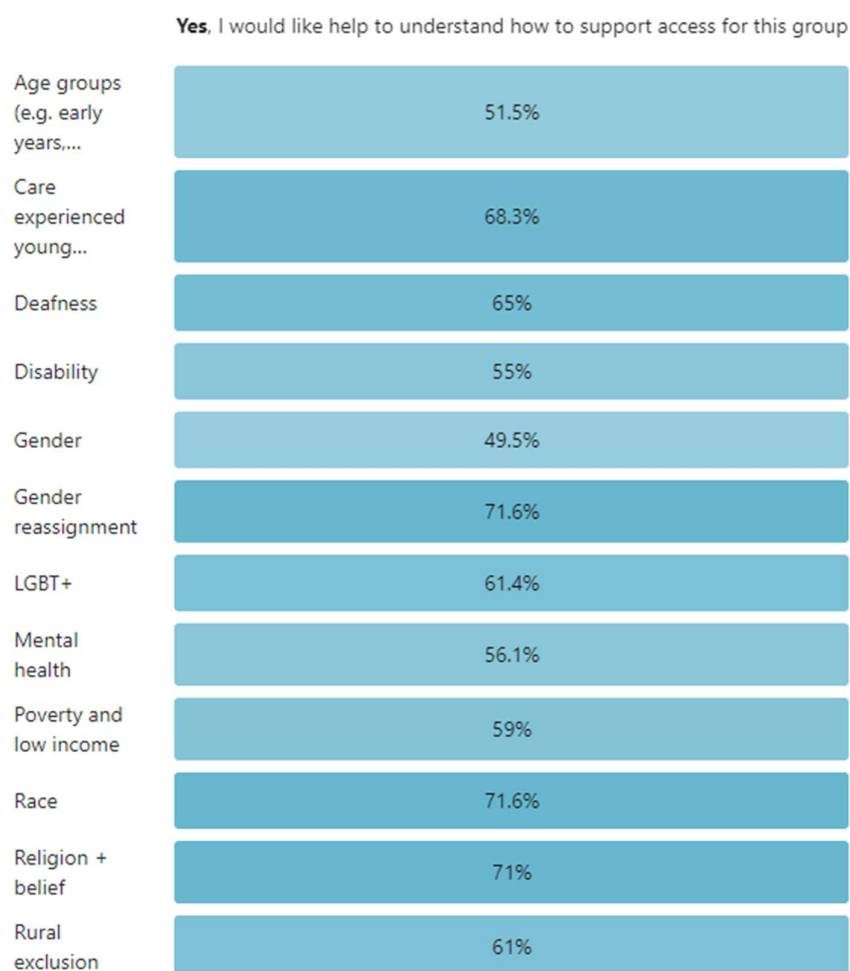


Figure 16: Responses to survey question “Would you like to receive support, training or guidance on equality and sport for specific groups in the future?”

Beyond this, there was some variation in the extent to which respondents were likely to say they would like to receive support, training or guidance in relation to these groups. Over 7 in 10 respondents said they wished to receive help around Gender reassignment (71.6%), Race (71.6%) and Religion and belief (71%). Care Experienced young people (68.3%) and Deafness (65%) similarly emerged as characteristics where respondents wished to receive help in the future. These areas were often also highlighted as areas with regards to which more guidance would be welcomed throughout interview and focus group stages of the research.

“Gender reassignment... many sports bodies will reflect that as a difficulty for them.”

“I'd say it is ethnically diverse communities where I still feel we're building that understanding and where there's probably still the biggest gap.”

“Yeah, I think the race and racism [training] is definitely one we could do with more of. I think a better understanding or awareness of people who are Care Experienced would be another one, and I've not seen anything in relation to it.”

However, it is also important to note that research participants’ priorities in this respect were not the same, with each individual group highlighted by at least some participants as an area in which they would like more support. Some survey respondents, for example, highlighted Gender, Disability and LGBTQIA+ as areas where they would particularly welcome additional support:

“Gender-based violence, you know, that's very specific, but I think it did open up a lot of conversations, and that was about... what you should do if you come across someone who has experienced gender-based violence and what should your role be in there.”

“I need to learn more on how to support people with a physical disability, who are neuro-diverse and who are from the LGBTQ+ community.”

This underlines the importance of ensuring that there is a broad range of support and guidance available to the sporting sector across all equalities characteristics and groups.

Sources of knowledge and evidence around equality in sport

Finally, research participants shared the primary sources they use to access knowledge and evidence on equality in sport. Table 1 summarises these sources, listing both general resources and specific organisations, networks, and tools commonly utilised by those working within Scotland's sporting system to learn more about equality in the field.

There are a wide variety of avenues through which those in Scotland’s sport sector access knowledge and evidence around equality and sport, ranging from simply discussing these issues with colleagues and those with lived experience, to a range of sources of statistical and qualitative data relevant to equality and inclusion. As discussed more fully in the next section of the report, a number of research participants highlighted resources produced by **sportscotland** in this area, including its website, EDI toolbox, workshops and seminars, and the 2020 Equality in Sport Report.

“I work really closely with **sportscotland**, and they keep me sort of up to date on what they are doing to promote equalities.”

Others said they seek to access knowledge and evidence in this area from a diverse range of sources, and indeed proactively seek out new sources through which they can gather relevant evidence and data.

“We look all over. I mean, we're always trying to uncover new, you know, credible quality places where we can get evidence and data, you know, we have partner organisations around the UK and in Scotland.”

Generic Sources	Organisations, networks and resources
------------------------	--

Academic Research and Conferences	2020 Equality in Sport report
Board of Trustees	Active Schools training
Colleagues	Age Scotland
Community engagement	ASN Schools/Departments
Documentaries	BBC / Mainstream news
EDI Events	Changemakers
Employee composition reports	Changing Lives Network
Employers	Enable Scotland
Internal EDI reports	Inside Track
Internal equality monitoring/data	LEAP Sport
Individuals with lived experience	National LGBTQIA+ Sports Group
Local clubs	MySport data
Local council	Observatory of Sport in Scotland (OSS)
Membership database	Scottish Action for Mental Health (SAMH)
Research and insight team	Scottish Disability Sport (SDS)
Partners	Scottish Government including legislation
Podcasts	Spirit of 2012
School reports	Sport England
Scottish health/household survey	Sporting Equals
Social media e.g., Instagram	Sports associations e.g., Archery GB
University qualifications	sportscotland
Webinars	The Robertson Trust
Work Experience	TSI Scotland Community Networks
	UK Active
	World Health Organisation
	Women in Sport

Table 1: Summary of responses to interview and survey question “What are your main sources of knowledge and evidence for equality and sport?”

Perceptions of existing sportscotland tools and resources

This section describes our findings with regards to how existing **sportscotland** tools and resources around equality, diversity and inclusion are seen by those in the sector. This includes how and why **sportscotland** resources are used by those in the sector; the extent to which these tools and resources are seen as useful amongst those who have accessed them; suggestions as to how these resources could be improved in the future; and the extent to which those in the sector have been influenced by **sportscotland**’s ‘Sport for Life’ vision in their work around inclusion.

