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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Sport participation in Scotland: Trends and future prospects

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A report commissioned by the Observatory for Sport in Scotland



## INTRODUCTION

This report is about sports participation in Scotland, past, present and most importantly future. <sup>1</sup>The research that underpins it has been commissioned by the Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS); Scotland's independent think tank focused on community sport.

The impetus for this research has come from a growing unease that all is not well with community sport in Scotland with 'storm clouds forming on the horizon' around the prospect of decreasing participation and physical activity levels and its wider impact on society.

This research shines the spotlight of evidence on community sport in Scotland to provide a richer picture of the true state of participation. The findings are of interest to all stakeholders concerned about its future and the part they can play in helping it prosper.

It is hoped that the findings, conclusions and questions that emerge will inform the start, not the end, of a process of strategic debate and self reflection that helps stakeholders to shape effective policy and practice changes that secure and sustain a thriving future for community sport in Scotland.

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<sup>1</sup> *This report was commissioned by the Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS). It was researched and written by Nick Rowe with support provided, in particular for the data analysis and statistical modelling, by Dr Themis Kokolakis, Professor Simon Shibli, and Professor Chris Gratton at the Sports Industry Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University.*

## RESEARCH AIMS AND APPROACH

This research is focused on:

- Assessing the quality of the current evidence base of national statistics on participation in sport in Scotland, examining both its strengths and weaknesses.
- Mining the current national evidence to explore levels and patterns of participation and trends over the last 10 to 20 years.
- Comparing the more salient trends with experience in the Netherlands and Denmark as a basis for a wider international debate on transferable knowledge and learning.
- Exploring the wider societal 'drivers' related to participation in sport and their possible impact on participation over the next 10 to 20 years through both empirical analysis and qualitative research with key stakeholders.
- Modelling possible future scenarios of participation in sport in Scotland and exploring the policy implications.
- Proposing an agenda and context for a national debate on where participation in sport in Scotland is going, its influences, and where and how the future might be shaped.
- Presenting proposals to address weaknesses identified in the evidence base for community sport in Scotland.
- The methods employed to carry out this research involved a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques. The statistical analysis on sports participation focused on the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) and the Scottish Health Survey (SHeS). The qualitative research with stakeholders took place early in 2018 and helped frame the empirical analysis. The statistical models developed at Sheffield Hallam University explore the link between selected socio-economic drivers and sports participation.

## DEFINING AND MEASURING PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

The primary focus of this report is on 'community sport and recreation', which can be differentiated from the performance improvement end of 'elite sport' and from wider physical activities that extend, for example, to 'active travel'. Community sport takes place on a spectrum from organised to informal engagement that extends and overlaps with the wider scope of physical activity.

A number of areas are (identified in the report) where data availability for sport from government surveys is not ideal - where it has constrained the depth of analysis and insight that could be brought to this research and more widely where it limits its value to policy makers. These include:

- **The content of the survey questions.** The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) has been limited in most years to the very basic measures of prevalence.
- **The lack of any overarching theoretical foundation for the question content.** This limits insight and understanding of sport behaviours and influencing factors.
- **The lack of statistically reliable data on sports clubs and sports club membership** in Scotland and trends over time.
- **Limitations of sample size.** Although good by national survey standards sample sizes are often insufficient to provide a level of precision required to monitor changes in what for most sports are relatively small prevalence activities within the wider population.
- **The cross-sectional nature of the two primary data sources.** Participation in sport is by its nature a temporal phenomenon subject to considerable fluctuation in terms of dropping in and dropping out over the life course, which can only be explored properly by a longitudinal research design.

## TRENDS IN PARTICIPATION IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN SCOTLAND: AN OVERVIEW

This section provides a context for the sport analysis that follows and makes reference to the link to obesity and overweight in the population.

