



## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>**

# **The Value of Sport: Beyond Physical Activity**

**Does public policy underestimate the value of sport to social benefit, population health and wellbeing? The implications for sport and public policy in Scotland**

**An academic review commissioned by  
the Observatory for Sport in Scotland**

**Nicholas F. Rowe<sup>2</sup> and Ryan Brown<sup>3</sup>**

**April 2023**

---

<sup>1</sup> A copy of the full report is available at: [www.oss.scot](http://www.oss.scot)

<sup>2</sup> Nick Rowe was the Head of Strategy and Research at Sport England for over 25 years, where he helped develop a UK-wide 'Active People' approach to understanding sport and physical activity; and was Visiting Research Fellow at Leeds Beckett University. He currently works as an independent research consultant in sport and social policy, Chairs the Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS) Research Advisory Group and advises internationally on sport research. His book, *'Sporting Capital: Transforming Sports Development Policy and Practice'*, was published in December 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Ryan Brown is the Research Manager at the Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS). A former Scotland and UK elite athlete, he graduated from the University of the West of Scotland with a BSc in Sport and Exercise Science. He works across different areas of sport research, from elite to community, and has published work on *'Women in Leadership in Scottish Sport'* (2021), a study of gender equity in leadership roles across Scottish sport, commissioned by Scottish Women in Sport.

## INTRODUCTION

The central argument made in this review is that community sport provides value beyond the well-evidenced benefits of physical activity, and that public policy in Scotland currently fails to recognise or give sufficient priority to its contribution as it seeks to define social progress not solely by measures of GDP but by a wider set of values that prioritise sustainability, population health and wellbeing, individual happiness, and social and civic connection.

Taking part in sport is to be physically active, but is that its sum total? What do we miss if we characterise sport solely in terms of frequency, intensity and duration of activity but ignore other attributes associated with play, such as self-esteem, self-confidence, mastery, self-expression and social connection? Community sport makes a significant contribution to helping the nation be active, but does it do much more than this?

In exploring these questions, we do not suggest that a choice be made between public investment and support for ‘sport development’, and public investment and support for ‘physical activity promotion.’ Both are vital to a healthy and thriving population. However, our review of the research and policy evidence shows that the direction of travel in public policy in Scotland has been to increasingly conflate the two; to treat sport and other physical activities as equivalents and, consequently, by design or default, potentially dilute or waste resources and investment in seeking to address the huge public health challenge that is physical inactivity.

This analysis does not seek to mount a defence or uncritical affirmation of the value of all community sport but suggests that conflation of physical activity and sport in public policy could be failing both by not playing to their respective strengths and consequently not optimising the impact of investment of limited public resources. We conclude by recommending a new vision of ‘sport as society’, not merely ‘sport in society’, supported by a new National Strategy for Sport in Scotland engaging widely across government, health, education and communities, underpinned by investment in research capacity and evidence building.

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Our analysis suggests that public policy in Scotland would benefit from a more cohesive strategic approach and support for delivery models that can harness community sport’s potential and optimise its impact in delivering heightened societal value in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A number of recommendations follow from this analysis that could help to shape community sport policy, practice and delivery in Scotland:

- **Community sport should be recognised in public policy for multiple contributions to outcomes that drive improved wellbeing in Scotland**
- **Community sport in Scotland requires renewed strategic purpose to provide a platform for investment and unite stakeholders in a shared vision and agenda for change**
- **Topic area reviews: Priority topics to be agreed in a strategic planning stakeholder consultation**
- **Scottish sport must agree societal purpose and demonstrate impact, value and reach**
- **Cultural and funding shift in research commitment in areas of sport policy**

## HOW WE DEFINE SPORT IS IMPORTANT

The definition of what is and is not sport is contestable, and not solely of academic interest but with implications for priority in government policy and associated funding consequences. The direction of travel for the public policy definition of sport is towards a wider and more encompassing one that includes exercise, fitness and recreational activities, but this expands further under the ‘physical activity’ umbrella which includes areas such as active travel, gardening and housework.