How and why sportscotland resources are used

A further focus of this research was to understand the role played by **sportscotland** resources with regards to equality and sport, including the ways in which they are used, how useful they are perceived to be, and ways in which those in the sport sector feel they could be improved or made more useful.

Figure 17 provides an initial overview of the extent to which different **sportscotland** equality-related resources have been seen and accessed by survey respondents (based on 106 responses). As can be seen, there is considerable variation between the different individual resources. While most respondents reported having accessed the EDI section of the **sportscotland** website (70.8%) and the EDI **sportscotland** toolbox (62.3%), this figure was less than one-in-three for the Equality in Sport Learning Notes (32.4%) and the Equality in Sport Research Report 2016 (30.8%).

Participants described having used these resources in a variety of ways in their roles. These included: to increase their general knowledge and personal awareness; build their confidence around EDI when talking to others; as a background to service delivery; and as reference points for appropriate language and terminology associated with specific groups and those with protected characteristics.

“To reinforce and support my own learning, that of colleagues and to work with clubs and groups to drive forward improvements and changes to how they operate.”

“Used for guidance regarding terminologies of specific groups. Used to understand the current landscape of EDI in Scotland. Used to understand why there has been such a shift in focus towards EDI in relation to the Scottish Government's aims and objectives.”

“We discuss them as a team... and promote aspects of the work when we are out in communities.”

	Yes, I have accessed	Yes, I have seen before but not accessed	No, I have not seen before	Not sure
A. EDI section of the sportscotland website	70.8%	17%	8.5%	3.8
B. New Ideas – Our Equality Outcomes (equality outcomes for 2021-25)	44%	26%	20%	10%
C. EDI sportscotland toolbox	62.3%	23.6%	9.4%	4.7%
D. Equality in Sport Learning Notes	32.4%	25.5%	33.3%	8.8%
E. Equality in Sport Research Report (2020)	44.8%	20%	24.8%	10.5%
F. Equality in Sport Research Report (2016)	30.8%	25%	33.7%	10.6%

Figure 17: Responses to survey question “Have you accessed any of the following resources from sportscotland in your role?”

Others described having used the resources to put theory into practice when delivering programmes, to identify disengaged groups and any relevant barriers to participation.

“We use the tool kit when creating new clubs so we are looking at the needs of all our participants, we also use the protected characteristics beforehand to think about what they

may need before attending clubs but making sure we ask participants how we can support them when they are with us.”

“Helped to inform how we target our services and resources.”

In addition, some described ways in which the resources have been helpful in informing reporting and planning, policy development, funding applications, and both strategic and operational discussions.

“Mostly for developing a knowledge/evidence base for planning areas of work or at times applying for funding for a targeted project.”

“I’ve used the toolkit for definitions... equality impact assessments for reference.”

“I use these resources as a reference point in terms of reporting and planning.”

Perceived usefulness of sportscotland resources

Respondents also provided their thoughts as to how useful they have found these **sportscotland** resources, including what they have found useful about them. Figure 18 provides a summary of how survey respondents rated these resources, on a scale ranging from “Excellent” to “Unhelpful” (based on 97 responses).

	Excellent	Good	OK	Unhelpful	Not read
A. EDI section of the sportscotland website	18.6%	38.1%	26.8%	1%	15.5%
B. New Ideas – Our Equality Outcomes (equality outcomes for 2021-25)	6.2%	29.2%	25%	0%	39.6%
C. EDI sportscotland toolbox	19.6%	30.9%	18.6%	2.1%	28.9%
D. Equality in Sport Learning Notes	7.5%	25.8%	12.9%	1.1%	52.7%
E. Equality in Sport Research Report (2020)	8.3%	32.3%	17.7%	1%	40.6%
F. Equality in Sport Research Report (2016)	2.2%	21.3%	16.9%	0%	59.6%

Figure 18: Responses to survey question “Please tell us which of the following resources you have found most useful.”

Only a small proportion of respondents felt that any of the resources were unhelpful, with “Good” being the most common rating for each of the six resources (apart from those for which “Not read” was more frequent). The EDI **sportscotland** toolbox was the resource which respondents were most likely to rate as “Excellent”, while the other five resources were all more commonly rated as “OK” than as “Excellent.”

Research participants provided additional details on the resources they had accessed which they had found useful. The Equality in Sport Research Reports, for example, were noted as providing a detailed background to issues around equality and inclusion, including the wide range of different relevant characteristics involved and barriers faced.

“The research report is very helpful due to the wider scope of equalities, especially mental health.”

“Clarity on what we mean by EDI, factual data about the exact stats and barriers facing groups and individuals. Recommendations based on the research about what can be changed/improved.”

Several research participants also highlighted ways in which the EDI toolbox has been useful to them in their roles and activities.

“The toolbox and its practical tools of what clubs should consider for inclusion of participants with protected characteristics has become a framework when starting up clubs, from smaller details such as what and who we market on our posters and social media posts to larger details of the space we use for those with disabilities.”

“The toolbox is a particularly useful resource.”

On the other hand, some participants provided more mixed feedback, highlighting what they saw as the limitations of certain resources as well as the positive aspects.

“The toolbox is so limited. People go on once, see there is nothing then never return. The detailed reports are good.”

“I think some of the easy to absorb data/graphs and the lived experience videos contained within the toolbox section are particularly helpful. It's also relatively straightforward to navigate around all the resource content, but there's a lot of information due to the very broad nature and complexity of E,D&I which can be a little overwhelming.”

Finally, several participants offered more generally positive feedback relating to **sportscotland's** resources, describing them as evidence-based, relevant to the landscape of Scottish sport and helping to clarify the direction taken by **sportscotland**.

“Excellent for giving evidence based information to help planning and approaches to my work.”

“I like the fact that the EDI outcomes have specific outcomes that touch upon how people experience inclusion as opposed to strategy/corporate talk.”

“These resources provide you with knowledge and ideas that you may not have thought of yourself and may give different approaches you can take if you haven't done so already.”

Suggestions for improvement of resources

Although many participants found the existing sportscotland tools and resources helpful, they also shared various suggestions and ideas for improving them to make them even more effective and

useful. Those we engaged with provided a wide range of thoughts and suggestions as to how this could be done. Figure 19 provides a summary of the most common categories of suggestions made by participants in interviews and survey respondents (based on 49 responses).