### FINDINGS

- Trends in both those adults meeting guidelines and those classified as the most sedentary (very low activity) have shown little change over a five-year period from 2012 to 2017 with an indication of a slight increase from 62% to 65% in the former (driven by increases in recreational walking - see below).
- Over the same period the percentage of men (71% in 2017) meeting the physical activity for health guidelines has been significantly higher than women (60%) with no sign of the gap narrowing.
- There has been a slow but gradual increase in the proportion of children (aged 2 to 15 years) meeting physical activity guidelines over the period 2008 to 2016. The percentage of boys meeting the guidelines (79% in 2016) has shown little change while girls meeting the required activity levels (72%) has increased.
- From the age of 8 to 10 years onwards the activity levels of boys and girls diverge with a substantial decrease in the percentage of girls meeting the guidelines. This decline is seen later for boys but culminates in the percentage of 13 to 15 year-old girls meeting physical activity guidelines dropping as low as 11% and to 24% for boys.

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

***Scotland has broadly seen very little change - up or down - in physical activity levels over the last decade as far as adults is concerned.***

***For girls the 22 percentage point decrease in those meeting guidelines between the ages of 8 to 10 years and 13 to 15 years is a major challenge with, for many, the seeds of a life of sedentary behaviours and associated chronic health problems being sown at this young age.***

***These trends have occurred despite heightened public policy concern and political consensus over this issue. And many might think that there is little reason to believe that this pattern will not persist over the next 10 years and beyond.***

***It is clear that the current picture of a nation that is too inactive for its own good is stark, as are the consequences. Scotland is currently near the top of the world's league table of countries that are overweight and obese.***



photo: ???

## TRENDS IN SPORTS PARTICIPATION IN SCOTLAND: AN OVERVIEW

This section provides a broad overview of trends in participation in sport by adults and young people.

### FINDINGS

- Adult participation in any sport excluding walking has remained constant over the period 2007 (53%) to 2016 (53%).
- Any overall growth in sports participation has been driven by the inclusion of recreational walking which has reported significant increases since 2010. The percentages taking part in sport including walking has increased from 73% in 2007 to 81% in 2017.
- The drop-out with age remains significant and is showing no signs of decreasing with a halving of the participation rate between the ages of 16 to 25 years and 66 to 75 years (from 69% to 35% in 2016) a constant feature throughout the 9-year period.
- The percentage of children aged 2 to 15 years 'participating in any sport in the last week' has shown a slight fluctuation year-on-year but the overall trend is one of little change over the 9-year period 2008 to 2017. Girls participation has remained static over the same period (67% in 2008 and 66% in 2017) while boys has decreased since its peak of 76% in 2009 to 67% in 2016.
- Looking back a further 10 years, the equivalent figures available for 1998 show overall participation rates at 69% with the rate for boys at 72% and girls 65% indicating little change over an extended 18-year period.



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### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

***On the face of it, participation trends in sport in Scotland over recent years appear generally to be static. But we might question whether static is acceptable in a country that rates amongst the highest in the world for levels of obesity and overweight and where substantial proportions of the population are sedentary.***

***There are worrying signs that young people's participation in sport is starting to decline. There is not sufficient evidence to suggest it is the start of a downward trend, but the figures are currently heading in the wrong direction.***

***The evidence points to the next generation of Scots being more inactive and less sporty than their parents and grandparents were at the same age with the consequences of deteriorating health and wellbeing.***

## PARTICIPATION IN SPORT IN SCOTLAND: A DEEPER DIVE

This section takes a 'deeper dive' below the apparent surface calm to explore the undercurrents that are characterising and shaping sports participation in early 21st Century Scotland. The picture is a much more turbulent one than the overall statistics might suggest.