The UN definition of sport has gained currency across many European countries and used as a guide by the Observatory for Sport in Scotland refers to *“All forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organised or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games.”* Although open to wide interpretation it does by way of example provide some clarity on where the boundary may lie between sport and other physical activities.

This pragmatic definition of ‘sport’ has been accepted as uncontroversial with little public or academic discourse, debate or scrutiny. Yet, it has significant implications for how resources are distributed and on where and how public policy focuses its effort, as a wide definition of sport can dilute resources and focus and hide important trends that a narrower focus would reveal. To view sport as subsidiary to wider outcomes associated with a more physically active nation is potentially to relegate it to a supporting rather than primary role in public policy, and potentially lose a wide range of health and wellbeing benefits.

Sport’s relationship with wellbeing similarly requires clarity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2022) summarise wellbeing as follows: *“Traditionally, health-related quality of life has been linked to patient outcomes and has generally focused on deficits in functioning (e.g., pain, negative affect). In contrast, well-being focuses on assets in functioning, including positive emotions and psychological resources (e.g., positive affect, autonomy, mastery) as key components.”*

In the context of ‘sport policy’, the definition developed by Dodge et al in 2012 has application and resonance: *“In essence, stable wellbeing is when individuals have the psychological, social and physical resources they need to meet a particular psychological, social and/or physical challenge. When individuals have more challenges than resources, the see-saw dips, along with their wellbeing, and vice-versa.”*

## **SPORT IN SCOTTISH SOCIETY – BEHAVIOURAL TRENDS AND INFLUENCES**

It is important in the context of this review to understand the place of community sport in Scottish society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, recent trends in participation and factors shaping those trends, and the overall ‘direction of travel’ with potential consequences, both intended and unintended. Our review of the evidence supports a developing narrative around the role of sport in society, its place in public policy and increasing threats it faces. We draw the following observations and conclusions:

- 1) Sport participation rates in Scotland since 2000 may appear to be static, but they are not. The aggregation of statistics in a wide definition of ‘sport’ hides a growing poverty divide and sustained decline in more formally organised sport in Scotland. The reasons for this are often presented as having a degree of inevitability related to changing preferences and may be used to abnegate public policy responsibility for halting or reversing this trend. There is also evidence of generational change with signs that young people are both losing access to sport participation, dropping out at a young age and moving away from organised sport, with reducing or shifting demand and increasing competition for their leisure time from more sedentary activities.
- 2) The COVID-19 pandemic sent a major shock through an already fragile sport system in Scotland. Reducing annual investment in community infrastructure over 20 plus years, amid pressures to ‘break even’ in what is a discretionary, non-statutory local service, reached crisis point in most parts of Scotland. As we emerge from COVID there is unprecedented pessimism on the sustainability of local sport facilities, and the rate of permanent closures is increasing. This is accompanied by spiralling inflation, record increases in energy costs, uncertain economic markets and business environments, and severe staffing shortages. A new era of austerity looms, and previous experience of policy in Scotland shows that despite increasing evidence of value, social return on investment and health returns, community sport and leisure in Scotland will continue to be drained of investment as national and local government focus on what are considered essential public services such as the NHS, education, social care, housing and community safety. This contrasts with more active countries that have given community sport and wider physical activity a greater priority in public policy in response to social and economic challenges, to support and enhance public health, education and community cohesion.
- 3) As important as it is to focus on provision and opportunity - the infrastructure of sport – it would be a mistake to lose sight of the impact of recent shocks to the social and economic system on consumers of sport. The impact of COVID has been disproportionately felt by those living in poverty or on low incomes and the pandemic amplified inequalities in society. Sport participation was already highly socially structured and polarised in Scotland before COVID, and the pandemic is likely to have had a disproportionate impact on sport participation by more vulnerable socially and economically disadvantaged groups. Evidence shows that recovery in community sport activity has been slow with progress most likely to be found in informal or solo activities such as recreational walking, gym use and cycling – areas that were showing an increase in participation prior to the pandemic - with return to other activity hindered by a cost-of-living crisis exacerbated by austerity in public services, an increasing tax burden and higher mortgage rates.