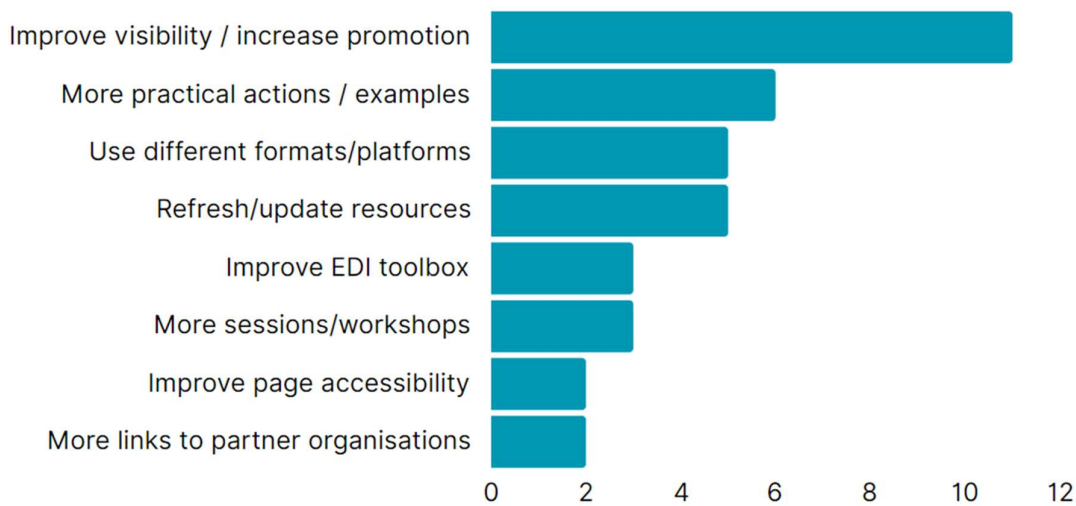


Figure 19: Summary of most common responses to interview and survey question “How do you think these resources could be improved (if accessed)?”

The most common suggestion was for **sportscotland** to promote more and increase the visibility of its tools and resources around EDI.

“I think we need to highlight these resources more regularly and bring them to life as at the moment they sit on the website and I don't really use them and imagine others are similar.”

“Regularly promote these to sporting networks and on social media platforms.”

One respondent felt this could be achieved through holding online workshops to support the launch of EDI-related tools and documents. Others similarly felt that more sessions/workshops would help increase engagement with and use of these resources.

“More online workshops to support the launch of these documents.”

“Think a training webinar/workshop for clubs would be a great addition.”

After increasing promotion and visibility, the next most common suggestions were for the resources to provide more practical actions and examples of what can be done to help reduce the barriers faced by people across different equalities-related groups. As Scotland’s national agency for sport, it was felt by some that **sportscotland** was in a unique position to be able to help reduce any confusion or lack of confidence that may be felt by those in Scotland’s sporting sector in this respect.

“Generally I don't think resources are action focussed enough. It would be good for the governing body to provide greater clarity on (a) what tangible things should be done and (b) how.”

“More FAQs for the basics. Club helper coach helper etc. What if a child with a disability arrives at a under 5's session?”

Others felt that **sportscotland** should explore the use of alternative formats and platforms to increase the accessibility of, and engagement with, its resources in this area. There were creative suggestions as to how **sportscotland** could help increase engagement amongst those participating in sport, as well as a feeling that different learning styles should be considered in the production of EDI-related resources (for example, through the creation of videos in addition to written guidance).

“[Make] into poster form with QR links that we can share with service users and stakeholders.”

“Different format - [my] preference is video, visual.”

“Could we have like a short video? The general population would be far more likely to watch a short video.”

Some research participants wished for these resources to be seen as ‘live’ documents that are regularly refreshed and updated to ensure their continuing relevance over time.

“I think the toolbox needs to continue to be refreshed and new content highlighted to staff via email or inside track.”

“Refreshed along with current priority action areas and updates on interventions in place.”

“Everything can be improved... these documents are live toolkits that should continue to grow and develop.”

Participants provided a lot of detailed feedback about the EDI toolbox, suggesting several improvements:

1. Update the 'lived experience' videos to make them more relevant to sports in Scotland.
2. Add more information explaining why certain groups, like those with Care Experience, are included alongside those with protected characteristics.
3. Review the glossary of terms to ensure they are suitable and appropriate for the Scottish context.

It was felt that **sportscotland** should continually be responsive to internal and external feedback of this kind to ensure the toolbox provides a full and accurate picture of the diverse range of activities in this area.

Finally, survey respondents were also asked how they would like to receive support around equality and sport. Figure 20 shows that online webinars were the most commonly identified method, selected by over three-quarters (76.6%) of respondents; this was followed by in person training and workshops (64.5%), information on the website (47.7%) and conferences/events (46.7%).

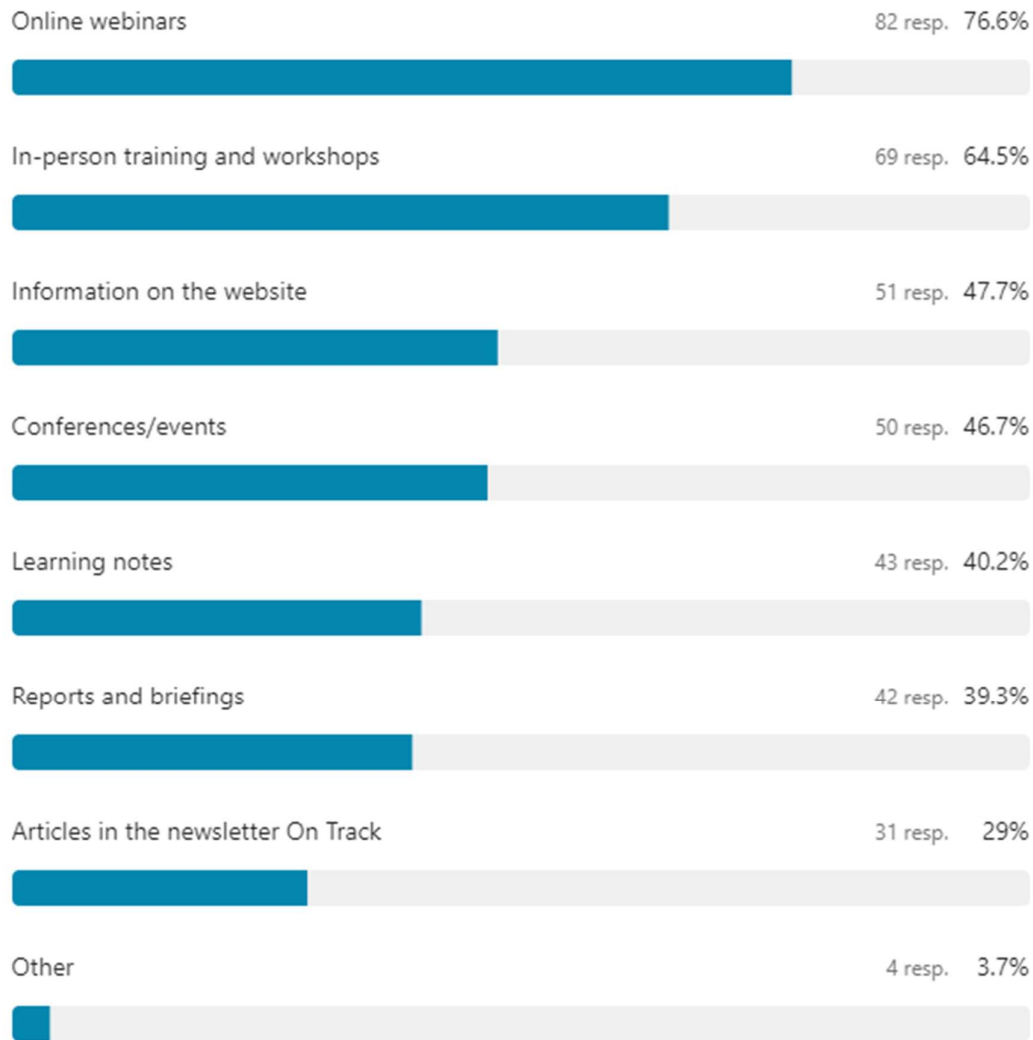


Figure 20: Responses to survey question “How would you most like to receive support around equality and sport?”