### FINDINGS: INEQUALITIES - AGE, GENDER AND SOCIAL CLASS

#### AGE

- There is a clear relationship between increasing age and likelihood of dropping out from sport. Between the ages of 16-25 years and 46-55 years participation rates excluding walking drop from 69% to 51%.
- Over the last 10 years (2007 to 2016) rates of participation in the 'benchmark 16 to 25-year-old group' in Scotland has declined from 74% (2007) to 69% (2016) with a 5 percentage point decline since 2013.
- An 'Index of sports participation drop-out' (drop-out for each age cohort referenced to the participation rate of 16 to 25-year-olds) shows that little if any in-roads have been made to drop-out with age over the 10-year period 2007 to 2016.
- Participation rates in sport (at least once in the previous week outside of school lessons) have decreased between 2014 and 2017 for children aged 11 to 12 years from 77% to 70% and for those aged 13 to 15 years from 64% in 2014 to 59% in 2017.
- Football, the only team sport to register in the top 10, stands out as having the highest proportionate drop-out between the ages of 16 to 24 years and 25 to 34 years.
- Golf, bowls and dancing are examples of sports that have a more positive relationship with age. In the case of bowls participation peaks amongst those aged 60-74 years and 75 plus while golf participation peaks at 60-74 years.

#### GENDER

- Sports participation rates in Scotland are significantly higher for men than they are for women. Gender difference is more marked when walking is excluded and the 'gender gap' in sports participation (excluding walking) has persisted over the last 10 years (58% men to 49% women in 2017).
- The 'gender gap' in sports participation starts very young. More girls (79% in 2017) than boys (76%) participate at the age of 8-10 years but girls' participation drops markedly as they move into their teenage years. The outcome is that by the age of 13-15 years more girls do not participate in sport (55%) than do (45%).
- More women than men participate in recreational walking, dance, keep fit/aerobics and swimming, but for all the other sports listed men significantly outnumber women. This is particularly noticeable for more traditional organised sports like golf, football and bowls.

#### SOCIAL CLASS

- Those who had a degree qualification in 2017 had a participation rate in sport of 68% compared with a rate of 49% for those who left school with some qualification but below that of 'Higher' and a rate of 26% for those who left school with no qualification.
- People living in the most deprived areas of Scotland are much less likely to participate in sport (42% excluding walking in 2017) compared with those living in the least deprived areas (65%). Of the sports listed only football, snooker/billiards and pool, and to some extent bowls, have any reach into people living in the most deprived communities.
- Of particular note is the drop in fitness related activities between the most and least affluent areas with a halving of the participation rates in keep fit/aerobics, multigym/weights and running/jogging.

## SPORTS - FORMAL, INFORMAL, INCREASING AND DECREASING

In four of the six 'fitness related sports' (keep fit/aerobics; multigym/weight training; cycling and running/jogging) there has been an upward trend in participation (swimming and dancing are the exceptions). In the three more traditional sports (football, golf and bowls) the trend is in a downward direction.

Significant change has taken place in the sporting landscape over a 10-year period (2007 to 2016) with 'fitness related activities' (such as keep fit; aerobics; multigym; weight training; yoga; Pilates; and tai-chi ) overtaking 'individual sports' (such as golf, bowls, tennis, boxing, martial arts) as the sport of choice for 16 to 25-year-olds (38% and 22% respectively).

## FREQUENCIES - GROWTH OF AN 'ACTIVE CLASS'

Changes are not only taking place in the sports that people play, but also in the frequency of play. Whilst the percentage of adults taking part overall (at least once in the previous 4 weeks) has remained flat over the last 10 years the percentages participating more frequently - once a week and three times a week - have shown a steady upward trend which is more marked in the highest frequency group (an increase from 24% of the adult population in 2007 to 30% in 2016).

Accompanying the growth in a more frequent group of participants is an upward trend of people taking part in multiple sports in a 4-week period from a low of 9% in 2010 to 12% in 2016.

## GEOGRAPHY AND SPORTS PARTICIPATION - VARIATIONS AND CHANGE

There is considerable variation in participation rates in sport across different local authorities in Scotland. The extent of the variation is shown by comparing the average of sports participation rates (for 2015-17) for the top 'performing' quintile of local authorities (58%) with that of the bottom performing quintile (42%). This difference of 16% is large and significant.