This analysis may at first suggest a gloomy outlook for community sport, but our study points towards an alternative narrative, where organised, socially structured sport is not an inevitable casualty of the social and economic challenges we face, but may instead be grasped, as is taking place in the world’s most active countries, as part of new health and wellbeing preventative solutions to problems facing all ages in Scotland.

## THE VALUE OF SPORT - PHYSICAL AND BEYOND

### The physiological health benefits of being active

Evaluated from any perspective, UK and global evidence on the value of sport and physical activity has grown substantially over the last 70 years.

The physiological response to exercise has played a long and formative role in the epistemological development of the value of sport, exercise and broader physical activity. In part, this is because the physiological response and associated health benefits better lend themselves to clinical models of research than the more conceptually challenging and methodologically difficult research paradigms associated with social and psychological benefits, programme impacts and effectiveness. Consequently, the most substantive and compelling evidence base is on the physical health benefits of ‘physical activity’.

According to the World Health Organisation (2022): *“Regular physical activity is proven to help prevent and manage noncommunicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and several cancers. It also helps prevent hypertension, maintain healthy body weight and can improve mental health, quality of life and well-being.”*

This is crystallised in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (undated) conclusion that: *“Regular physical activity is one of the most important things you can do for your health. Being physically active can improve your brain health, help manage weight, reduce the risk of disease, strengthen bones and muscles, and improve your ability to do everyday activities.”*

### The mental health and wellbeing benefits of sport and physical activity

The evidence base on the mental health benefits of a physically active lifestyle has trailed those on the physiological benefits but as sport becomes a stronger core policy within many governments seeking improved health prevention around the world it has strengthened in recent years and become more substantive.

Sport England in its review of the evidence on the outcomes of sport and physical activity (Sport England, 2017, p.34) concluded that: *“Compared with some other outcome areas, mental wellbeing as an outcome area appears to be well-established.”* Evidence of a positive impact of sport and exercise activity was reported on enjoyment and happiness; confidence and self-esteem; reduction of anxiety, stress and depression; improvements in terms of cognitive function; and reducing the risk of dementia.

Eime et al (2013, p.19) in their systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents concluded that: *“There is substantive evidence of many different psychological and social health benefits of participation in sport by children and adolescents. Furthermore, there is a general consensus that participation in sport for children and adolescence is associated with improved psychological and social health, above and beyond other forms of leisure-time PA.”*

Sport England (2017) noted limitations in the evidence base in terms of the quality of studies and directions of causality and, importantly in the context of this review, on *“the effectiveness of different types of sports, exercise and physical activities.”*

The relationship between participation in sport and exercise activity and subjective wellbeing (happiness) has been of increasing academic and policy interest (Downward et al 2011; Fujiwara et al, 2014). Taylor et al (2015, pp. 35, 37) note that *“there is growing evidence of the association between sport, exercise and subjective wellbeing”* but draw attention to limitations inherent in this research, referring in particular to, *“the little or no evidence of the differential effects of participation in sport*

*and exercise on wellbeing for various subgroups of the population, although it is clear that there are differentiated effects depending on individual versus team sports.”*

A systematic review of the evidence on the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents (Eime et al, 2013, p.19) concluded that “*...there is a general consensus that participation in sport for children and adolescence is associated with improved psychological and social health, above and beyond other forms of leisure-time PA. More specifically, there are reports that participation in team sports rather than individual activities is associated with better health.*”

In New Zealand an empirical study (Wilson et al, 2022) examining the association between wellbeing and organised sport participation among adolescents whilst accounting for demographic characteristics and other recreational physical activity concluded that “*...participation in organised sport appears to offer a unique benefit to wellbeing above and beyond participation in other recreational physical activities. Thus, while quality experiences of recreational physical activity are evidently beneficial for wellbeing, promoting participation in organized sport may offer greater value for those who are already active.*”