Impact of ‘Sport for Life’ vision

Feedback was also gathered with regards to the influence of **sportscotland’s** ‘Sport for Life’ vision on research participants’ work around inclusion. Figure 21 shows that over two-thirds (67.3%) of survey respondents said that the vision had influenced their work on inclusion. Participants in the research also provided a wide range of examples of different ways in which they had been influenced by Sport for Life.

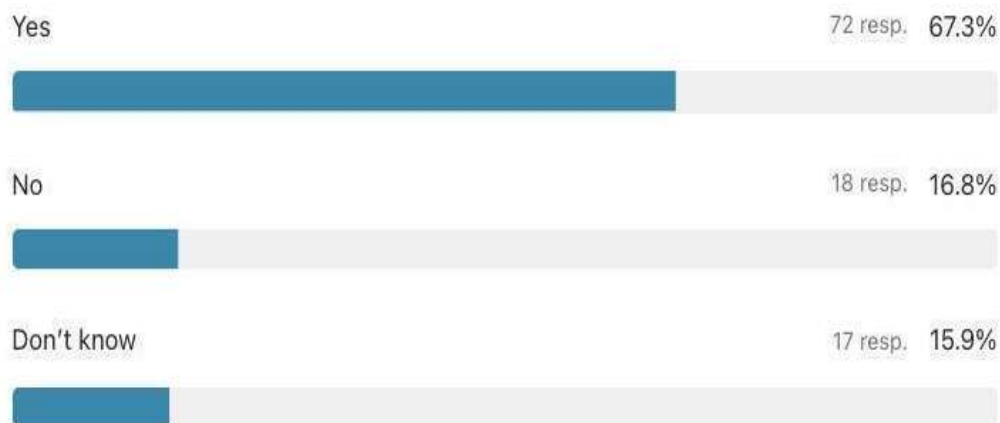


Figure 21: Responses to survey question “Has ‘Sport for Life’ influenced your work around inclusion?”

Several respondents said that Sport for Life played a key role in informing how they went about planning and delivering activities, helping them to do this in a way that is inclusive, person-centred, and responsive to a wide range of needs.

“The basis of the work myself and my team do is centred fully around the SFL strategy. We continually embed the guidance of the strategy to inform how and where we move within our work.”

“In a planning role, the sport for life strategy and inclusion underpinning everything we do significantly impacts my role.”

“Using it everyday as to who and why people are attending clubs. I have used surveys to understand why groups do not participate in sport. It underpins everything I do within Active Schools.”

Others said the Sport for Life had become a key reference point for them in their work - something they returned to regularly for guidance and as a practical resource with regards to inclusion in sport.

“It’s a definite reference point. The phrase inclusion underpins everything we do, is really clear and can be a useful aid to anchor people.”

“It’s been a key document to share with partners and colleagues and to reference wherever required in writing policies or providing guidance.”

“It has provided a clear framework to allow me to stay on track and reflect on outcomes and impact within my role.”

Some respondents highlighted how Sport for Life had helped to increase their knowledge and awareness around inclusion in sport, giving them greater confidence when engaged in relevant discussions and thinking about practical solutions.

“Just having a greater knowledge of this area and the importance of it.”

“Raised awareness and ability to have conversations about solutions.”

“Every part of my job, I related back to sport for life and want to provide sport to be accessible for all.”

Finally, several respondents provided more specific examples of projects or activities they had carried out which had been influenced by the Sport for Life vision and its emphasis on inclusion.

“I use the person-centred approach regularly, especially with participants and volunteers with ASN and disabilities or anyone who requires that little extra support.”

“I have initiated and led 2 significant projects that fit into the "Sport for Life" vision. Those are: a judo project for targeted, hard to reach young people and a partnership project with the College, in order to utilise over 100 students and provide sport opportunities to primary schools.”

“Our community sports hubs are far more inclusive now than ever before.”

Priorities and recommendations for improvement and progress

Summary of recommendations

The following outlines a summary of recommendations aimed at both **sportscotland** and the wider sporting sector, designed to build on existing progress and further advance equality, diversity, and inclusion in Scottish sport. These recommendations encompass actions at both the system level, influencing policy and strategy, and the local level, empowering communities to create meaningful change on the ground.

System-Level Recommendations

To achieve lasting change and create a truly inclusive sporting sector, systemic action is required across Scottish sport.

- **Building accessibility:** Ensure new and redeveloped facilities are fully accessible to individuals with disabilities by providing guidance and support, considering ramps, accessible bathrooms, and suitable changing room designs. Such support is already in place with **sportscotland** providing guidance and funding around inclusion and accessibility of facilities on their website¹⁸
- **Adaptive training:** Develop training programs to address evolving areas like transgender and non-binary inclusion in a supportive and inclusive manner.
- **Organisational culture:** Encourage leadership in Scottish sports organisations to prioritise equality through visible actions, strategic decisions, and integrating equality initiatives into everyday operations.
- **Specialist equipment:** Ensure targeted funding opportunities consider the need for specialist equipment to address disparities for participants with disabilities.
- **Increase diversity across the system:** Promote more diversity in leadership positions within sports organisations by encouraging a greater emphasis on diversity and inclusion metrics and data monitoring.
- **Champion lived experience:** Encourage the inclusion of voices with lived experience in decision-making roles to provide insights into the barriers faced by different groups.
- **Dynamic resources:** Treat the Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) toolbox as a living document. Continuously incorporate feedback, ensure the further addition of practical examples, and use alternative formats like videos and interactive visuals for accessibility.

¹⁸ [Accessible & inclusive - sportscotland the national agency for sport in Scotland](#)

- **Promote existing resources:** Increase efforts to make the toolbox and other equalities-related **sportscotland** tools and resources more visible and actively promote their use across the sector.
- **Inclusive sporting opportunities:** Advocate for more flexible school participation targets in sports to allow for inclusive sporting opportunities beyond traditional or popular sports, encouraging broader participation.
- **Increase direct support:** Encourage equality-based tasks and responsibilities to be part of more job roles, creating direct lines of accountability and support.

Local-Level Recommendations

Targeted interventions are necessary to effectively promote equality in sports at a local level.