Comparing changes in sports participation rates over the period 2007/8-2011 to 2015-17 (based on three-year averages) only 9 local authorities have seen an increase in participation while 23 have witnessed a decrease.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

***It is of concern that Scotland has shown no signs over the last 10 years of increasing the 'benchmark participation rate' in young adults or in making in-roads to attrition rates with age.***

***Viewed through the lenses of gender and social class Scotland is a 'divided sporting nation'. The structural inequalities of gender and class in sports participation appear entrenched in Scottish society with little change over the last 10 years despite public policy priorities targeting these groups.***

***An overall theme of this section is that the apparent surface calm in community sport in Scotland as reflected in the overall trends in participation hides a turbulent undercurrent. Three strong undercurrents may be highlighted as follows:***

- ***The trend towards engagement in fitness activities dominates and grows alongside a parallel decrease in the more traditional and organised sports participation market.***
- ***Increasing polarisation between classes - the growth of an 'active class', which, in disposition and behaviours, is a world apart from an increasingly left behind 'unsporty and inactive class' that now makes up a significant minority of the Scottish population.***
- ***The large geographical variations in participation between local authority areas, only explained in part by variations in population density, demography and levels of deprivation.***



photo: Inverness Leisure

## INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS: SCOTLAND, THE NETHERLANDS AND DENMARK

This section explores comparative differences between trends and patterns of participation in Scotland (5.40m pop.), the Netherlands (17.08m pop.) and Denmark (5.77m pop.). Comparisons are made on an 'index' (relative approach) that show change over time. It is important to make clear that these comparisons are at a very broad and to some extent descriptive level. There is no attempt here to try to understand how the sport systems in the three countries came to be where they are or why the differences have occurred. This is an area highlighted for further research in the final section.

### FINDINGS: HOW DOES PARTICIPATION IN THE UK COMPARE WITH DENMARK AND THE NETHERLANDS?

- Denmark has the third highest reported participation rate in Europe (adults who said they exercised 'regularly or with some regularity' i.e. at least once a week) behind Finland and Sweden. The Netherlands is the highest ranked non-Scandinavian country in 4th place behind Denmark while the UK sits in 10th place some 20 percentage points behind Finland in first place and 16 points behind Denmark.
- When compared on a more frequent level of participation (percentages who exercised or played sport 'regularly', i.e. at least 5 times a week) the UK (13%) performs at a similar level to Denmark (12%) and above the Netherlands (6%). This is consistent with the earlier analysis that identified a growing trend in Scotland towards a very active and sporty minority.
- The UK has 37% of the adult population who report that they 'never participate in exercise and sport' compared with 20% in Denmark and 31% in the Netherlands.

### SCOTLAND AND THE NETHERLANDS COMPARED

- Both Scotland and the Netherlands experienced a similar dip in rates of participation in 2009 followed by slow growth to 2013 and in the case of Scotland that growth extending to 2014. Since 2013/14 participation has remained static in both countries.
- There was no 'gender gap' in participation in the Netherlands up until 2011. Since 2011 men's participation in the Netherlands has been higher than women but only marginally. The picture is very different in Scotland with a large and persistent gender gap with men having much higher participation rates than women and little sign of the gap narrowing.
- Social class has a major impact on participation in sport in both Scotland and the Netherlands, but comparative analysis suggests that the class differences are greater in Scotland.

## SCOTLAND AND DENMARK COMPARED

- Statistics show the success story of community sports participation in Denmark with a continuous and sustained increase in participation between 1987 and 2011. However, in Denmark participation rates dipped post 2011 for the first time in the country's recent history.
- Unfortunately, the time series for Scotland is much shorter than for Denmark. The pattern of a peak in 2011 with a subsequent dip in participation is similar, although Scotland did not experience the 'growth spurt' between 2007 and 2011 seen in Denmark.
- In Denmark there is little drop-out in participation with age while in Scotland the drop-out with age starts early and accelerates into middle and older age. Those aged 66 to 75 years in Scotland are 50% less likely to participate than 16 to 25 year olds when recreational walking is excluded whereas in Denmark participation peaks in older age at 60-69 years..
- In Denmark women are as likely to participate in sport as men and may even be slightly more likely to participate than men. In Scotland, depending on the definition used, sports participation by women is some 20% lower than men's, and is showing no sign of narrowing.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