## **Going beyond physical activity - the social benefits of sport**

The evidence base continues to evolve and develop, but as we widen the lens on the impact of sport to examine broader social benefits it is incumbent on us to explore more challenging research questions. Notwithstanding the healthy degree of caution called for by Coalter (2007), recent summary reviews have made a range of positive conclusions on an emerging evidence base on the social impacts of sport to include positive impacts on criminal behaviours and recidivism particularly amongst young males; positive social capital impacts from sport including reduced social and ethnic tensions; more collective action and community involvement; and “*considerable evidence of the positive effect of sport and exercise on educational outcomes*” including educational attainment (Taylor et al, 2015, p.18).

This discourse on the value of sport has been particularly evident in the context of education and school sport, its creation of a foundation for healthy living, and the differences between the state and independent sectors in Scotland, and between children from high and low SIMD areas.

Rowe (2018) highlights the importance of building sporting capital – physical, psychological and social capacities – at a young age to sustain lifelong engagement in sport. There is extensive evidence that early positive experiences and participation in sport through their school years impacts on later life participation as an adult (Tammelin et al, 2003; Kirk, 2005; Roberts and Brodie, 1991).

In an educational context the case for sport is increasingly represented in what is termed a co-curriculum teaching environment. Co-curricular refers to, “*activities, programs, and learning experiences that complement, in some way, what students are learning in school—i.e., experiences that are connected to or mirror the academic curriculum*” (Great Schools Partnership, 2022).

Outside of the school environment community amateur sports clubs play an important role in the institutional structure of sport (Breuer et al, 2015) and to the extent that they are embedded in local communities and sustained by volunteers make an important civic contribution. Eime et al (2013, p.1) conclude from a systematic review that there is “*...consistent evidence that club-based and team-based sport participation, when compared to other individual forms of PA, is associated with better psychological and social health outcomes. It is generally concluded that it is the social nature of this participation that is the factor mediating the relationship between participation and improved health.*”



## Social return on investment

Over recent years there has been increasing interest in extending evaluation of outcomes to examining the social return on investment in sport (Davies, 2018; Gosselin et al, 2020).

In England, this culminated in a report using 2017/18 as its base model to assess the net social value of sport and physical activity expressing the total value of the social outcomes as a proportion of inputs (Davies et al, undated). Value was assessed based on 16 social outcomes spanning the physical and mental health benefits (including risk of stroke CHD, various cancers, Type 2 diabetes, dementia, depression hip fracture, back pain and risk of injury), mental wellbeing (including subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction), individual development (including educational attainment and enhanced human capital) and social and community development (including reduced criminal incidences, enhanced social capital and non-market benefits from volunteering).

SIRC (Davies et al, undated) concluded that the overall social return on investment ratio (that is the value of the return net of the costs of inputs) was an SROI of £3.28 i.e., for every £1 ‘invested’ in sport and physical activity in England, £3.28 worth of social benefits is generated. But of more importance in the context of this paper it concluded: *“In our calculations, the largest contribution to social value is associated with mental wellbeing, totalling £41.76bn. This is 58.3% of all social value generated by sport and physical activity in England. The second largest contribution is from social and community development which contributes 27.9% (£19.97bn), followed by physical and mental health at 13.4% (£9.59bn)”* (Davies et al, undated, p.38).

When assessed in the context of this review, this conclusion is significant. It suggests that the value to society of sport and physical activity is predominantly not from the physical and clinical mental health benefits – although substantial – but from the mental wellbeing and social and community benefits.

## The value of sport: physical and beyond - conclusions and observations

There are several important conclusions and observations that we may make from our review on the state of the evidence that have implications for the place of sport in public policy in Scotland.