- **Accessibility:** Improving access to sports facilities in rural areas requires collaboration with community transport services and consideration of infrastructure challenges specific to those locations. This ensures that geographical barriers do not limit participation. Guidance and funding in relation to accessibility and inclusion of facilities are available from **sportscotland**.¹⁹
- **Affordability:** Local sports clubs should be supported in adopting flexible cost models, such as "pay what you can" schemes and reduced fees for low-income families, Care Experienced children, and those from rural areas. This tackles financial barriers to participation.
- **Empowering volunteers:** Volunteers play a crucial role in local sports. Providing targeted training and resources on equality, diversity, and inclusion will better equip them to foster inclusive environments. Additionally, exploring ways to build capacity within local clubs can help reduce over-reliance on volunteers, ensuring sustainability and effectiveness.
- **Local autonomy:** Granting local professionals more discretion in allocating resources empowers them to address the unique needs of their communities. This localised approach ensures that interventions are relevant and impactful.
- **Dedicated support:** Designating points of contact within communities to support local clubs in implementing equality initiatives and navigating EDI challenges offers direct assistance and fosters a sense of shared responsibility.

Additional considerations for the Scottish sports sector

Creating truly inclusive sporting environments in Scotland requires a shift beyond simply providing information. While toolkits and resources are valuable, organisations must actively challenge the existing culture and practices that perpetuate exclusion. This necessitates a multiple approach, addressing accessibility, representation, and support systems.

¹⁹ [Accessible & inclusive - sportscotland the national agency for sport in Scotland](#)

Firstly, accessibility needs to be considered holistically. This means not only ensuring that facilities are physically accessible to those with disabilities but also addressing the transport challenges that can limit participation, particularly in rural areas. Furthermore, cost should not be a barrier to participation. Exploring flexible payment options and considering the need for specialised equipment in funding applications are crucial steps towards equitable access for all.

Beyond practical considerations, fostering inclusion requires a deeper understanding of the diverse needs of individuals and communities. Training programs should address evolving issues such as transgender equality, equipping staff and volunteers with the knowledge and confidence to navigate these complexities with sensitivity and inclusivity, organisations should move beyond a reliance on volunteers and invest in dedicated staff with expertise in EDI, ensuring that support is consistent and readily available. By embedding equality-based tasks within job roles and championing diversity in leadership positions, a clear message is sent that inclusion is a priority at all levels. Finally, embracing intersectionality and showcasing real-world examples of inclusive practices will strengthen the commitment to creating a sporting landscape where everyone feels welcome and empowered to participate.

Priorities for the Scottish sports sector

Below, we highlight a series of priorities for improvement in the years to come, linked to specific findings which emerged over the course of this project. Some of these priority areas, for example around the accessibility of facilities and the prevalence of discriminatory attitudes, are linked to deep-rooted logistical and cultural aspects of Scottish life. These attitudes will require years of concerted effort across many parts of society to fully address and rectify each priority. We have set out one or more recommended actions which we believe would help facilitate progress and positive change in the coming years, if undertaken by **sportscotland** in a spirit of collaboration with relevant partners across the sector.

Infrastructure barriers, including in relation to transport and the accessibility of sport-related buildings and locations, emerged as the most commonly-identified barriers to participating in sport in Scotland.

- When planning new facilities or redeveloping existing ones, such as adding ramps and suitable changing room designs, ensure they are fully accessible to individuals with disabilities. Organisations and groups should refer to **sportscotland**'s guidance on inclusion and accessibility²⁰ and include these aspects in any funding application.
- Explore working with existing local transport services or creating partnerships to improve transport options, particularly for those in rural areas, to make sports facilities more accessible.
- Encourage local authorities and clubs to take into account infrastructure challenges around sports participation in rural areas, and ensure accessibility for remote communities is factored into programme planning and funding.

²⁰ <https://sportscotland.org.uk/facilities/design-guidance/guidance-by-facility-type/accessible-inclusive>

There are some equalities characteristics and groups, including transgender, deafness, and religion & belief, which only a minority of the sports workforce feel they have a strong understanding of.

- Develop and/or identify training programs to help the sector address and build confidence around evolving issues and topics, such as transgender, in a supportive and inclusive manner.
- Ensure clear and up-to-date guidance and information is available to those working across levels of sport in Scotland who wish to improve their understanding of these areas.
- Explore designating specific points of contact within communities through which local clubs and organisations can access support in implementing initiatives and understanding challenges around equality and inclusion in sport.

Research participants highlighted a lack of representation of those with equalities characteristics in senior leadership roles, but also pointed to a lack of clear and available data with regards to Scotland's sports workforce as a whole.

- Promote greater diversity in leadership positions in sports organisations (and across the wider sports workforce) by encouraging a focus on diversity and inclusion metrics and data monitoring.
- Explore opportunities for the adoption of 'reverse mentoring' approaches to training and development, through which people of underrepresented backgrounds can play active roles in more formal processes aimed at bringing about specific actions and outcomes with regards to equality and representation.

Most of those we engaged with said they had experienced or observed somebody facing barriers to participation in sporting environments, such as racism, discrimination, and negative attitudes towards people of particular characteristics.

- Encourage the adoption of formal 'allyship' approaches to addressing barriers in sporting environments, through which those in Scotland's sports workforce can become better equipped in turning good intentions into specific actions to support those affected.
- Encourage the inclusion of voices with lived experience in decision-making roles to provide insights into the barriers different groups face.

Most research participants said that the term 'equality' was not a part of their current job title or description, with most also feeling that there is a need for greater equality and inclusion in sport in Scotland.

- Include equality-related tasks and responsibilities within the descriptions of more job roles and positions across the Scottish sports workforce, to encourage collective responsibility for promoting equality and create direct lines of accountability and support within sports organisations.

Many sports clubs and communities in Scotland, particularly at the grassroots level, are either led by volunteers or are reliant on volunteers to carry out many crucial day-to-day activities, which can limit their ability to undertake equality-related initiatives.

- Explore ways in which local sports clubs and communities can be supported to build capacity and avoid over-reliance on volunteers.
- Provide training and resources specifically designed for volunteers, to help them become better equipped to promote and understand equality, diversity, and inclusion in sport.

Cost and affordability emerged as a crucial barrier to accessing sport in the minds of many of those we engaged with across Scotland's sports sector, relevant across people of different backgrounds/characteristics and reinforcing existing barriers and inequalities of access.

- Provide advice and guidance to local sports clubs in relation to exploring flexible cost models such as "pay what you can" or reduced membership fees for groups such as low-income families, Care Experienced children, and people from rural areas.

The most common piece of feedback gathered with regards to sportscotland's existing equality-related resources was that these tools and documents should be made more visible and promoted more widely.

- Increase efforts to make the EDI toolbox and other equalities-related **sportscotland** tools and resources more visible, and seek to more actively promote their use across the world of sport in Scotland.
- Incorporate internal and external feedback continuously, regularly seek out practical examples for potential use, and use alternative formats such as videos and interactive visuals to ensure accessibility.