***The greatest differences in sports participation in Scotland compared with that in the Netherlands and Denmark relate to age and gender. In both the Netherlands and Denmark, the overall high participation rates are underpinned by equality in participation between men and women.***

***Some of the broad challenges facing sport are not unique to Scotland. Even in countries like the Netherlands and Denmark which set the bar there are signs of participation coming under pressure and issues of 'sporting inequality' linked to social class.***

***All three countries will be concerned about a potentially 'left behind' inactive and 'unsporty' group, but the scale of this group in the UK (and by inference Scotland) - over a third of the population - makes it a greater policy issue.***

***There are limits to this analysis. It provides insight to key differences that define community sports participation in Scotland compared with the Netherlands and Denmark and points towards 'the art of the possible' and potential shared problems and challenges. But showing the differences is one thing; understanding why they occur - and most importantly the lessons that can be learnt from these countries that are culturally transferable - is the next critical stage.***



photo: Jenny Houston

## DRIVERS OF COMMUNITY SPORTS PARTICIPATION: A GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE?

This section widens the field of vision beyond sport to explore the social, economic and cultural drivers referred to here-on-in as 'the (key) drivers' that impact on sports participation and at times are impacted by it. It involved a qualitative exercise with a range of influential stakeholders in Scottish sport.

### FINDINGS

- Analysis of the responses from a range of stakeholders in Scottish sport suggests a pessimistic view about the direction of travel for sports participation with 8 of the 13 key drivers thought to be pushing down rather than pulling up participation.
- The drivers that were felt to have the greatest downward impact were 'provision-austerity in public investment' followed by 'health status/overweight/obesity' and 'socio-economic inequality'. At the other end of the spectrum 'gender and sport - societal shift or more of the same' was felt to be likely to pull sport participation up from current levels, as were 'new age fitness and health' and 'access to open space and countryside - low density rural versus high density urban'.
- Generally, the stakeholders in Scottish sport engaged in this exercise believed that public policy could make a positive difference to the way these drivers impact on sport if the right choices were made and resources allocated. This was particularly felt in relation to 'sport and education' and 'provision- austerity in public investment'.
- Five drivers emerged as a priority - health status/overweight/obesity; social media and technology - the distracted young; sport and education; 'socio-economic inequality'; and 'provision - austerity in public investment'.
- A number of drivers have been identified as posing particular challenges with stakeholders attaching a sense of negative inevitability to them. Of particular concern is the 'social media' (new technology) related driver and to a lesser extent the 'volunteers' driver.

### CONCLUDING COMMENTS

***This section takes a wide-angle lens view of sport in Scotland. This sees sport not as an isolated activity but as one that is socially, economically and culturally framed, influenced and impacted.***

***It would be overly negative to say that sport is a 'hostage' to these wider trends. Sport itself can make a difference. But it would be a failure of vision and imagination if sport policy was not to recognise the critical interdependences it has with them.***

***The picture that emerges from the qualitative research with stakeholders is that although there is a sense of 'determinacy' for some of the key societal influences on sport there is a greater belief of 'agency' - that we have choices and that we can make a real and positive difference - if there is the political will to do so, the resources made available and the insight to drive innovative practice.***

***The future is seen to pose both opportunities and threats. Stakeholders view opportunities in how women are being empowered in society and, as a consequence, how they relate to sport; and how a more educated society can become a more active and sporty one.***

***However, these positives are tempered by concerns, including the impact on sport of increasing socio-economic inequalities; the disproportionate impact on public services with austerity; and a pervasive unease about where trends in social media and technology may be taking us.***



photo: Unsplash

## MODELLING SCOTLAND'S SPORTING FUTURE: WHAT MIGHT SPORT IN SCOTLAND LOOK LIKE IN 10 YEARS TIME?

In this section a more quantitative perspective is taken on what the future might look like in Scotland over the period 2018 to 2028. The modelling approach taken was based on examining trends and associations between sports participation and selected key socio-economic and cultural drivers. The modelling did not seek to forecast or predict the future - but examined possible projected futures or scenarios. Three futures were explored - one where the trends continued ('On Trend'); one where we made pessimistic assumptions about the direction of travel of the driver ('Pessimistic Scenario') and one where we made optimistic assumptions about the direction of travel ('Optimistic Scenario').