1. Evidence of physiological health benefits (physical and mental) from physical activity has longer antecedents and is generally grounded in more methodologically sound research than is the case for psychological wellbeing, social and community benefits. Research in the areas of social benefit associated with physical activity, exercise and sport are inherently challenging with a multiplicity of outcomes, processes, confounding variables, difficulties of definition, attribution and causality. However, there is increasing realisation in the research community of the imbalance between ‘physiological benefits’ and ‘social benefits’, and the evidence gap is narrowing, albeit slowly due to a lack of funding and high quality, theoretically informed evaluations.
2. It is important to recognise that ‘absence of evidence’ is not ‘evidence of absence’. The social benefits of sport are not without evidence, but it is complex and ‘less compelling’ than the evidence base on physiological benefits of physical activity. Public investment in sport should be evidenced-based, but to make progress while confronting such complexity the test in public policy has to be one of ‘beyond reasonable doubt’ rather than of ‘proven cause and effect’. Applying the standard of beyond reasonable doubt, the evidence base on the individual social and community value of sport, exercise and physical activity is both plausible and convincing. The evidence is sufficient to suggest that the question is not whether these benefits occur but in what form they occur, in what contexts and under what conditions – failure to address these questions is a common weakness in evaluations and research designs. This often results in research that treats all activity in multiple contexts as ‘equivalents’ without considering inherent differences in, for example, walking to the shops, exercising on a treadmill at home, taking part in an exercise class at a local gym, playing weekly games of football or skateboarding with friends, or playing a game of golf, pickleball or walking netball with post-session socialising.

3. Evidence from extensive analysis of the social return on investment from sport and physical activity in England showed a substantial credit of approaching a 3.28-to-1 return, but the distinction on how much benefit is accrued by different types of activities in different contexts is not clearly made. Volunteering is identified and counted separately, but participation in sport is not, being subsumed within a broader measure of physical activity in the calculation of health benefits. It is interesting in the context of this review that far greater value was estimated from the individual wellbeing and social and community benefits from participation in sport than from the physical and mental health benefits of being active. This conflicts with the dominant discourse that places primacy on getting more people to be more physically active whilst rendering the quality of life and wellbeing premiums from being active through community sport as minor or of lower order priority.

## COMMUNITY SPORT IN PUBLIC POLICY IN SCOTLAND

When assessed from a national perspective, sports policy in Scotland may be characterised as being positioned, in principle, at the ‘sport for instrumental outcomes’ end of the public policy spectrum, consistent with the general trend seen in neighbouring countries. **sportscotland**, as the national sports development agency, has been consistent in its focus on the sport system and on participation, albeit widely defined, as its primary purpose. To this extent, it resonates with public policy in Denmark and the Netherlands but differs from the current strategic focus taken by Sport England which has widened its remit to include broader objectives around physical activity and ‘movement’.

**sportscotland** sees its role as contributing towards national physical activity outcomes linked to the National Outcomes Framework and Active Scotland Outcomes Framework. However, in assessing its contribution to these outcomes it reports a relatively narrow set of measures confined to **sportscotland**’s own programme impacts as opposed to a wider, national picture of sport participation. This perspective is missing from the Scottish landscape.

**sportscotland** and the Scottish Government appear content to operate without a strategic national direction for community sport. **sportscotland** publishes a Corporate Strategy and Business Plans which provide an inward-looking focus on its progress as an organisation and what it is seeking to achieve, narrowly defined in terms of programme impacts. But there is no shared common ownership of a strategy for sport in Scotland. Similarly, in the absence of a national strategy for sport in Scotland there is an absence of an accountability framework for sport outcomes that focus on participation in the population, drop out or sustained engagement in sport, club membership and volunteering. Possibly as a consequence, when compared to other European countries, Scotland has a very limited evidence base of national population surveys to draw upon in shaping sport policy.

In concluding, it is interesting to note that whereas participation in sport does not feature in the key performance indicators in the Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework, both ‘attendance at cultural events’ and ‘participation in a cultural activity’ are elevated as leading measures in Scotland’s vision to create a vibrant and creative country, as is ‘people working in the arts and culture’. This suggests that the Scottish Government values participation in the arts and other creative activities as a measure of cultural value without being subsidiary to other outcome areas, as is the case of sport - as demonstrated by its connection to physical activity and health as primary national outcomes.