In performance sport environments, most research participants felt that equality is considered only "a little" or "not at all".

- Encourage leadership in Scottish sports organisations, including Scottish Governing Bodies, to prioritise equality through visible actions, strategic decisions, and the integration of equality initiatives into everyday operations. The Moving to Inclusion Framework (<https://movingtoinclusion.co.uk/moving-to-inclusion-framework>) is available to guide organisations through this process.

Achieving true equality in Scottish sport requires a collective and sustained effort. While some barriers, such as ingrained attitudes and systemic inequalities, will require long-term societal change, the recommendations outlined here offer a tangible roadmap for progress. By prioritising accessibility, fostering inclusive leadership, empowering volunteers, and promoting open dialogue, **sportscotland** and its partners can create a sporting landscape where everyone feels welcome, valued, and able to thrive. This collaborative approach, driven by a commitment to continuous improvement and informed by lived experiences, will pave the way for a more equitable and representative sporting sector in Scotland.

Annex A: Background on additional learning note groups

Poverty and low income

sportscotland addresses socio-economic deprivation by acknowledging its impact on access to sport and physical activity. By utilising the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to understand and gauge poverty and low income, **sportscotland** recognises that socio-economic factors significantly influence sports participation. People from the most deprived areas are often less active and face greater barriers to engage in sport.

The cost-of-living crisis has worsened these challenges, making it even more difficult for individuals from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds to participate in sports. There has been a decline in participation and challenges in maintaining sporting facilities due to financial pressures, which further restrict access for those affected by poverty.

Care Experienced young people

sportscotland, as a Corporate Parent, has a responsibility under the Children and Young People Act 2014 to improve the lives of Care Experienced young people through sport. Through the publication of several Corporate Parenting Plans, **sportscotland** emphasises the role of building an inclusive community to remove barriers to participation faced by Care Experienced young people and to ensure equal access to opportunities, promoting their all-round development through sport.

sportscotland remains committed to upholding all children's rights, including safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of Care Experienced young people. With the development of the 2024-2027 Corporate Parenting Plan²¹, the wellbeing of Care Experienced young people is enshrined by the commitment to 'The Promise'²².

sportscotland adheres to four main commitments; educating its staff and the broader sports sector about the needs of Care Experienced young people, enhancing their access to sports participation and coaching opportunities, and providing career development through opportunities within **sportscotland**.

The deaf community

While the deaf community are protected under the Equality Act 2010 through provisions to prohibit discrimination based on disability, **sportscotland** have identified this group as facing particular barriers to sports inclusion.

Research conducted in 2020 highlighted that there was a limited understanding about the Deaf community within the sports sector, with many respondents indicating only "a little" understanding. There is a recognised need for more support and training about the Deaf community's unique needs and experiences in sports. The research suggests that increasing efforts to understand and improve

²¹ <https://sportscotland.org.uk/about-us/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/childrens-rights-and-corporate-parenting>

²² <https://thepromise.scot/>

sporting experiences for the Deaf, including how they can be more effectively engaged in sports participation, would be valuable.

Across the sporting sector there are examples of programmes including a British Sign Language and Deaf-friendly programme²³ introduced by Scottish Curling to help reduce communication barriers and encourage participation in curling among deaf individuals.

Mental health

People with long-term mental health issues are protected from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010, and **sportscotland** has identified people experiencing mental ill-health as facing particular barriers to sports inclusion. The Scottish Mental Health Charter for Physical Activity and Sport emphasises²⁴ the positive effects of sport and physical activity on mental health and wellbeing. The charter supports **sportscotland**'s EDI approach.

The charter forms a part of **sportscotland**'s commitment to inclusion and aims to reduce barriers to sports participation, challenge stigma, and promote mental health awareness within the sports community.

Rural communities

It is recognised by **sportscotland** and the Scottish Government that rural and island communities face unique challenges in accessing sports. This may be due to limited public transport and resources, and fewer opportunities compared to urban areas.

The Islands (Scotland) Act, 2018²⁵ and the National Islands Plan²⁶, both aim to enhance wellbeing and economic growth in island and rural communities by improving sports facilities and promoting participation. It is therefore necessary to gain an understanding of what rural communities need in order to conduct full impact assessments for future policies.

²³<https://www.scottishcurling.org/development/inclusive-curling/bsldeaf-friendly-curling/#:~:text=Scottish%20Curling%20has%20worked%20in%20partnership%20with%20staff,some%20new%20BSL%20signs%20for%20technical%20curling%20terms>

²⁴<https://sportscotland.org.uk/about-us/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/scottish-mental-health-charter-for-physical-activity-and-sport>

²⁵ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2018/12>

²⁶ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-plan-scotlands-islands/>

Annex B: Summary of key research

Summary of key research for the equality groups with the highest number of research reports since 2020.

Race

Race, including all aspects of nationality and ethnic origins, has been the predominant equality theme since 2020. This is unsurprising given the high-profile nature of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020. Communities across the world were prompted to take action, either into direct action or protest, or, using research as an outlet to better understand the role, and subsequent inequalities, surrounding race in all areas of daily life. As a result, a high volume of reports, reviews, and research emerged in the sporting sphere to better understand how racial inclusion and sport intersect across the UK. In 2020, for example, *Sported* released a valuable report titled “Tackling Racism at the Grassroots” that highlighted how “*Black, Asian and minority ethnic people working or volunteering in community sport [in the UK] can feel ‘patronised and poorly represented’ within the grassroots and community sport sector.*”²⁷ The following year, a ‘Coaching for All (CfA)’²⁸ report by Loughborough University, funded by Sport England, sought to uncover why there is underrepresentation in paid coaches from global majority backgrounds across a variety of coaching scenarios and settings.

Sporting Equals produced a [literature review](#) on ‘Sport & Ethnicity in Scotland’ in 2024, outlining some of the primary equality issues surrounding race and ethnicity across the Scottish sports sector. The evidence presented in this review reveals unequal participation of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds in sports activities across Scotland. The report draws on findings from the Scottish Household survey which indicates that ‘participation rates in physical activity and sport were lower amongst those from ethnically diverse communities than in the white population in the majority of activities.’²⁹ The report also outlines some recommendations on tackling racism and racial inequality in sport activities across Scotland, including, providing ‘victims of such behaviour [space] to tell their own stories in their own words to people who they trust’.

In its concluding remarks, the Sporting Equals report highlights the need for more Scotland-specific data on ethnic diversity and sports participation, emphasising the importance of understanding the nuances within and between ethnically diverse communities. It stresses the need to move beyond current EDI initiatives and embed meaningful change within sporting organisations, fostering collaboration with community organisations and prioritising education and cultural sensitivity.

In the few years that followed, more research was published that analysed the refugee experience of sport in the UK; the intersections of race and ethnicity in sport; the prevalence of racism in football and cricket; the impact of racism on elite athletes and coaches from racially diverse backgrounds; and the underrepresentation of coaches of colour in the UK³⁰.