### FINDINGS

- On current trends in overweight and obesity in the population sports participation rates in Scotland will be pushed down to 50% by 2028 from 53% in 2017. Effective intervention could give a 10 percentage point boost to participation taking it to 60% and the opposite is true in the Pessimistic Scenario where, with increasing overweight and obesity, participation rates could fall to as low as 43%.
- The key driver on social media and technology refers in particular to 'the distracted young'. It was not possible to model children and young people's use of the internet and its impact on their sports participation for this research. As an alternative, intensive (daily) internet use and adult participation was modelled - and the trend appears to be fairly benign based on these adult indicators. But any significant change to that trend could have a large impact on sports participation with a 7 percentage point range between the Optimistic and Pessimistic Scenarios.

- Modelling shows the extent of the possible influence of the key driver on socio-economic inequality with a 10 percentage point range in participation rates in sport between the Optimistic and Pessimistic Scenarios for 2028 (from a possible high of 56% to a low of 46%).
- Modelling shows some association between investment in sporting events and sports participation but the impact is small and likely to be of little significance to Scottish community sport over the next 10 years.
- An overall 'Total Model' of sports participation in Scotland that combines the modelling of the associations for each of the 8 key drivers into one composite model shows a range of 8 percentage points difference in sports participation projected over the next 10 years to 2028 from a possible high (Optimistic Scenario) of 55% to a low (Pessimistic Scenario) of 47% with a trend projection of 51%.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

***The modelling and analysis presented is exploratory and innovative, dealing with associations and not direct cause and effect, bound by a theoretical underpinning.***

***The value of such an exploratory approach to Scotland's sporting future is justified at a number of levels. In particular, it raises awareness of the interdependences sport has with wider social, economic and cultural trends in society.***

***Public policies outside of sport impact on many aspects of people's lives in ways that have direct and indirect consequences for sport and the possible extent of these is shown dramatically in the analysis. Sports policy should, therefore, be framed in this context and understand where it is impacted by wider social trends and where it can impact on them, and the likely mechanisms in both instances.***

***The potential impact of increasing rates of overweight and obesity are shown starkly in the modelling projections. This is a classic example of a two-way relationship where sports participation can impact positively to reduce overweight and obesity while increasing overweight and obesity can have a major negative impact on sports participation.***

***The assumption of a relationship between investment in sporting events and participation in sport (the sports legacy) has been a feature of public policy for many years but the modelling results show little potential impact from such interventions.***

***The aggregate results of the modelled projections over the next 10 years show a range of participation rates of 8 percentage points. Given that public policy in sport has greater ambitions it is not unreasonable to argue that it should target an increase towards the upper end of the range modelled.***

## THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY SPORT IN SCOTLAND: A PUBLIC POLICY RESPONSE

The scope of this report has not extended to a critical analysis of sports policy as currently formulated, or to practice as delivered 'on the ground'. This can be done within a wider debate and stakeholder engagement. The evidence in the report does, however, raise 'strategic questions' which could help to focus and frame that debate.

### QUESTION 1:

#### HOW DOES SCOTLAND DEVELOP A STRATEGIC VISION AND FRAMEWORK TO BEST DEVELOP COMMUNITY SPORT?

In many ways addressing this question sets the context for other questions that follow. Sports development policy and practice operating in a strategic vacuum will almost certainly result in fragmented and misplaced interventions with sub-optimal outcomes. 'Corporate plans' and 'Outcome Frameworks' are important but they are not a national strategic plan. A strategic plan requires: a long-term vision and short-term actions; to be connected to wider socio-economic and cultural drivers of sports participation; to be underpinned by a coherent theory of behaviour change; to be consistently understood and interpreted by all key players in the sports system who will know their respective strengths and weaknesses and the contribution they can make; and to be adequately resourced with financial profiles aligned to process and outcome priorities.

### QUESTION 2:

#### WHERE SHOULD PUBLIC POLICY IN SCOTLAND BE FOCUSED AND RESOURCES PRIORITISED TO BEST ADDRESS INEQUALITIES IN SPORTS PARTICIPATION?



photo: Inverness Leisure

This may seem like an unnecessary question given that all publicly funded agencies and many others in the sport system profess to prioritise social inequalities and ways to overcome them. Yet it has to be asked given the evidence in this report that shows that inequalities in sports participation have persisted over many years. The evidence points to Scotland becoming an increasingly 'divided sport society' with the growth of an 'active class' and a left behind 'unsporty and inactive class', that make up a significant minority of the Scottish population. The question extends to a number of factors that include: better understanding of the complexities of social inequality that compound, for example, class with age, gender, ethnicity and disability; resource prioritisation; the design and targeting of interventions; and understanding the nature of behaviour change including attitude formation, motivation and relationship to constraints and barriers. This question also suggests a critical examination of current funding systems to establish who is most likely to benefit and why, and if there are unintended outcomes that subsidise those who least need public subsidies rather than reaching and making a difference to those who need them most. Any such analysis should occur both nationally and in local authorities across Scotland.

### QUESTION 3:

## WHAT ISSUES IN CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH SPORT SHOULD PUBLIC POLICY ADDRESS IN ORDER TO DESIGN THE RIGHT INTERVENTIONS?

Public policy in Scotland is committed to improving children's and young people's participation in sport and their sporting experiences. However, there is evidence of decreasing participation rates in sport outside school lessons and high levels of drop-out by girls as they move into their teenage years. Is public policy showing enough innovation and intervention to address these issues? Is Scottish sports development policy reliant on an outdated traditional model of 'sports club membership'? Related questions emerge including whether public policy is adequately addressing the antecedents of drop-out in Scotland such as possible decreases in levels of physical literacy amongst pre-school and primary school children? And do we understand the potential impact of increasing social media use and online gaming on young people's leisure time and long-term health?



photo: rawpixel.com / Freepik

### QUESTION 4:

## WHERE SHOULD PUBLIC POLICY IN SPORT FOCUS ATTENTION IN THE AGEING POPULATION TO BEST MEET THE NEEDS OF OLDER PEOPLE?

Evidence presented in this report shows the steep drop-out in participation in sport with age in Scotland, in contrast to other European countries, where such drop-out is shown not to be inevitable. With Scotland facing a significant rise in its ageing population this issue will become more pronounced and of greater concern. It raises the question of whether public policy in sport is giving this group sufficient priority. As with social inequality this has a number of dimensions that include resources but extend beyond this to deep understanding of a changing market, its needs, desires and motivations, and how sport can adapt and create innovative ways to engage this population and provide healthier lifestyles. Related to this is the need for greater comparative international research to understand what differentiates the countries with low levels of age-related drop-out from Scotland, how much is culturally determined and how much a consequence of public policy and provision choices.

### QUESTION 5:

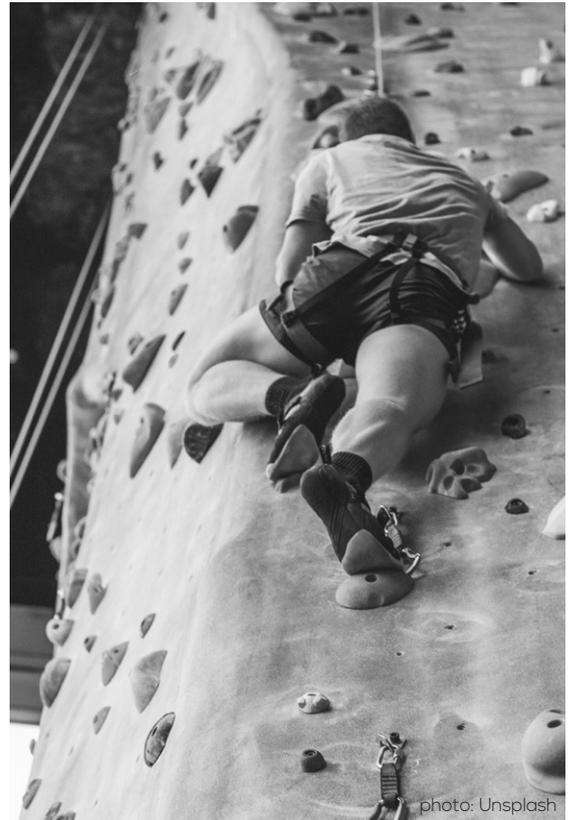
## WHAT POTENTIAL EXISTS FOR THE MORE TRADITIONAL ORGANISED VOLUNTARY SPORT SECTOR TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMERCIAL FITNESS SECTOR TO THEIR MUTUAL BENEFIT?

Evidence in this report shows that fitness activities are overtaking traditional forms of sport as the activity of choice for many in Scotland. This is extending to the younger adult age groups which historically have provided the foundation for more organised forms of sport. The concern here lies not in the increase in fitness activities, but the substitution of fitness for other forms of community sport, as evidenced by static overall levels of participation and reducing levels in deprived areas. Countering this argument is evidence of a growing minority of more frequent and multi-sport participants suggesting an opportunity for 'cross-over' with mutual benefits for both the more traditional voluntary sport club sector and the commercial fitness sector. If this is the case could these two sectors work jointly to promote opportunities to mutual benefit? And are there lessons that the 'traditional organised sport sector' could learn from a more innovative private and commercial sector?

## QUESTION 6:

### WHAT ARE THE IMPORTANT GAPS IN RESEARCH EVIDENCE AVAILABLE TO SPORTS POLICY AND PRACTICE IN SCOTLAND?

Evidence-based policy and practice is the foundation for effective strategic planning and local delivery. To address this question requires a systematic review of the evidence available and the research gaps that exist. The analysis provided in this report might suggest that there is sufficient population level evidence to provide the foundation for effective strategic planning for sport in Scotland. In fact, this research has shown that not to be the case. To make sense of what is going on in community sport in Scotland and how public policy can influence it requires measures that extend beyond those currently collected on prevalence to capture the factors that relate to and impact on participation and how it is experienced. This empirical data includes but also extends from the 'what' and 'how many' to the 'why' and 'how' of participation to include the prevalence and development of 'Sporting Capital' in the population. Through research with various sports stakeholders across Scotland, and comparison with effective practice in other European countries, OSS has identified the need for a 'National Survey of Scotland's Sporting Life' to fill this gap and better support and inform national and local government and all involved with community sport. Other research gaps identified by OSS include a 'Scottish Sports Innovation Exchange' evaluating and presenting practice and an online 'Research Information Hub' that collates and makes sense of the research evidence of value to policy makers and practitioners. The research carried out in this report has identified other potential evidence gaps including: the number and characteristics of sports clubs and sports club members, and development of a national register to support such research; an exploration of the factors that underpin geographical variations in participation and the impact of public policy intervention; and the impact of social media on children's sporting behaviours and levels of physical activity.



## QUESTION 7:

### HOW DOES SCOTLAND BUILD ITS RESEARCH CAPACITY TO SUPPORT EVIDENCE-BASED POLICY AND PRACTICE IN COMMUNITY SPORT?

Although **sportscotland** and sports bodies invest in research and the Scottish Government in its Health Survey and Scottish Household Survey there is a desire across Scotland for a review of the country's community sport research capacity, funding and organisation to address this question. Scotland has a tradition of providing high-quality academic centres of excellence in sports research, particularly but not exclusively in the areas of sports science and public health. Does Scotland have the capacity and expertise to address the interdisciplinary challenges of community sport that require a collaborative and multi-disciplinary response? A review of existing academic centres of excellence could address this question as part of a feasibility study for establishing an independent and well-resourced 'collaborative centre of community sport research' within higher education.