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The argument made in this review, supported by the evidence, is that the value of sport is underrated in Scotland and that the emphasis on its relationship to improving physical health outcomes has in a perverse way operated to its detriment in public policy. This is not: a) to deny the crucial importance in a public health context of preventive health policies that prioritise reducing sedentary behaviours and helping people to be more physically active; nor b) to deny the important contribution sport participation makes to physical health - being physically active is intrinsic to the sporting experience. But it is to argue that there is a need to look beyond the physical to more clearly recognise the value sport brings to individuals and society when combining physical activity with its associated qualities of self-actualisation, self-expression, purposive behaviour and social engagement.

**To view sport from a ‘physical activity plus’ perspective is not new but in embracing and giving primacy to the physical activity and health paradigm in its public policy positioning, over cultural, sociological and psychological paradigms, we would argue that the intrinsic benefits of sport have become less understood, background factors, diminishing their value to people and communities in Scotland.**

Our analysis suggests that public policy in Scotland requires a new strategic approach and delivery models that can harness community sport’s potential and optimise its impact in delivering heightened societal value in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. A number of recommendations follow from this analysis that could help to shape community sport policy, practice and delivery in Scotland.

### **1) Community sport should be recognised in public policy for multiple contributions to outcomes that drive improved wellbeing in Scotland.**

These include cultural, sociological and psychological benefits in addition to physiological. Any review of the National Outcomes Framework should embed these elements and seek to determine how community sport contributes to a wide range of outcomes and cross-cutting agendas, rather than presented as merely subsidiary to physical activity and public health. This positioning should be solidified in the National Performance Framework by a set of sport participation indicators that measure both the necessary condition of regular participation and sufficient conditions of participation in different organised contexts, and amongst population subgroups.

### **2) Community sport in Scotland requires renewed strategic purpose to provide a platform for investment and unite stakeholders in a shared vision and agenda for change.**

Community sport in Scotland sits in a strategic vacuum. A ‘National Strategy for Sport in Scotland’ (to include sport and active recreation) would critically examine where we are now, the challenges faced by sport, effectiveness of existing programmes and funding routes, where Scotland wishes to get to in the next 10 years, how it gets there and which, and how, stakeholders can all play their part. It should aim to address short-term pressing challenges set within a longer-term vision with realistic policy ambitions relevant and appropriate to the social, economic and environmental realities of life in Scotland. We suggest that this vision is about ‘sport as society’ not merely ‘sport in society’. This would not be a national physical activity and health strategy but would complement such a strategy, for example, Public Health Scotland’s new systems-based approach to physical activity in Scotland and the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework. Ideally, the strategies would be developed in a parallel but connected process with clearly defined vision, set of priority markets, motivational drivers, primary stakeholders, ambitions and return on investment models.

### 3) Topic area reviews

Priority topics should be agreed in a strategic planning stakeholder consultation. Drawing on OSS insight from across sport, this review suggests consideration of the following priorities:

- i. Review of the workforce engaged in community sport in conjunction with key stakeholders, including **sportscotland**, Community Leisure UK, sport governing bodies and CIMSPA, to include the potential for a modernised sports development profession with appropriate skills and training support.
- ii. Unlocking civic potential to review the proliferation of models of asset transfer, co-production, community engagement, public sector/community partnerships, and sports club and volunteer development, and document and share good and failing practice.
- iii. Reviewing PE and school sport to include its place in the curriculum, in extracurricular and co-curriculum contexts, preparation for lifelong engagement, building sporting capital, reducing drop-out and addressing inequalities.
- iv. Review causes and solutions to sporting inequalities in Scotland's poorest neighbourhoods and vulnerable populations. Each review would engage a variety of relevant stakeholders to understand and share insight and lived experience, examine good and innovative practice, and establish how partnerships can be formed across sport, leisure, health, education and business sectors to shape economically, socially and environmentally sustainable provision.