²⁷ Sported (2020), [Sported Insight and Research, ‘Tackling Racism at the Grassroots.](#)

²⁸ <https://www.sportingcommunitiescic.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/CFA-Coaching-for-all-Research-report.pdf>

²⁹ Sporting Equals (2024), Sport & Ethnicity in Scotland Report 2024

³⁰ Stone (2018) ‘Utopian community football? Sport, hope and belongingness in the lives of refugees and asylum seekers,’ *Leisure Studies*. 37(2):171-183; Pavan (2021) ‘Shall We Speak Football?: “Scottish Accent You Know—It’s Not Easy”’ *International Journal of Sport & Society*. 12(2):199-218; Nunn, et al. (2022) ‘Beyond integration: football as a mobile, transnational sphere of belonging for refugee-background

Disability

In the past four years, at least 10 new pieces of research have further established and understood the barriers people with disabilities experience when accessing (or trying to access) sport in the UK and Scotland. 'Disability' is a broad and, in some ways, unsuitable term as it potentially has the effect of looking at everyone in the same way when, of course, everyone is an individual and it is unhelpful to flatten their experiences into one broad category. 'Disability' can instead be broken down into a host of subcategories, such as physical disability (which can again be dissected further); neurodiversity; and dealing with mental health issues. The research published in the past four years reflects this wider approach, however, highlighting the need to establish new diverse and inclusive categories under the umbrella of 'disability.'

In 2021, for example, *Observation for Sport in Scotland*, jointly with the University of West Scotland, published their extensive 'Disability Sport Research Review'³¹ which sought to update the 2001 'Disability Sport in Scotland' review conducted by **sportscotland**. The updated report highlights developments in disability sport in Scotland and underscores key barriers to participation. The following year, the *World Innovation Summit for Health* produced an extensive report documenting the importance of sport for mental health. In addition, that same year, UK Deaf Sport produced their report 'Supporting deaf girls to stay active in their teenage years and beyond,' which unpicks the intersections of gender and disability, and seeks to understand the specific barriers teenage girls with hearing impairments face when accessing sport, and pinpointing ways to remedy this.³²

Transgender and non-binary gender

In the past four years, there have been eight new research reports / reviews published on the protected characteristic of 'gender reassignment', more commonly referred to by LGBTQIA+ organisations as transgender or trans which are more inclusive terms. The legal term of 'gender reassignment' has been designated by the 2010 Equality Act and states that "you must not be discriminated against because of gender reassignment." Much like the broad term 'disability,' more nuance is necessary when understanding the intricacies and varying identities protected under the umbrella of 'gender reassignment.' The legal term does not only apply to those who have medically transitioned into their identified gender. It also applies to any trans person (man, woman, transfeminine, transmasculine) who identifies as a gender different to the one they were assigned at birth, but who may not have had (or want) surgery, or be currently on (or seeking) any medicalised form of transitional care. The term also includes individuals who identify as 'non-binary', who don't view their gender under the strict confines of two categories but instead self-identify with pronouns such as 'they/them/their.'

LEAP Sports (Leadership, Equality and Active Participation in Sports for LGBTQIA+ people in Scotland) have been frontrunners in research and reports on trans and non-binary inclusion in sport, producing, not only data-driven publications like 'Non-binary inclusion in sport: Rising to the

young people,' *Leisure Studies*. 41(1):42-55; Smith, et al. (2023) 'Do know harm': Examining the intersecting capabilities of young people from refugee backgrounds through community sport and leisure programmes,' *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. 58(7):1135-1153.; Doidge, M., Keech, M. & Sandri, E. (2020) 'Active integration': sport clubs taking an active role in the integration of refugees,' *International Journal of Sport Policy & Politics*. 12(2):305-319.; <https://cdn.cityofsanctuary.org/uploads/2023/03/Football-Club-of-Sanctuary-Awards-Minimum-Criteria-Draft-04-22.docx>; <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/football-welcomes-refugees>; <https://pawb.cymru/footballwelcomesrefugees/>

³¹ <https://oss.scot/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Disability-Sport-Review-Aug-2021-final.pdf>

³² UK Deaf Sport (2022), [Supporting deaf girls to stay active in their teenage years and beyond](#)

challenge,”³³ but also creating toolkits for “helping transgender people feel as comfortable as possible when going to the gym,”³⁴ and toolkits for “increasing visibility and inclusion of LGBTI people in mainstream sports.”³⁵

³³ <https://leapsports.org/files/4225-Non-Binary%20Inclusion%20in%20sport%20Booklet.pdf>

³⁴ <https://leapsports.org/files/0152-LEAP%20Trans%20Access%20Hit%20the%20Gym,%20online%20use.pdf>

³⁵ <https://leapsports.org/files/1840-Major%20Sports%20Events%20toolkit.pdf>

Annex C: Survey with Stakeholders - questions

Survey introduction

sportscotland have commissioned Horizons Research to conduct research on equality and sport. The purpose of the research is to help improve work within the sport sector in Scotland, in relation to advancing equality, eliminating discrimination and fostering good relations between different groups of people across sport in Scotland.

By equalities groups, we refer to people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (including age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, sexual orientation). In addition to this, we include characteristics such as socio-economic status, Care Experience and rural exclusion.

About this survey

This survey will gather views and experiences from the perspective of all parts of the Scottish sport workforce. It aims to understand the sports sector's understanding and awareness of equality issues in sport, how equalities issues are embedded in the work of people in the sports sector, and to gather feedback on existing tools and resources on the **sportscotland** website.

This survey:

- should take 5-10 minutes to complete if you opt only to answer the multiple choice questions or 10-20 minutes if you choose to elaborate on answers
- is open until Monday 30 September 2024

The survey is designed to gather a wide range of views and experiences. Please be as open and honest as you can. To navigate between questions, simply use the blue arrows at the bottom of the screen, or scroll if using a mouse.

The survey is anonymous, and your name or identifiable details will not be used in our report. All data will be processed and stored in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Horizons Research's Data Protection Policy. The data will be used for the purposes of understanding how people across the sport sector in Scotland think about equalities issues. The data will be analysed and presented in our report for **sportscotland**, to be published at the end of 2024.

If you have any questions about the survey or would like to access the survey in a different format (such as text-to-speech), please contact us at info@horizonsresearch.org.

1. Do you consent to your data being used for this research project and associated outputs?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
2. Which type of organisation (or network) do you work in?
 - a. **sportscotland**

- b. Scottish Governing Body
 - c. Community Sport Hubs
 - d. Local authority
 - e. Active Schools
 - f. FE/HE
 - g. Leisure Trust
 - h. Third sector
 - i. Other
3. What is your role in that organisation (or network)?
 - a. Officer
 - b. Middle manager
 - c. Administrator
 - d. CEO/director of large divisions
 - e. Senior manager, team manager
 - f. Senior officer/supervisor
 - g. Head of department, director of smaller organisations
 - h. Other
 4. Does your current job role include the term 'equality' in its title or description?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
 5. How long have you been working in the sporting system in Scotland?
 - a. 5 years +
 - b. 2-5 years
 - c. 1-2 years
 - d. Less than 1 year
 6. Do you feel that there has been a shift in the way people in the sporting system in Scotland think about equality in recent years?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
 7. If you feel there has been a shift in how people think about equality, please elaborate on what you feel the reasons are for this.
 8. How well do you feel you understand issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion?
 - a. I have a strong understanding of these issues
 - b. I have a basic understanding of these issues
 - c. I still do not fully understand these issues
 - d. None of the above
 9. Please elaborate on how well you feel you understand issues relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.
 10. Do you agree that there should be more equality and inclusion in sport in Scotland?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know

11. Please elaborate on your thoughts around whether there should be more equality and inclusion in sport in Scotland.
12. Have you ever observed / experienced anyone facing barriers in the sports system?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
13. If you have encountered people facing barriers in trying to access sports in Scotland, how have you taken action in response to this (and/or who have you spoken to about it)?
14. What do you think are the main barriers that 'equalities groups' face in accessing sport in Scotland?
 - a. Physical access barriers (i.e. for people with physical disabilities)
 - b. Infrastructure barriers (i.e. transport, accessibility of locations/buildings)
 - c. Mental/cognitive access barriers (i.e. for people with neurodivergence, mental health issues)
 - d. Not being included fairly
 - e. Not having adjustments made to enable participation
 - f. Not having enough sports role models / positive encouragement to participate
 - g. Stigma, discrimination and negative behaviours
 - h. Not being listened to
 - i. Not feeling welcome in the sporting system
 - j. Other
 - k. All of the above
15. Do you feel you have sufficient information and guidance to enable you to support people facing barriers / people from equalities groups to access sports?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't know
16. Please elaborate on whether you feel you have sufficient information and guidance to enable you to support people facing barriers / people from equalities groups to access sports.
17. What are your main sources of knowledge and evidence for equality and sport?
18. Have you accessed any of the following resources from **sportscotland** in your role?
 - a. A. EDI section of the **sportscotland** website
 - b. B. New Ideas – Our Equality Outcomes (equality outcomes for 2021-25)
 - c. C. EDI **sportscotland** toolbox
 - d. D. Equality in Sport Learning Notes
 - e. E. Equality in Sport Research Report (2020)
 - f. F. Equality in Sport Research
19. Please tell us which of the following resources you have found most useful.
 - a. A. EDI section of the **sportscotland** website
 - b. B. New Ideas – Our Equality Outcomes (equality outcomes for 2021-25)
 - c. C. EDI **sportscotland** toolbox
 - d. D. Equality in Sport Learning Notes
 - e. E. Equality in Sport Research Report (2020)
 - f. F. Equality in Sport Research

20. What have you found useful about these resources (if accessed)?
21. How do you think these resources could be improved (if accessed)?
22. Could you tell us about how you've used these resources in your own role?
23. 'Sport for Life' is **sportscotland's** vision for an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport. It is guided by the principles of being inclusive, person-centred, accountable, collaborative, responsible and first-class. Has 'Sport for Life' influenced your work around inclusion?
24. If Yes, please provide examples of how Sport for Life has influenced your work around inclusion.
25. Overall, what priority do you feel equality has within sport in Scotland?
 - a. Completely – it underpins everything in sport
 - b. A lot – it is considered in most areas
 - c. A little – it is considered in some areas
 - d. None – it is rarely thought about
26. Please elaborate on the level of priority you feel equality has within sport in Scotland.
27. To what extent do you feel different environments within the sporting system take account of equality?

a. Clubs and communities:	Completely	A lot	A little	Not at all	Don't know
b. Schools and education:	Completely	A lot	A little	Not at all	Don't know
c. Performance sport:	Completely	A lot	A little	Not at all	Don't know
28. Please expand on the extent to which you feel different environments within the sporting system take account of equality.
29. Overall, how supported do you feel in your immediate working environment?

a. To promote equality:	Well supported	Fair	Not well supported	Don't know
b. To embed equalities and inclusion into your work:	Well supported	Fair	Not well supported	Don't know
c. To understand equality issues:	Well supported	Fair	Not well supported	Don't know
30. Please expand on the extent to which you feel supported in your immediate working environment in relation to promoting, embedding and understanding equality issues.
31. How would you describe the work that you do to reduce inequalities and further inclusion in sport?
32. Please rate your understanding of equalities issues in relation to each of the following characteristics:
 - a. Age groups (e.g. early years, elderly)
 - b. Care Experienced young people
 - c. Deafness
 - d. Disability
 - e. Gender
 - f. Gender reassignment
 - g. LGBT+
 - h. Mental health
 - i. Poverty and low income
 - j. Race
 - k. Religion + belief

- l. Rural exclusion
33. Would you like to receive support, training or guidance on equality and sport for specific groups in the future?
- a. Age groups (e.g. early years, elderly)
 - b. Care Experienced young people
 - c. Deafness
 - d. Disability
 - e. Gender
 - f. Gender reassignment
 - g. LGBT+
 - h. Mental health
 - i. Poverty and low income
 - j. Race
 - k. Religion + belief
 - l. Rural exclusion
34. Do you have any other suggestions, requests or thoughts for any other support, training or guidance?
35. How would you most like to receive support around equality and sport?
36. Finally, please use this space for any additional comments you would like to share about this area of work.

Annex D: Interviews with Stakeholders - questions

1. What is the organisation you work for and what is your role?
2. How long have you been working in or with the sports sector?
3. Does your current job role include the term 'equality' in its title or remit?
4. What does equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) mean for you?
5. Do you feel that there has been a shift in the way people in the sports system in Scotland think about equality in recent years? If so, how (and why)?
6. Do you think there are gaps in the sports sector's understanding of specific equalities groups (like the ones I mentioned earlier)? If so, which groups do you think need more attention?
7. What do you think are the main barriers that 'equalities groups' face in accessing sport in Scotland?
8. Have you ever tried to further equality and inclusion in sport in your own work? If so, in what ways?
9. From your experience, do you think enough practical action is taken to promote equality in sport in Scotland? In...
 - a. Clubs and communities
 - b. Schools and education
 - c. Performance sport
10. How supported do you feel in your immediate working environment to understand equality issues and take action on embedding equality and inclusion into your work?
11. What is your biggest source of knowledge and evidence for equality and sport?
12. Have you accessed any of the reports, toolkits or learning notes on equality, diversity and inclusion that **sportscotland** has produced?
13. What have you found useful about these resources (if accessed), and how do you think they could be improved?
14. Can you give us any examples of how you've used any of these resources in your own role?
15. What support, training or guidance on equality and sport have you accessed in the past 12 months?
16. Would you like to receive support, training or guidance on equality and sport for specific equalities groups in the future? If so, which ones?
17. Do you have any other suggestions, requests or thoughts for any other support, training or guidance?
18. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us that you think might be helpful for this project?