### 4) Scottish sport must agree societal purpose and demonstrate impact, value and reach

We believe the evidence on the benefit and value of sport presented in this review justifies an elevated status in public policy in Scotland. However, this cannot be a free pass for community sport. If sport is to have widespread societal benefit, it must be evaluated differently in Scotland, as is now common across Europe. For consideration, we suggest progress includes measurements against three important tests:

- **Test 1** is whether the ambitions put forward by proponents of community sport are realistic and grounded in theory, i.e. in the realm of the possible (*The Realistic Ambition Test*).
- **Test 2** is whether the sport activity can achieve wider social benefit and value, and this can be demonstrated with credible evidence of impact (*The Evidence of Impact Test*).
- **Test 3** is whether public policy intervention can 'deliver the goods' to reach the people who need them most (*The Evidence of Delivery Test*).

## 5) Cultural and funding shift in research commitment in areas of sport policy

Relatively little research has been commissioned by the Scottish Government and **sportscotland** in the last 20 years, and so Scotland now lags its European neighbours in its commitment to and co-ordination of research, accessible data and insight, and use of research to shape policy. To inform a new national sport strategy, Scotland needs a National Sport Research Strategy underpinned by secure funding commitment for at least five years to develop credible understanding of the community sport landscape, sport participation trends and behaviours and the contribution of sport to wider societal outcomes.

We would recommend that a sport research strategy consider:

- i. A regular national survey to inform ambitions in the National Performance Framework and provide ongoing insight.
- ii. A longitudinal panel to develop insight on drivers of sustained behaviour change through the life course, the impact of life transitions, barriers to activity, changing trends in sporting demand, relationship between sport participation in different contexts and impact on national outcomes.
- iii. The creation of Scottish evidence base of data, insight and good practice - what works on the ground and why - with an experimental programme of research and development testing innovative interventions, of which there are many in Scotland, and potential for scalability.
- iv. National co-ordination with incentivisation of capacity-building across Scotland's enviable academic landscape; building of bridges between policy, practice and academic research communities; promotion and facilitation of institutional and disciplinary collaboration around a shared strategic ambition; and networks for sharing and collaborating internationally.

These approaches have been developed in recent years by a number of European countries and networks, to address similar concerns around health and wellbeing, sport and physical activity decline and economic pressures. We believe that it should be achievable relatively quickly in Scotland, building into the COVID pandemic creation of national strategic groups with sport, health, education and academic stakeholders, to create a new, innovative culture of research and evidence, with international input, to shape effective, cohesive and sustainable policy that drives lasting benefit across all populations in Scotland.

## Selected References

Centers for disease Control and Prevention, (undated). Benefits of physical activity. Accessed on 2nd December 2022 at: <https://www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/basics/pa-health/index.htm>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2022). Health Related quality of life: Wellbeing concepts. Accessed on 17th October at: <https://www.cdc.gov/hrqol/wellbeing.htm>

Coalter, F., (2007). A wider social role for sport-who's keeping the score? London: Routledge.

Davies, L. Christy, E., Ramchandi, G., and Taylor, P., (undated). Report 1: Social Return on Investment of sport and physical activity in England. Sport Industry Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam. London Sport England. Accessed at: <https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2020-09/Social%20return%20on%20investment.pdf?5BgVLn09jwpTesBJ4BXhVfRhV4TYgm9E>

Davies, L., (2018). Sports participation in Scotland, quantifying the benefits. Academic Review Paper. Edinburgh: Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS).

Dodge, R., Daly, A., Huyton, J., and Sanders, L. (2012). The challenge of defining wellbeing, International Journal of Wellbeing 2(3) 222-235. Doi:10.5502/ijw.v2i3.4.

Downward, P. and Rasciute, S., (2011). Does sport make you happy? An analysis of the wellbeing derived from sports participation. International Review of Applied Economics, 25 (3): 331-348

Eime, R.M., Young, J.A., Harvey, J.T. et al, (2013). A systematic review of the psychological and social benefits of participation in sport for children and adolescents: informing development of a conceptual model of health through sport. Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act 10, 98 <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-10-98>

Fujiwara, D., Kudrna, L. and Dolan, P., (2014). Quantifying and valuing the wellbeing impacts of culture and sport. [online]. London: Department for Culture, Media and Sport. [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/304899/Quantifying\\_and\\_valuing\\_the\\_wellbeing\\_impacts\\_of\\_sport\\_and\\_culture.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/304899/Quantifying_and_valuing_the_wellbeing_impacts_of_sport_and_culture.pdf)

Gosselin, V., Boccanfuso, D. and Laberge, S., (2020). Social return on investment (SROI) method to evaluate physical activity and sport interventions: a systematic review. Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act 17, 26. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-020-00931-w>

Great Schools Partnership, (2022). The Glossary of Education Reform. Accessed online on 8th December 2022 at: <https://www.edglossary.org/co-curricular/>

Rowe, N. F., (2018). Sporting capital: transforming sports development policy and practice. Abingdon: Routledge.

Sport England, (2017b). Review of evidence of the outcomes for sport and physical activity: A rapid evidence review. London: Sport England.

Tammelin, T., Näyhä, S., Hills, A.P. and Järvelin, M. R., 2003 Adolescent participation in sports and adult physical activity', American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 24(1), pp. 22-8

Taylor, P. et al, (2015). A review of the social impacts of culture and sport. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University.

United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace, (2003). Sport for Development and Peace: Towards Achieving the Millennium Development Goals (Geneva: 2003) at 2, online: United Nations [UN, Towards Achieving].

Wilson, O.W.A., Whatman, C., Walters, S., Keung, S., Enari, D., Rogers, A., Millar, S., K., Ferkins, L., Hinckson, E., Hapeta, J., S., M., Richards, J., (2022). The Value of Sport: Wellbeing Benefits of Sport Participation during Adolescence. Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health 2022, 19, 8579. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19148579>

World Health Organization, (2022). Physical Activity. Accessed on 2nd December 2022 at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity#:~:text=Regular%20physical%20activity%20is%20proven,of%20life%20and%20well%2Dbeing>



This review was commissioned by the Observatory for Sport in Scotland, Scotland's only independent think tank focused on community sport. The OSS exists to inform, connect and challenge.

Working with a wide network of Scottish and global partners and researchers, the OSS engages everyone with an interest in sport, physical activity and health and wellbeing to work with us to identify knowledge gaps, and find, commission and communicate relevant research and evidence to shape policy, and inform practical and sustainable solutions at local and national levels.

### **Other reviews in the series**

Davies, L., (2019). Sheffield Hallam University. **Sports participation in Scotland, quantifying the benefits.** Academic Review Paper. Edinburgh: Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS).

Davison, R., and Cowan, D., (2020). University of the West of Scotland. **Sports Participation and Ageing: Influence and Impact.** Academic Review Paper. Edinburgh: Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS).

Davison, R., and McPherson, G., (2021). University of the West of Scotland. **Disability Sport Research Review.** Academic Review Paper. Edinburgh: Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS).

Dennehy, J., (2020); The Gender Hub. **Gender Diversity in Sport.** Academic Review Paper: Edinburgh: Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS).

Kay T., (2020). University of Stirling. **Sport and social inequality.** Academic Review Paper. Edinburgh: Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS).

Rowe, N. F. (2019). **Sports participation in Scotland: trends and future prospects.** Edinburgh: Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS).

Shibli, S., (2019). Sheffield Hallam University. **Sports for the future - decline, growth, opportunity and challenge.** Academic Review Paper. Edinburgh: Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS).

Taylor, J., (2020). University of Stirling. **Assessing the research needs of organisations involved in Community Sport in Scotland.** Academic Review Paper. Edinburgh: Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS).