

# SPORTS AND CULTURE IN SCOTLAND

What's happening, why it matters and what action is needed.



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April 2025

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- Sports and culture benefit individuals, communities, and the economy. These include physical and mental wellbeing, individual development, building stronger communities and contributing massively to the Scottish economy. This paper examines the state of sports and culture in Scotland, why it matters, and what needs to be done to strengthen it.
- The governance structure for sports and culture is complex, with many plans but limited outcomes. The lack of statutory protection for sport and culture services means that when councils face difficult budget decisions, they prioritise statutory services, resulting in larger reductions for non-statutory provision of sport and culture.
- Local government investment in culture, sport and leisure services across Scotland has reduced by at least 20% in real terms - as much as 33% in some areas. Most councils and ALEOs have reduced opening hours, closed facilities, increased charges and cut staff.
- Scottish spending on culture is amongst the lowest in Europe. Participation in cultural activity is as high as 87 per cent for those with incomes above £30,000 per year, falling to 54 per cent for those below 10,000. For example, libraries are crucial to improving literacy and addressing children's reading crises, with fewer than 25 per cent of children reading for pleasure frequently. Every £1 invested in the arts yields £5 of tax revenue.
- Physical inactivity is recognised as one of the four leading modifiable health risk factors. The direct financial cost to the NHS across the UK is estimated to be as high as £1.2 billion each year. The proportion of adults meeting the recommended levels of physical activity is 63 per cent, falling to 50 per cent in Scotland's most deprived areas. Despite many strategies, there has been little progress in increasing activity levels. Social inequality and gender are significant barriers to participation.
- The importance of sports and culture in strengthening communities is recognised in national strategies. However, progress in National Outcomes has been minimal and, if anything, deteriorating, particularly for the most disadvantaged communities.
- The failure to improve levels of physical activity and cultural capacity and strengthen our social infrastructure will further pressure our health services and damage the Scottish economy. We need to move beyond the many worthy plans into action. The paper highlights many proposals and recommends six high-level actions:

## SPORTS & CULTURE IN SCOTLAND

### SIX STEPS TO REFORM

1

Create one coordinated plan for sports and culture with measurable outcomes. A plan that clearly explains the role sport and culture can play in improving our physical and mental health, the economy, and building stronger communities.

2

Put the provision of sport and culture on a statutory basis, with recognised standards of provision, and develop statutory reporting standards for national and local government.

3

Develop a long-term programme for the capital investment needed to sustain and improve facilities and ensure better access to underused facilities.

4

Identify the revenue resources required to meet the planned outcomes. Then, the local tax base should be broadened to give communities the power and resources to strengthen social infrastructure, such as sports and culture.

5

Reducing inequalities should be at the heart of every plan to improve sports and culture, targeting investment and ensuring access to facilities for everyone in our communities

6

Develop a workforce plan for the sector that ensures we are training the workforce of the future, creating career pathways and embedding Fair Work conditionality at every level.

## 1. Introduction

This paper builds on the Jimmy Reid Foundation's work on building stronger communities by taking a closer look at grassroots sport and culture in Scotland.

Sports and culture benefit individuals, communities, and the economy. These include physical and mental wellbeing, individual development and building stronger communities. Many of these benefits are even more profound for young people. While the economic benefits are difficult to calculate precisely, studies indicate that sport alone contributes over £2.5 billion to the Scottish economy, employing nearly 60,000 people. Scotland's cultural heritage is a major driver of tourism, contributing around £3.3 billion to the economy and employing 209,000 people. The creative industries contribute a further £4.4 billion, employing 155,000 people.

The Scottish Household Survey found that more than eight in ten (82%) adults had taken part in physical activity and sport in the previous four weeks. 88% of adults had been culturally engaged in the last year by attending a cultural event or place of culture or participating in a cultural activity.

However, public sports and culture investment has declined with a 20 per cent real terms cut over the past decade. As local government services have come under increasing financial pressure, councils have cut services like sports and culture to finance core statutory services such as education and social care.

These numbers indicate the importance of sport and culture to individuals and communities across Scotland, yet the sector receives relatively little consideration in the policy debate. This paper will examine the state of sports and culture in Scotland, why it matters, and what needs to be done to strengthen it. The focus will be on public provision because that provides the best prospect of access for all.

## 2. Sports and Culture Provision in Scotland

### Introduction

The public provision of sports and culture services is provided by councils, Arm's-Length External Organisations (ALEOs), not-for-profit organisations, and the private sector. For this paper, we use the United Nations working definition of sport, which includes physical activity:

'All forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental wellbeing and social interaction, such as play, recreation, organised or competitive sport, and indigenous sports and games.'

For cultural services, we use the UNESCO definition:

'Services aimed at satisfying cultural interests or needs. They do not represent cultural material goods in themselves but facilitate their production and distribution. For example, cultural services include licensing activities and other copyright-related services, audio-visual distribution activities, promotion of performing arts and cultural events, as well as cultural information services and the preservation of books, recordings and artefacts (in libraries, documentation centres, museums).'

<sup>1</sup>

### Statutory requirements and governance

The public provision of sport and culture is devolved to the Scottish Parliament, although the UK Government contributes to elite sport through UK Sport and the UK Anti-Doping Agency. The UK Government is investing £8.5m in 30 projects in Scotland through the Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme<sup>2</sup>.

The Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee holds the Scottish Government to account on matters within its remit, undertakes inquiries and examines and proposes amendments to legislation. Several cross-party groups (CPGs) are also interested in this sector, including the CPG on Sport.

In the Scottish Government, several ministers have responsibilities for the sector. The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport (Maree Todd MSP) oversees the direction of sport and physical activity. The Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government (Shona Robison MSP) is responsible for local government services. The Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, *Cultural services*, <https://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/cultural-services>

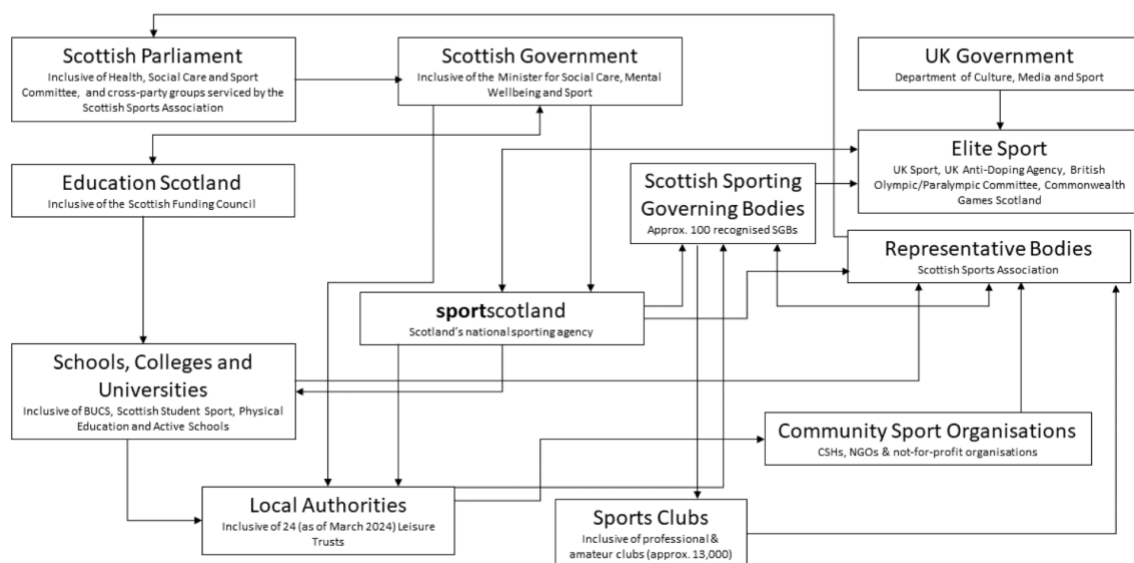
<sup>2</sup> UK Government, *Multi-Sport Grassroots Facilities Programme projects: 2024 to 2025*, <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/multi-sport-grassroots-facilities-programme-projects-2024-to-2025>

Culture (Angus Robertson MSP) is responsible for culture policy, heritage and the arts. Schools, colleges, and universities also play a role in providing sports and culture.

**Sportscotland** is Scotland's national sports council (with a Royal Charter) and an NDPB responsible to the Scottish Parliament through Scottish Ministers. Under the National Lottery, etc. Act 1993, **sportscotland** was appointed to distribute funding received from the National Lottery for Scottish sport (£30.1m in 2022-23). This NDPB is under financial pressure, with a voluntary redundancy programme, saying, ‘The sport sector is experiencing real economic challenges with partners making difficult financial decisions at every level.’<sup>3</sup>

Ministerial guidance also sets out the Scottish Government's expectations of **sportscotland** and its strategic priorities. The Scottish Sports Association (SSA) is the umbrella organisation for over 100 recognised Scottish governing bodies of sport (SGB), of which around half receive funding from **sportscotland**. Scotland's national sports strategy (2019-2029), *Sport for Life*, outlines **sportscotland**'s vision of ‘an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport’<sup>4</sup>. Sportscotland has been allocated a budget of £36.4m in 2025-26 by the Scottish Government, which is split between councils and Scottish Governing Bodies.<sup>5</sup>

## Appendix 1: Scotland's Structure for Sport and Physical Activity in Scotland



<sup>3</sup> A. Learmouth, Civil servants at sportscotland offered voluntary severance, (Herald, 3 February 2025), <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24906677.civil-servants-sportscotland-offered-voluntary-severance/?ref=ebbn&nid=1388&u=34f83e6edd8c6c3e60fb76fd3fd4cb97&date=030225>

<sup>4</sup> SportScotland, *Sport for Life*, (2019), <https://sportscotland.org.uk/media/em0d3zo3/sport-for-life-full-document.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> D. Collins, *Sport in Scotland*, (SPICe Briefing, May 2024), <https://bprcdn.parliament.scot/published/2024/5/3/80d33c81-8d78-48b9-a5e7-193dc8169b9d/SB%2024-22.pdf>

Scotland's Physical Activity Delivery Plan, *A More Active Scotland*, aims to reduce physical inactivity in adults and teenagers by 15% by 2030<sup>6</sup>. This is linked to the WHO's global plan *More Active People for a Healthier World*. The *Active Scotland Outcomes Framework* sets out the shared goals that the Scottish Government and their partner organisations (including sportscotland, Education Scotland, and NHS Education Scotland) have outlined to achieve their vision and support and enable people to be more physically active<sup>7</sup>. Programmes include Active Schools, which aims to promote more high-quality opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity within schools and to facilitate a pathway for longer-term sports participation through partnerships with clubs and community organisations. Over 269,000 children and young people attended Active Schools activities throughout the 2022/23 academic year, accounting for 38% of the school roll.

Scotland's national walking strategy, *Let's Get Scotland Walking*, outlines the Scottish Government's vision for a Scotland where everyone benefits from walking<sup>8</sup>. This includes initiatives such as the Daily Mile, which aims to create a culture of walking. The strategy also aims to create better walking environments by developing and managing attractive, well-designed places and signed routes close to where people live and work.

There are limited statutory requirements for councils to provide sports and culture facilities in Scotland, and those that exist are not prescriptive. The Local Government and Planning (Scotland) Act 1982, Section 14(1), states: 'a local authority shall ensure there is adequate provision of facilities for the inhabitants of their area for recreational, sporting, cultural and social activities.' However, 'adequate' has never been defined, and no current statutory guidance exists. Local authorities have powers to provide facilities and activities in Section 15(2) of the same legislation<sup>9</sup>. Under the Public Libraries Consolidation (Scotland) Act, as amended in schedule 21 of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, local authorities in Scotland have a statutory duty to provide 'adequate library facilities' for all residents in their area. The problem again is that 'adequate' is not defined.

The lack of statutory protection for sport and culture services means that when councils face difficult budget decisions, they prioritise statutory services, resulting in larger reductions for non-statutory provision of sport and culture.

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<sup>6</sup> Scottish Government, *A More Active Scotland*, (2018),

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2018/07/active-scotland-delivery-plan/documents/00537494-pdf/00537494-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00537494.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Scottish Government, *Active Scotland Delivery Plan*, (July 2018), <https://www.gov.scot/publications/active-scotland-delivery-plan/pages/5/>

<sup>8</sup> Scottish Government, *Let's get Scotland Walking - The National Walking Strategy*, (2014), <https://www.gov.scot/publications/lets-scotland-walking-national-walking-strategy/pages/5/>

<sup>9</sup> These powers and obligations were transferred to the new authorities under Schedule 13 of the Local Government etc. (Scotland) Act 1994.

## Councils

Scotland's 32 councils are responsible for community-based (leisure centres, swimming pools, playing fields) and school-based facilities comprising most Scottish sports facilities. Local authorities are expected to assess local needs and account for national objectives when allocating funds, developing strategies, and implementing initiatives.

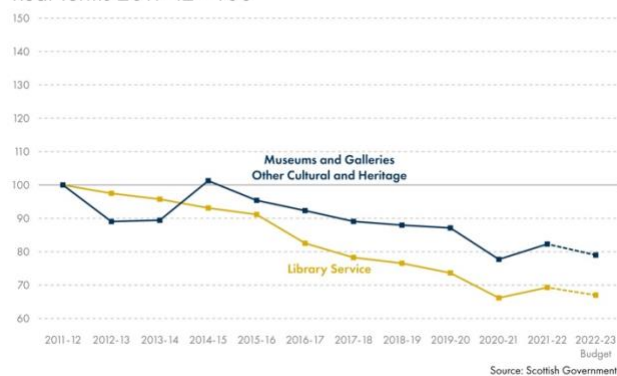
Local authorities are the primary financial investors in sport and physical activity across Scotland, responsible for up to 90% of the public funding. For example, over 500 indoor sports centres in Scotland have public access, 70% of which are on education sites. There was an increasing level of provision of new facilities from 1950 through to 1979, but it has fallen steeply since then<sup>10</sup>.

Pressures on local authority funding generally impact sports and physical activity and harm participation. There is additional funding for community sports through *CashBack for Communities* (2008), a Scottish Government initiative that utilises funds recovered through the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (POCA).

The picture is similar to spending on culture and libraries. A SPICe analysis highlighted that spending on museums and galleries and other cultural and heritage activities had gone up and down in cash terms since 2011/12<sup>11</sup>. However, there is a more evident trend of reduced spend in cash terms for libraries. The EIS has continued to highlight an erosion of instrumental music provision, with proposed cuts to services resulting in a series of annual battles. They are urging the Scottish Government to provide adequate funding to Local Authorities to sustain and grow instrumental music services and deliver on their manifesto commitments<sup>12</sup>.

### Local Government spend on Culture and Libraries

Real Terms 2011-12 = 100



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<sup>10</sup> M. Fitzjohn and M. Tungatt, How many indoor sports centres are there in Scotland?, (Oct. 2021), <https://sportsleisurelegacy.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/SCOTLAND-FULL-REPORT.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> SPICe Spotlight, *Trends in Funding for Culture*, (June, 2023), <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2023/06/12/trends-in-funding-for-culture/>

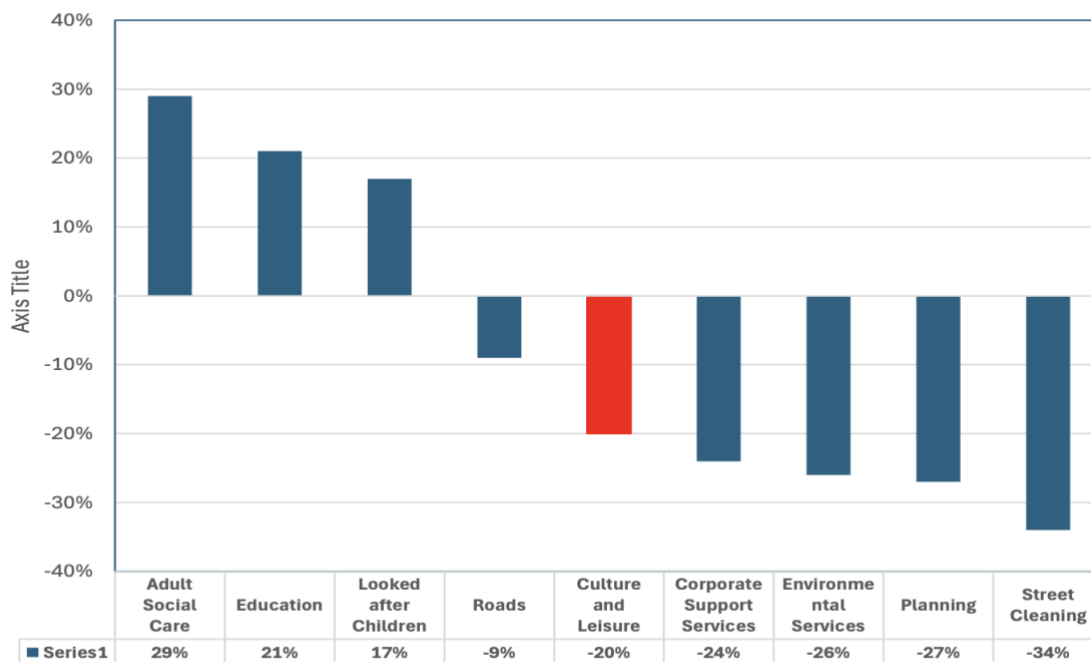
<sup>12</sup> EIS, Stand up for Music, <https://www.eis.org.uk/change-the-tune/petition-2025>



A report by EKOS for Community Leisure UK, Creative Scotland and **sportscotland** highlights the challenges faced by culture, sport and leisure services in Scotland and warns of an even gloomier picture for the years ahead<sup>13</sup>. They found that:

- Local government investment in culture, sport and leisure services across Scotland has reduced by at least 20% in real terms between 2010/11 and 2022/23—as much as 33% in some areas.
- Income has not returned to pre-pandemic levels, reflecting the current cost of living pressures on households.
- Operating costs have increased sharply since the pandemic, particularly in relation to energy and staff, exerting further financial pressure on what are already stretched services.
- Most councils and ALEOs have already had to make substantial savings through reducing hours, closing facilities and staff reductions. Around a third of ALEOs have closed facilities, including indoor and outdoor sports facilities
- Long-term funding reductions have now meant that there is little left to do other than withdraw services and close facilities.
- There is little sign of optimism as most councils and ALEOs expect further reductions in budgets in the future.

**Figure 2.1: % change in Council Expenditure (real terms) between 2010/11 and 2022/23**

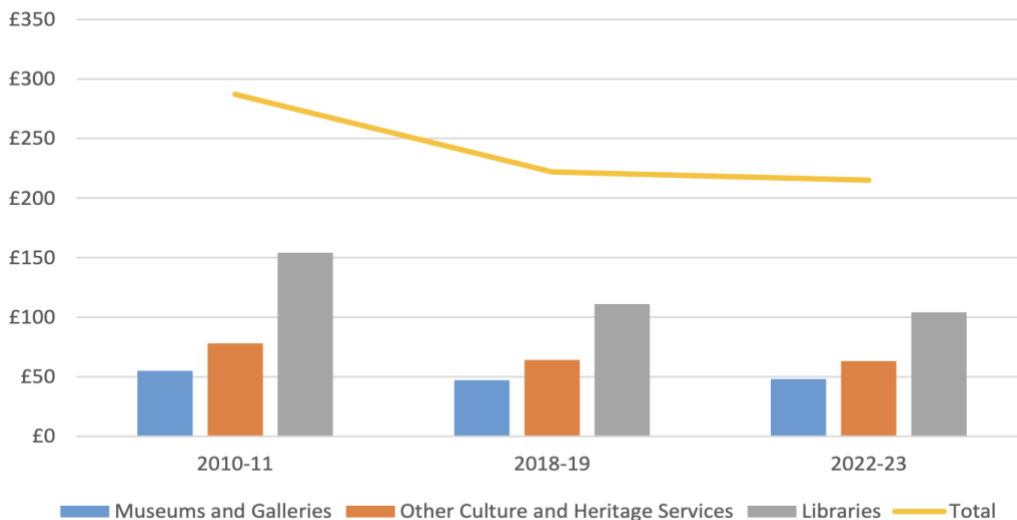


Source: Local Government Benchmarking Framework Overview Report 2022/23

<sup>13</sup> EKOS, Review of Culture and Leisure Services in Scotland, (August, 2024), <https://communityleisureuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Review-of-Culture-and-Sport-and-Leisure-Services-in-Scotland-Final-Report-2024.pdf>

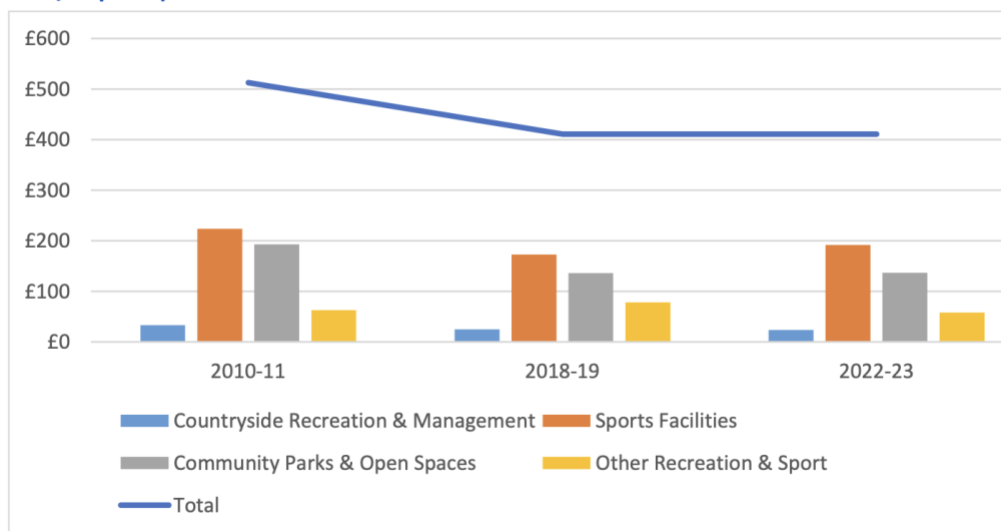
Data on specific services has its challenges due to definitions. The Improvement Service maintains datasets on facilities, which again rely on third-party reporting<sup>14</sup>. However, these charts give an indication of the impact.

**Figure 2.2: Change in Council Net Revenue Expenditure between 2010/11 and 2022/23 (all in 2022/23 prices - £ millions)**



Source: LFR and VOCAL (2014)

**Figure 2.3: Change in Council Net Revenue Expenditure between 2010/11 and 2022/23 (all in 2022/23 prices) - £ millions**



Source: LFR and VOCAL (2014)

Capital expenditure on cultural services increased over the same period, spiked by investment in museums and art galleries in 2019/20, but typically rose from £35m to £70m per year. Equivalent spending on recreation and sport has remained relatively stable at around £135m per year.

<sup>14</sup> Improvement service, Sports facilities Scotland, [https://data.spatialhub.scot/dataset/sports\\_facilities-unknown](https://data.spatialhub.scot/dataset/sports_facilities-unknown)

Around one-third of councils and ALEOs have closed facilities altogether, and many have also reduced opening hours. Pricing has been used (as a means of generating more income) more extensively in sports than in culture, and 25% reported that they had stopped some sports and leisure services altogether since pre-pandemic years. At the OSS Sport Summit 2019, Scotland’s largest provider of public facilities, Glasgow Life, told the audience that sport and leisure in Scotland was “broken and unsustainable”<sup>15</sup>. Council-operated outdoor activity centres have also closed, and the private sector centres are experiencing financial difficulty.

## Swimming

Swimming pools illustrate many of the challenges facing sports facilities in Scotland. There are 396 public swimming pools in Scotland, of which 56% are over 30 years old. Scotland’s accidental drownings (47 deaths in 2023) are more than double the UK rate per head of population, so swimming pools are a vital national asset for teaching children to swim. Scottish Swimming has calculated that 200 pools are at risk of closure by 2030 based on age alone unless significant investment can be secured to renovate existing pools and build the next generation of carbon-efficient pools. This requires five new pools every year at a cost of £40.5m, although they would bring energy efficiency savings of £5m per year. Swimming provides all the health benefits of physical activity in a non-weight-bearing environment. Swimming pools are the beating heart of many a community. Pools are vibrant places – often community hubs where people of all ages and abilities come together for fun and fitness<sup>16</sup>. As Glasgow’s Olympic medallist, Michael Jamieson, says, ‘I think swimming in particular is going to become a really, really difficult sport to get access to. It’s already got the reputation as a middle class sport’<sup>17</sup>.



There have been significant staffing cuts at the facilities that remain open. This applies to all levels of staff, with not one category increasing posts by more than they decreased.

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<sup>15</sup> Observatory for Sport in Scotland, <https://oss.scot/scotlands-sporting-infrastructure-starting-to-collapse/>

<sup>16</sup> Scottish Swimming, *The Benefits of Swimming*, (Dec. 2024), <https://ocs-sport.ams3.cdn.digitaloceanspaces.com/scotswim-full/2025/01/TheBenefitsofSwimming-Pools.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> G. McKay, 'It's not just elite sport in Glasgow that's under threat', (Herald, 2 March, 2025), <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24972525.its-not-just-elite-sport-glasgow-threat/>

**Table 4.5: In which areas of culture services have there been increases or decreases in staffing levels over the last three years (e.g. arts development)?**

	No. of posts has reduced	No. of posts has stayed the same	No. of posts has increased
Senior management (n=19)	63%	26%	11%
Operational staff (n=19)	63%	26%	11%
Facility managers (n=18)	56%	44%	0%
Front of house (facilities) (n=18)	50%	39%	11%
Support staff (e.g. admin, finance etc.) (n=19)	47%	47%	5%
Education and outreach staff (n=12)	42%	50%	8%
Arts development (n=18)	39%	44%	17%
Business development staff (including marketing) (n=17)	35%	41%	24%
Museum curators/Collections management roles (n=17)	29%	65%	6%
Other specialists (n=9)	22%	67%	11%
Other (n=2)	50%	50%	0%

Other included: libraries. Don't knows removed.

**Table 4.6: In which areas of sport and leisure services have there been increases or decreases in staffing levels over the last three years (e.g. sports development)?**

	No. of posts has reduced	No. of posts has stayed the same	No. of posts has increased
Senior management (n=28)	50%	50%	0%
Business development staff (including marketing) (N=24)	29%	46%	25%
Support staff (e.g. admin, finance etc.) (N=25)	40%	48%	12%
Operational staff (N=25)	72%	20%	8%
Facility managers (N=25)	36%	56%	8%
Front of house (facilities) (N=24)	42%	58%	0%
Sports development (N=23)	43%	43%	13%
Education and outreach staff (N=13)	54%	38%	8%
Specialists (e.g. coaches/trainers) (N=21)	48%	43%	10%

Don't knows removed.

These cuts are not unique to Scotland. An APSE paper, *Securing the future of public sport and leisure services*, concluded that ‘The focus on efficiencies, including greater reliance on income generation, which public sport and leisure services have had to rely upon, have not been reinvested into the service but instead those savings have mainly been used to support other public services. The sector risks becoming increasingly inaccessible as it has to focus on ever greater financial returns from those that can afford to pay and risks a lack of focus and support on those most in need.’<sup>18</sup>

## ALEOs

Arm’s-length external organisations (ALEOs) are separate organisations (it is not a legal definition) used by councils to deliver services. ALEOs receive payments from their council for the delivery of services (commonly known as a management fee) and may also use council services in areas like payroll, finance, HR and IT. Most (but not all) are established as single-member trusts in which the council is the sole member.

Their use grew throughout the 1990s in sports and culture, and most councils use them to provide a range of activities. At a time of financial constraints, the attraction for councils was the tax benefits offered to charities (Non-Domestic Rates relief), which freed up more money to deliver the service. There was also a hope that charitable status would attract greater external funding. Still, this was marginal in practice, and the loss of economies of scale often led to higher operating costs. Almost all their funding comes from local authorities, and many have moved from one financial crisis to another. In response, many have attempted to cut staff wages and conditions, primarily through casual staff, reducing wages, sick pay, holiday entitlements and pay, and pension contributions<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> APSE, *Securing the Future of Public Sport and Leisure Services*, (2021),

<https://www.apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/members-area/apse-networks/sports-leisure-management/resource-hub-for-sports-and-leisure-services/securing-future-public-sport-leisure/>

<sup>19</sup> UNISON Scotland, *Charitable trusts delivering public leisure and cultural services*, (December 2006).

The Barclay Review of Non-Domestic Rates recommended removing ALEOs from the bodies that could receive charity relief from non-domestic rates because this was simply tax avoidance of around £45m per year.

‘4.116: If the council itself were still providing a service directly, it would pay rates, but by creating an ALEO rates relief becomes available and the cost of that relief is then met by the Scottish Government. This allows councils to gain additional funding from the Scottish Government outwith the usual funding arrangements, a fact that was acknowledged by councils themselves as one of the primary reasons they put services into ALEO status in the first place. This is tax avoidance and should cease.’<sup>20</sup>

The Scottish Government partially implemented the recommendation, retaining rates relief for existing ALEOs, while future ALEOs would not enjoy the same level of exemption. Barclay also recommended that sports club relief be reviewed to ensure it supports affordable community-based facilities rather than member clubs with significant assets that do not require relief. Clubs registered with HMRC as a Community amateur sports club get separate rates relief.



Around 25 councils  
**Sport and leisure**<sup>1</sup>



Around 20 councils  
**Cultural services**<sup>1</sup>

Includes leisure centres, swimming pools and sports development.

Includes museums, galleries, theatres and libraries.

Audit Scotland highlighted the difficulty in defining an ALEO. They identified 25 sport and leisure and 20 cultural ALEOs in Scotland, with 13 councils having joint leisure and culture ALEOs<sup>21</sup>. They also ‘saw limited evidence of public opinion shaping options appraisals’ when ALEOs were being considered and recommended stronger governance arrangements. Public satisfaction in sports and leisure ALEOs performance had also declined.

### Private and Voluntary Sector

There are approximately 13,000 sports clubs across

Scotland, which are typically voluntary organisations that rely on membership fees to support their operation, however, some receive funding from the National Lottery and local authority grants. There is a network of Community Sport Hubs (CSH) to enable collaboration between sports clubs and other community-based organisations to improve the impact that sport and physical activity has on communities<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Scottish Government, Report of the Barclay Review of Non-Domestic Rates, (August, 2017), p.72.

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/independent-report/2017/08/report-barclay-review-non-domestic-rates/documents/00523643-pdf/00523643-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00523643.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Accounts Commission, *Councils’ use of arm’s-length organisations*, (Audit Scotland, May 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Understanding community sport hubs, <https://sportscotland.org.uk/media/44yljeic/csh-leaflet-updated-23.pdf>

# ALL COMMUNITY SPORT HUBS ARE FOUNDED ON THESE THREE PILLARS



Founding pillars	The approach each CSH adopts	The Community Sport Hub Officer network supports Community Sport Hubs to...
 Meeting community needs	Inclusive	...understand the barriers people face and proactively address them
	Responsive	...adapt what they do based on how they are doing and what's happening around them
 Fostering community collaboration	Accountable	...plan well, measure their performance and be accountable for delivering outcomes
	Collaborative	...develop and strengthen partnerships and collaborations across public, voluntary, and private sectors
 Empowering community leaders	Person-centred	...listen to people and put their voices at the heart of their thinking
	Continuously improving	...do everything to the highest possible standard, whilst seeking to continuously improve

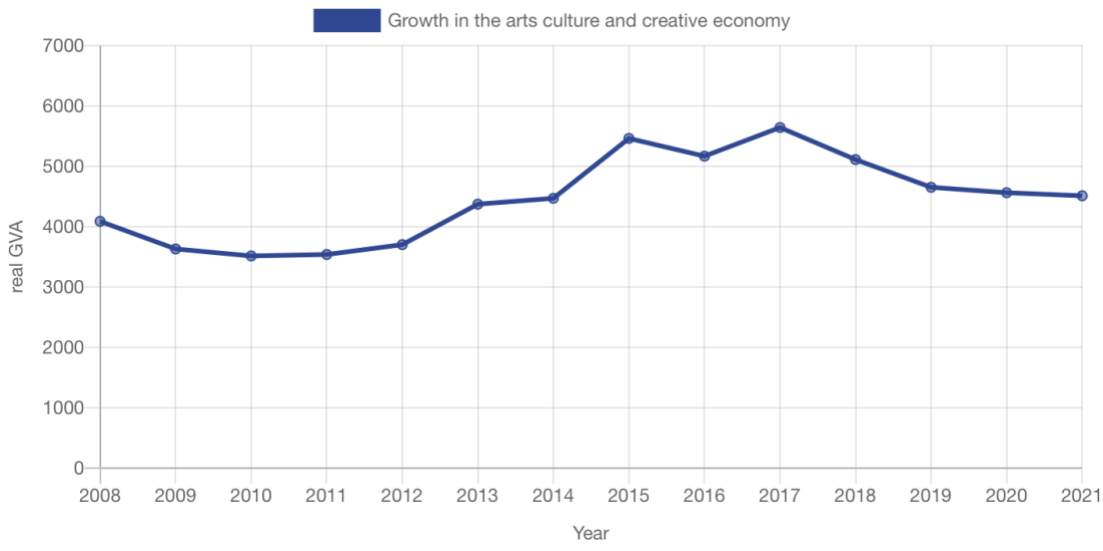
## Creative Economy

The arts, culture, and creative sector are important economic sectors for Scotland. The latest data for the sector shows that it employed 155,000 people, and there were 13,285 registered enterprises operating in the 'Creative Industries growth sector', representing 7.6% of all registered businesses in Scotland. Scottish cultural exports contribute £5 billion annually to the national economy. That's about 2.5% of onshore GDP.

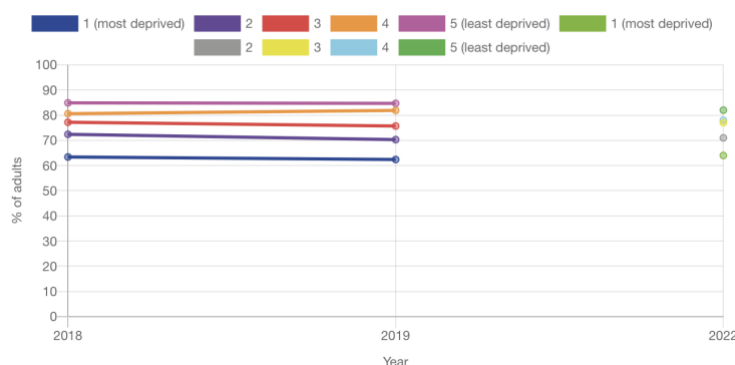
### GVA at constant prices



The National Outcomes show a fall in the GVA for the Arts, Culture and Creative sector in recent years, although there has been a £997 million (28%) increase in real terms since 2010. The Digital Industries sub-sector has primarily driven this until recent falls.



Overall, participation in cultural activity appears to have returned to close to pre-pandemic levels. In 2022, around 74% in Scotland attended a cultural event or place. However, attendance was higher among households with greater net annual household income. 87 per cent of those with a net annual household income of over £30,000 had



attended or visited a cultural event or place in the last 12 months, compared to 54 per cent of respondents with a net annual household income of between £0 and £10,000<sup>23</sup>.

Attendance at cultural events and visiting places of culture in the last 12 months by year

Cultural activity or event	2018	2019	2022	2023
Any excluding cinema	74	74	65	69
Any including cinema	81	81	74	76
Archive or records office (e.g. Scotland's Family History Peoples Centre)	2	2	1	1
Art gallery	21	22	18	21
Book festival	6	6	3	4
Cinema	56	58	49	50
Classical music performance	0	0	5	5
Classical music performance or opera	7	8	0	0
Comedy performance	0	0	10	13
Culturally specific festival (e.g. Mela /Feis/ local Gala days)	16	15	5	8
Dance show / event - e.g. ballet	11	11	6	8
Exhibition - including art, photography and crafts	18	18	12	14
Historic place - e.g. castle, stately home and grounds, battle or archaeological site	34	35	29	33
Library (including mobile and online)	26	27	17	20
Live music event - e.g. traditional music, rock concert	34	37	32	36
Museum	32	34	26	30
None	19	19	26	24
Opera	0	0	2	2
Streaming of a live performance (e.g. theatre, dance, concert or comedy performance)	7	7	8	7
Street arts (e.g. musical performances or art in parks, streets or shopping centre)	16	17	10	11
Theatre - e.g. pantomime / musical / play	32	33	24	30

Source: [Scottish Household Survey Data Explorer](https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes/national-outcomes/culture/measuring-progress-culture)

The Scottish Government recognises that “Culture is central to building diverse, inclusive and prosperous communities. Culture, events and creativity can help promote and foster active

<sup>23</sup> Scottish Government, The National Outcomes – culture, <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes/national-outcomes/culture/measuring-progress-culture>



citizenship, encouraging people to lead and effect change in our communities.”<sup>24</sup> It published a Culture Strategy in 2020, which sets out the Scottish Government's vision for culture and a series of actions.<sup>25</sup> A refreshed action plan was published in December 2023.

While the sector welcomes the positive vision, it also points out that at around 0.5%, Scottish spending on culture is amongst the lowest in Europe. Real terms per-person spending in Scotland from 2009–2023 decreased by 29%. England and the UK, as a whole, are similar. They argue, ‘The creative economy, attacked from all sides in recent years, is stagnant. Without investment, it would contract. Job losses would be particularly severe in fragile areas such as grassroots music venues, which not only nurture talent but also support local economies through hospitality and tourism.’<sup>26</sup>

The promised £100 million investment by 2028 was looking even further off after the mid-year cuts in the 2023-24 Budget, described as ‘devastating’ by 100 organisations<sup>27</sup>. However, next year’s budget appears to show some recovery, with culture and arts spending increasing by £34 million, with £20 million channelled through Creative Scotland for its competitive multi-year funding programme for artists and cultural organisations<sup>28</sup>. Culture organisations welcomed this, although as the Cabinet Secretary for Constitution, External Affairs and Culture told Parliament in January 2024, ‘I recognise that the additional £15.8 million of funding next year will not rectify years of standstill funding. That is only the starting point of a journey of three phases—sustain, develop and innovate—all of which are important.’<sup>29</sup>

There will also be two reviews. A broader review will look at the existing support for the sector and explore new ways the Scottish Government can grow the overall funding pot for culture and diversify funding streams—a separate but linked review of Creative Scotland, which Dame Sue Bruce will lead.

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<sup>24</sup> Scottish Government, *Culture in an independent Scotland*, (Feb. 2024), <https://www.gov.scot/publications/building-new-scotland-culture-independent-scotland/pages/6/>

<sup>25</sup> Scottish Government, *A Culture Strategy for Scotland*, (March, 2022), <https://www.gov.scot/publications/culture-strategy-scotland/>

<sup>26</sup> D. Perman, *Seven steps to save Scotland’s creative economy*, (Sceptical Scot, 30 October, 2024), <https://sceptical.scot/2024/10/seven-steps-to-save-scotlands-creative-economy/#:~:text=I%20propose%20mission%2Doriented%2C%20strategic,supporting%20over%2070%2C000%20jobs%20directly.>

<sup>27</sup> S. Carrell, *Scottish arts sector appeals to ministers over ‘devastating’ budget cuts*, (Guardian, 22 Aug. 2024), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/aug/22/scottish-arts-sector-appeals-to-ministers-over-devastating-budget-cuts>

<sup>28</sup> Scottish Government, *Increased funding for arts and culture*, (December 2024), <https://www.gov.scot/news/increased-funding-for-arts-and-culture/>

<sup>29</sup> SPICe, *Understanding the Increase in Scotland’s Arts and Culture Budgets*, (17 Feb. 2025), <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2025/02/17/culture-arts-budgets/>



## Libraries

Our public library system has a special place in the work of the Jimmy Reid Foundation. His extensive reading nurtured Jimmy's political seeds, starting before he went to school and developing into a lifelong passion. After a TV programme, he was famously asked, 'Where did you study English Literature?' He replied, 'Govan Library'.

**What university did you attend Mr Reid? Govan Library.**

"The library was there for me, and to this day I believe that it is a fundamental element when people talk about establishing a society within which there is an increasing quality of life representing something beyond the rat race."

 The Jimmy Reid Foundation



There are around 480 local 'venues', 49 mobile libraries and a 24/7 digital offer, which sees 1 in 2 of the public regularly use local libraries. 83 public libraries have closed in Scotland since 2009/10, with spending cut by 30 per cent over the same period. Many more libraries have cut their opening hours and reduced staff. The number of library staff in Scotland has

dropped from 1,462 full-time equivalent workers in 2017-18 to just 1,306 by 2021-22. Libraries bring generations together in a space in a way few other places can and generate £6.95 for every £1 of public funding. This also applies across the UK, with libraries closing at a rate of 40 annually<sup>30</sup>. While less prevalent in Scotland, libraries are increasingly being run by volunteers, usually unqualified for the role. Libraries are far more than a repository of books - they are community focal points and, for some, a vital lifeline to the outside world.

A new poll by YouGov has revealed that 40% of Britons haven't read a single book in the past 12 months and that the average person has only read or listened to three books in a year.

The heritage sector is also under pressure. The additional funding announced by the UK Culture Secretary will also be aimed at crumbling museums. It includes £120m, which will be available to 17 major institutions such as the British Museum, National Gallery and National Museums Liverpool, which all get regular annual funding from the DCMS. Local museums will now have a dedicated £20m fund 'to help keep cherished civic museums open'. The Barnett consequential of this for Scotland will be for the Scottish Government to distribute. In December 2023, the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government, Shona Robison MSP, confirmed the Scottish Government's commitment to 'investing at least £100 million more in the arts and culture by 2028-29.'<sup>31</sup> The Government states that the 2024-25 budget included an uplift of £15.8 million compared to the previous year. While most of

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<sup>30</sup> S. Menon & L. Cawley, 'A library is more than a place with books, it is a lifeline', (BBC, 18 March 2025), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cvg117gdky1o>

<sup>31</sup> SPICe, *Understanding the Increase in Scotland's Arts and Culture Budgets*, (Feb. 2025), <https://spice-spotlight.scot/2025/02/17/culture-arts-budgets/>

this will go to Creative Scotland, there is £4.7m for National Collections, and £800,000 went to the V&A Dundee this year.

That still leaves Scotland's many fine local museums struggling for support from limited council funding, charges, Lottery Fund and charitable grants. Local archaeology is the responsibility of local authorities, who look after 90% of Scotland's historical sites. Staffing numbers continue to fall, making it difficult to maintain existing sites or undertake rescue archaeology as developments unearth new sites<sup>32</sup>. The heritage sector also argues that changes to the VAT rebate scheme would better safeguard the country's fragile historic attractions, widen public access, and boost economic growth. Some of Scotland's most famous battlefields, including Culloden, Prestonpans, and Killiecrankie<sup>33</sup>, have also been under development pressure.

Historic Houses estimates that extending eligibility for the existing rebate scheme to listed buildings that open to the public for at least 28 days a year would cost not much more than £6m and yield as much as £5.5m in additional vital repairs and maintenance<sup>34</sup>. Heritage sites have also been attacked for updating their information, with often misleading claims from groups claiming they have gone 'woke'. The National Trust has fought off attacks from the 'Restore Trust' pressure group, who, with less than transparent funding, have published a range of factually incorrect or misleading claims<sup>35</sup>. In opposition, Keir Starmer pledged to defend organisations such as the National Trust and Royal National Lifeboat Institution, accusing the Conservatives of attacking them to stoke a "desperate" culture war.

## **Private Sector**

Scotland's private fitness and leisure sector includes a wide range of gyms, fitness studios, and leisure centres catering to various fitness needs and preferences. Low-cost gyms and boutique studios are gaining popularity, offering accessible fitness options. The average gym membership cost in the UK is just under £50 per month, although low-cost budget gyms can be half of that. Funding cuts to councils mean local authority gym prices are increasingly in line with those of the private sector. In the EKOS survey, 54% of public sector providers reported increasing charges for sport and leisure.

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<sup>32</sup> Scotsman, *Scotland risks 'wholesale loss' of heritage*, (12 Feb. 2025), <https://www.scotsman.com/heritage-and-retro/heritage/scotland-risks-wholesale-loss-of-heritage-as-archaeology-cuts-leave-numbers-at-bare-minimum-4984881>

<sup>33</sup> G. Russell, *Trust claims Scottish battlefields are under threat*, (The National, Nov. 2021), <https://www.thenational.scot/news/19702989.trust-claims-scottish-battlefields-threat/#>

<sup>34</sup> Historic Houses, *VAT Rebates*, (27 Jan. 2025), <https://www.historichouses.org/app/uploads/2025/01/historic-houses-vat-rebate-summary-jan-25.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> B. Quinn, *How the National Trust fought back against the culture warriors*, (Guardian, 27 Oct. 2024), <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/oct/27/how-the-national-trust-fought-back-against-the-culture-warriors>

The private sector provides many other leisure facilities, including theatres, cinemas, etc. Access to these services is highly dependent on disposable income levels.

## Workforce

Labour market data for the UK has been subject to significant problems post-pandemic. They have always been inadequate in Scotland. The employment by industry data is unhelpful for the purposes of sport and leisure.

We know that sports and culture are significant employers. It is estimated that 586,000 people are working in sports and physical activity across the UK, although job numbers have not returned to pre-pandemic levels. In addition, some three million people are involved as coaches, although many will be volunteers. The reliance on volunteers can also lead to inequality of provision, as less affluent areas have fewer people with the time and resources to contribute in this way. This workforce is less diverse than the wider workforce, typically younger, white, and male than average, with 30% more 16- to 24-year-olds working in these occupations than in the wider economy. They are broadly distributed across the UK because they respond to local needs<sup>36</sup>.

Artists, directors and actors have raised the alarm about what they describe as a rigged system preventing working-class talent from thriving in their industries after analysis showed almost a third of major arts leaders were educated privately. A Guardian survey of the 50 organisations that receive the most Arts Council England funding revealed that privately educated people occupied a disproportionate number of leadership roles<sup>37</sup>. Almost a third (30%) of artistic directors and other creative leaders were educated privately, compared with a national average of 7%. More than a third (36%) of the organisations' chief executives or other executive directors went to private schools. Research by the Sutton Trust has also highlighted a stark overrepresentation in the arts for those from the most affluent backgrounds.

Access to arts courses was threatened by the previous UK government, which described them as 'Mickey Mouse degrees'. This analysis has been rejected by the new UK Government, with the Culture Secretary saying, 'It's economic madness, but it's also taking from a generation what is theirs by birthright - the chance to live richer, larger lives and to access the arts.'<sup>38</sup>

Musicians have one of the highest suicide rates in the world because the music business contains so many difficulties, such as intense touring, performance anxiety and low earnings, researchers have

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<sup>36</sup> CIMSA, *Workforce Insight Report*, (2023), <https://www.cimspa.co.uk/news-blog/news/2023/workforce-insight-report-available/>

<sup>37</sup> L. Bakare, *Working-class creatives don't stand a chance in UK today, leading artists warn*, (Guardian, 21 Feb. 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/feb/21/working-class-creatives-dont-stand-a-chance-in-uk-today-leading-artists-warn>

<sup>38</sup> I. Youngs, *Struggling English museums get rescue funds*, (BBC, 20 Feb. 2025), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ckgdwww392wo>

suggested. 'No other industry would tolerate this level of loss of life, and neither should we. The industry needs to get its house in order to confront levels of mortality which are profoundly upsetting and need to be tackled.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> D. Campbell, High suicide rates show music industry 'profoundly dangerous', researchers say, (Guardian, 7 March 2025), <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2025/mar/07/high-suicide-rates-show-music-industry-profoundly-dangerous-researchers-say>

### 3. Why Public Provision Matters

#### Introduction

There is a broad consensus that sports and cultural activities have many benefits for individuals and communities and the economy more broadly. Both the UK and Scottish governments have strategies to make the nation more active. They also recognise that sports and physical activity have to be more inclusive and welcoming so that everyone can have confidence that there is a place for them.

The previous UK Government strategy reiterated these themes, although with the caveat that they were ‘Moving towards a more sustainable sector that is more financially resilient and robust.’<sup>40</sup> This was widely viewed as a marketisation strategy with obvious access issues. The plan was also criticised for the absence of a plan to deliver the government’s ambitions. The then Labour Shadow Minister said, ‘This long-delayed report continues the tradition of words but no substance from this government on sports. Instead of another task force, the government should come forward with a substantive plan to get our country more active. Labour would include a greater emphasis on sports in schools to set young people up for active lives.’ While these issues are devolved to Scotland, how the new UK government develops the plans they have inherited will matter, not least in terms of funding.

#### Physical Activity

Physical inactivity is recognised as one of four leading modifiable risk factors for non-communicable diseases alongside tobacco use, unhealthy diet and the harmful use of alcohol. The direct financial cost to the NHS across the UK is estimated to be as high as £1.2billion each year, and the World Health Organisation estimate that 1-3% of healthcare expenditure is attributed to inactivity. The Scottish Health Survey shows that only 69% of children (2yrs to 15yrs) and 69% of adults (16yrs to 75yrs plus) met the CMO Physical Activity Guideline for moderate to vigorous physical activity (MVPA). In addition, more active societies can generate additional returns on investment, including reduced use of fossil fuels, cleaner air, less congestion, and safer roads. It can also improve educational attainment directly through improved grades, school engagement, behaviour and reduced absenteeism or indirectly by enhancing skills such as self-control and concentration, teamwork and time management.

The graphic below illustrates the positive contribution of physical activity and sport to the people of Scotland, aligned to Scotland’s National Performance Framework, which also incorporates Scotland’s

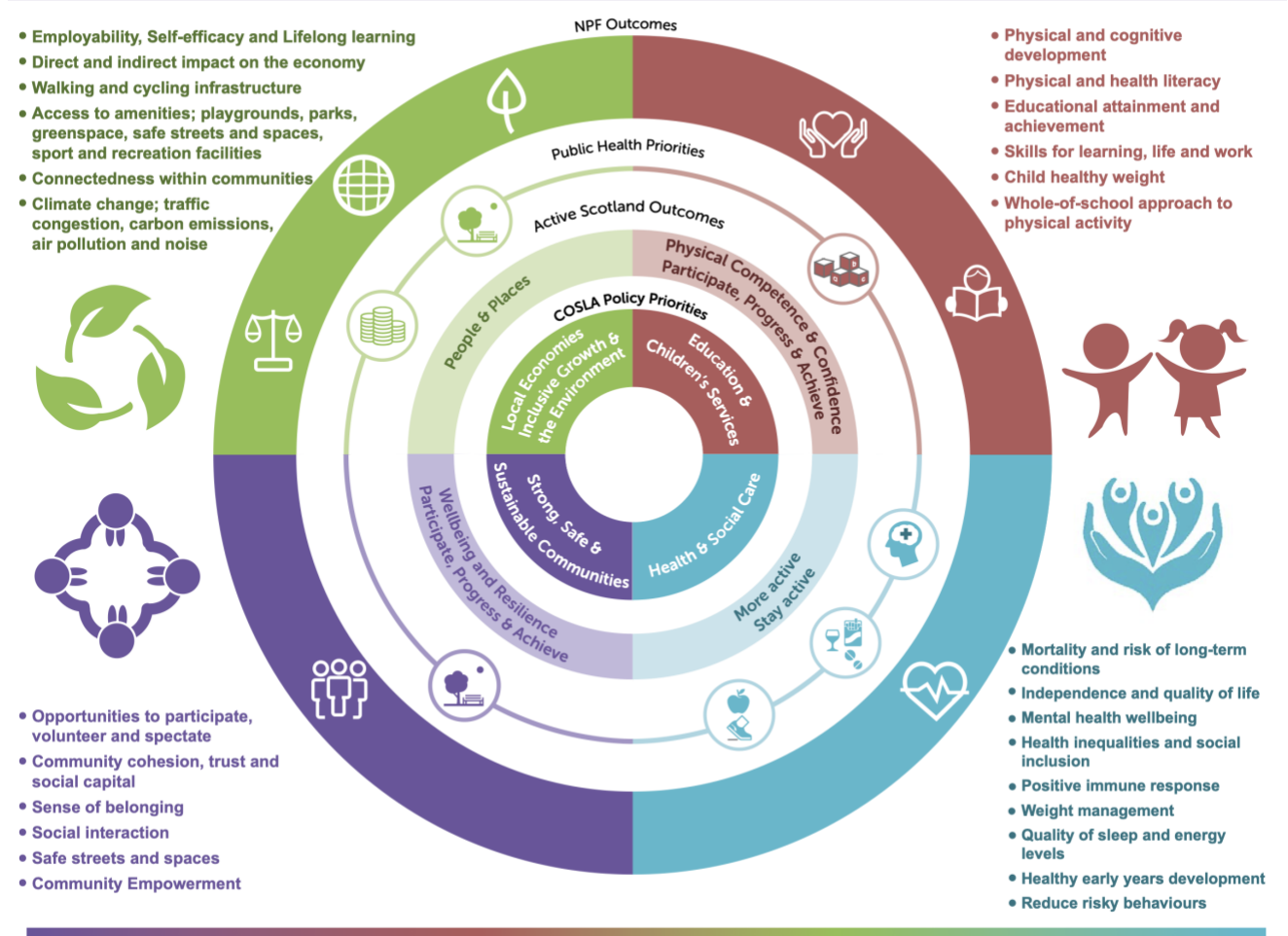
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<sup>40</sup> UK Government, Get Active: a strategy for the future of sport and physical activity, (August, 2023), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/get-active-a-strategy-for-the-future-of-sport-and-physical-activity>

commitment to the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals, Scotland’s Public Health Priorities and the Active Scotland Outcomes Framework.

## The Positive Contribution of Physical Activity and Sport to Scotland

Physical activity and sport provides a range of physical, mental, social, environmental and economic benefits:



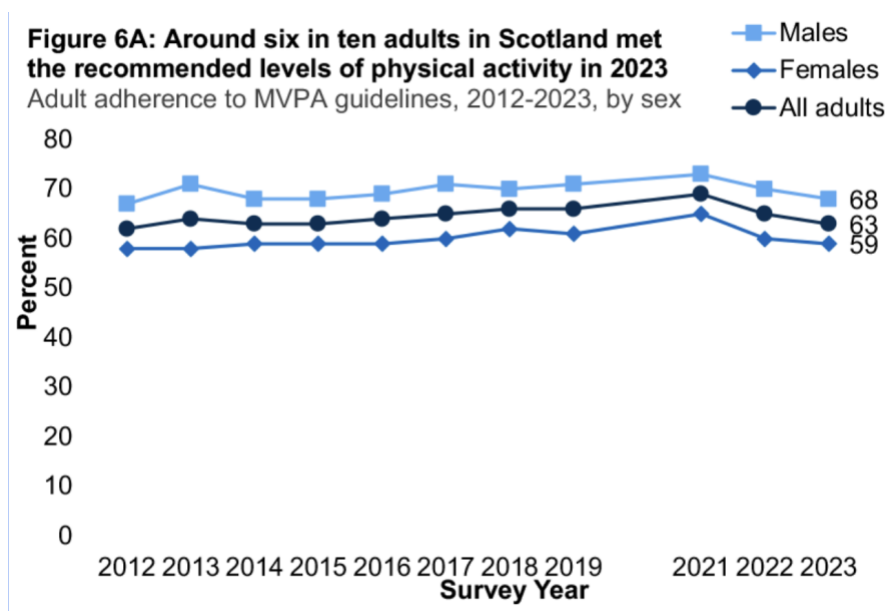
A briefing by COSLA and others highlights sport and physical activity can lead to strong, safe and sustainable communities through:

- Building stronger communities by bringing people from different backgrounds together via participating, volunteering and spectating
- Improving community links, levels of cohesion and social capital
- Improving residents’ sense of belonging and connection in an area, increasing levels of social trust.
- Increasing number of people of all ages out on the streets, making public spaces seem more welcoming and providing opportunities for social interaction and children’s play



- Mobilising community assets that enable physical activity increases people’s control over their health and promotes equity.<sup>41</sup>

Sports and physical activity can positively impact employability in terms of employment opportunities, earnings, job performance, and job satisfaction. The social and economic value of volunteering is significant, with the annual value in Scotland estimated at £2.26 billion<sup>42</sup>.



The Scottish Health Survey (SHeS) assesses adherence to the guidelines for moderate or vigorous physical activity (MVPA)<sup>43</sup>. The proportion of adults meeting the recommended levels of physical activity (63%) has been falling marginally from its 2021 peak. A higher proportion of men reported having met the guidelines (68%) compared with women (59%). Adherence to recommended physical

activity levels was lowest for children aged 13-15. A notably lower proportion of girls aged 13-15 met the recommended physical activity level compared with boys in this group (43% and 67%, respectively). Sedentary time increased with age among children.

Only one in two adults living in Scotland’s most deprived areas met the recommended level of physical activity (50%). In her paper, *Sport and Social Inequality*, Professor Tess Kay (University of Stirling) highlights this. She argues that the role of poverty and disadvantage have been underplayed in sports and advocates for centring analyses of inequalities in sports policy and practice<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> COSLA, The Positive Contribution of Physical Activity and Sport to Scotland, [https://www.cosla.gov.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0021/24942/COSLA-PA-Contribution-Briefing-V8.pdf](https://www.cosla.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/24942/COSLA-PA-Contribution-Briefing-V8.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Scottish Government, *Volunteering for All: national framework*, (April 2019), <https://www.gov.scot/publications/volunteering-national-framework/>

<sup>43</sup> Scottish Government, *Scottish Health Survey 2023* (Nov. 2024), <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-health-survey-2023-volume-1-main-report/pages/12/>

<sup>44</sup> T. Kay, *Sport and Social Inequality*, (Observatory for Sport in Scotland), <https://www.oss.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Sport-Social-Inequality-Tess-Kay-review-paper-1.pdf>

The Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee investigated female participation in sport<sup>45</sup>. They took evidence from stakeholders and highlighted barriers to participation in teenage girls and women of all ages. These barriers included puberty, gendered/restricted activity offerings; competition focus rather than fun, and negative attitudes from boys and boys dominating playgrounds in schools. The Committee also recognised social media's huge positive and negative influence on girls and women and their attitudes to and engagement with sports and physical activity. Athletes who showed strength, endurance and skill in physically demanding sports challenged deeply ingrained stereotypes of women as physically inferior and fragile. As a result, they faced intense scrutiny, both socially and publicly<sup>46</sup>.

According to a Moving Communities study, participation in public leisure centre activities saved the NHS £397.8 million in 2023. The findings from 8.8 million leisure centre users across 818 sites show that more than 28,000 costly health conditions were prevented, with older adults reaping the most significant benefits and providing the greatest return on investment for the NHS. The research estimated the following had been prevented: 12,946 hip fractures. 4,724 cases of depression. 4,368 cases of dementia. 2,685 cases of coronary heart disease. 1,127 cases of Type 2 diabetes. 959 cases of stroke. 229 cases of breast cancer 225 cases of colorectal cancer<sup>47</sup>.

Elite sport is outwith the scope of this paper. However, major sporting events are expensive to deliver and need to provide recognisable benefits in terms of legacy for community sports. The Commonwealth Games are coming to Glasgow in 2026 after the Australian state of Victoria pulled out amid concerns over costs. The Scottish Government has made clear public funding is not needed, although it was in 2014. The First Minister argues that 'Glasgow 2026 will bring huge economic benefits to the city, and support upgrades to sporting facilities – benefiting individuals, communities and clubs.' A report for UK Sport claims that sporting events in 2022 delivered a direct economic impact of £132m, supporting 1,600 jobs and a 6:1 return on investment<sup>48</sup>. A study for the Scottish Government found that 'Despite the relatively strong overall evidence of a short-term boost to businesses, the evidence for a long-term increase in activity is limited in quality and quantity.'<sup>49</sup> The

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<sup>45</sup> Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, *Female participation in sport and physical activity*, (Oct. 2023), <https://digitalpublications.parliament.scot/Committees/Report/HSCS/2023/10/9/44f3cbcf-b4f5-429b-822d-93fdd1e60353-1#89be6c59-caeb-4724-832b-0f86aec56bd5.dita>

<sup>46</sup> S. Bekker and S. Mumford, *Open Play: The Case for Feminist Sport*, (Reaktion Books, Feb. 2025).

<sup>47</sup> K. Hudson, *Physical activity delivered in leisure centres prevented 12,946 hip fractures and 959 strokes in 2023*, (Sports Management, 11 Feb. 2025), <https://www.sportsmanagement.co.uk/Sports-news/latest/Moving-Communities-shows-the-power-of-public-leisure-centres-to-support-the-UKs-health/355027?source=home&p=11>

<sup>48</sup> UK Sport, *New report reveals economic and social benefits of the UK hosting sporting events*, (Jan. 2023), <https://www.uk-sport.gov.uk/news/2023/01/12/new-report-reveals-economic-and-social-benefits-of-the-uk-hosting-sporting-events>

<sup>49</sup> Scottish Government, *Evidence for legacy from major sporting events*, (April 2014), <https://www.gov.scot/publications/review-evidence-legacy-major-sporting-events/pages/5/>



Scottish Government's Games 10-year legacy outcomes included getting more children to routinely participate in play, sport, or other active recreation. As we have seen, the 2014 games have not helped deliver this outcome, although it is not the only factor<sup>50</sup>. Others question the legacy of the 2014 games for Glasgow's East End<sup>51</sup>.

### Strengthening Communities

In the Jimmy Reid Foundation paper, *Building Stronger Communities*, we deployed the concept of 'social infrastructure', namely, the physical conditions that determine whether personal relationships can flourish. When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends and neighbours. When degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves. We recommended that instead of a series of piecemeal initiatives, we need a comprehensive programme of action that covers all the factors that help build stronger communities<sup>52</sup>.

The importance of sports and culture in strengthening communities is recognised in national strategies. For example, **sportscotland's** national strategy, *Sport for Life*, explicitly recognises that 'Taking part in sport improves social connections and reduces social isolation. It also lowers crime rates and antisocial behaviour and helps develop a sense of civic pride'<sup>53</sup>.

However, progress has been minimal and, if anything, deteriorating, particularly for the most disadvantaged communities, although again, the data is outdated. The National Outcomes uses the term 'social capital' as the resource of social networks, community cohesion, social participation, trust and empowerment. The Social Capital index is at 93 index points, 7 points lower than the 2013 baseline (100) and the index score 2018 (95). The feeling of local empowerment dropped significantly, which speaks to the centralisation of power away from communities, as highlighted in the *Building a Local Scotland* campaign. Their declaration notes 'that the average Scottish 'local' council has 170k citizens. The EU average is 10k. Community Councils have £400 pa and no statutory powers. Scotland has no truly local democracy<sup>54</sup>.'

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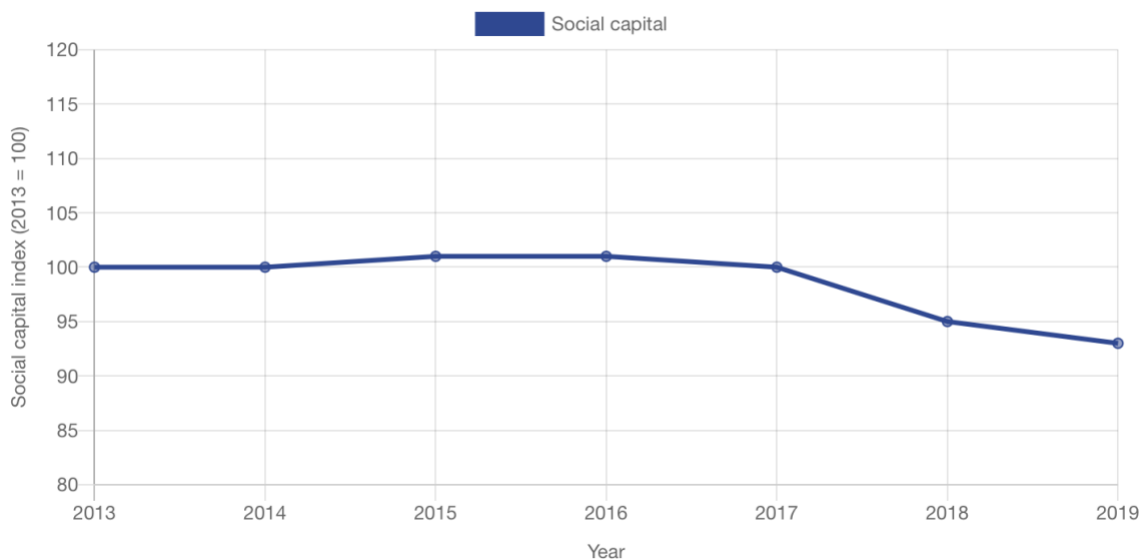
<sup>50</sup> M. Williams, *Glasgow Commonwealth Games bid to shed 'Europe sick man' tag fails*, (Herald, 25 February 2025), <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/24960160.glasgow-commonwealth-games-bid-shed-europe-sick-man-tag-fails/>

<sup>51</sup> D. Brewerton-Harper, *The Ghosts of the 2014 Games*, (Scottish Left Review, 142, Oct/Nov. 2024), <https://scottishleftreview.scot/the-ghosts-of-the-2014-games/>

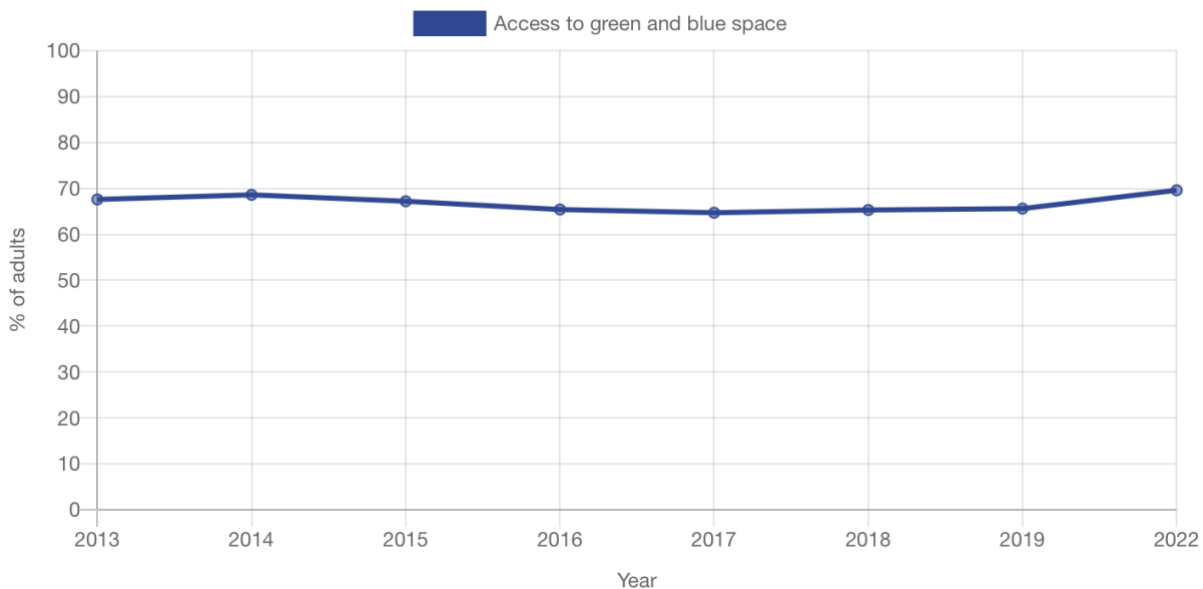
<sup>52</sup> D. Watson, *Building Stronger Communities*, (Reid Foundation, 2020), <https://reidfoundation.scot/2020/08/building-stronger-communities/>

<sup>53</sup> **SportScotland**, *Sport for Life*, (2019), <https://sportscotland.org.uk/media/em0d3zo3/sport-for-life-full-document.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> *Building a Local Scotland*, <https://buildlocal.scot>



According to the National Outcomes, green and blue space access has only improved marginally since 2013.

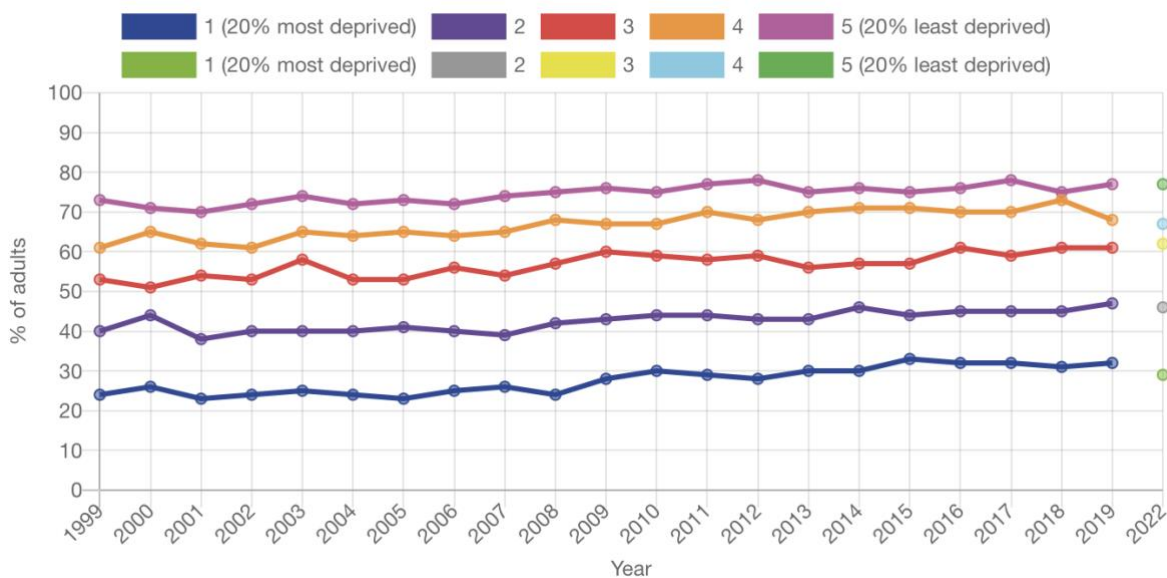


In 2022, adults living in less deprived areas were more likely than those living in more deprived areas to live within a five-minute walk of their nearest green or blue space: 73% for the 20% least deprived areas compared to 57% for the 20% most deprived areas. This is unchanged since 2014, while the proportion has been improving for higher income groups. A 2022 survey found that women are three times more likely than men to feel unsafe (one in six women compared to one in 20 men). Factors like socioeconomic status, race, disability and age can exacerbate the experience of feeling unsafe for some people. Urban planners and policymakers must prioritise and actively incorporate women's

safety in park design and management. Community engagement with women from different backgrounds is essential for creating safe and inclusive parks and green spaces<sup>55</sup>.

One test for the effectiveness of social infrastructure is loneliness. Again, the National Outcomes show no significant improvement. Those living in the 20% most deprived areas were almost twice as likely to experience feelings of loneliness (30%) as those living in the 20% least deprived areas (16%). This is reinforced by the National Outcomes data for places to interact. The indicator has fallen since its introduction, probably reflecting cuts in facilities and household incomes. The percentage of adults who tend to agree/strongly agree that there are places to meet up and socialise in their neighbourhood was 57.4% in 2022. People in the 20% most deprived parts of Scotland are much less likely to agree with this statement (47%) than people in the 20% least deprived parts of Scotland (66%).

There are similar National Outcomes data for perceptions of local areas, but there has been no significant improvement since 2014. The proportion rating their neighbourhood as a very good place to live increased significantly as deprivation declined. Of those living in the 20% most deprived areas of Scotland in 2022, only 29% rated their neighbourhood as a very good place to live, whereas 77% of those living in the 20% least deprived areas rated their neighbourhood as a very good place to live.

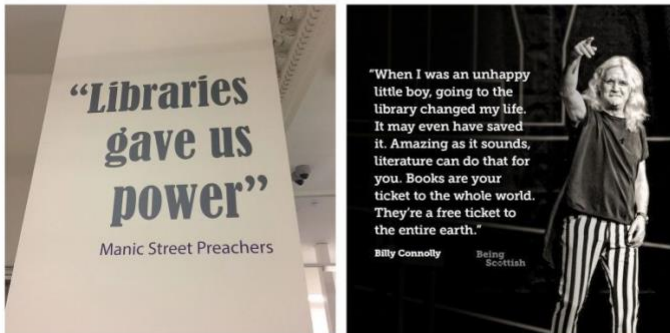
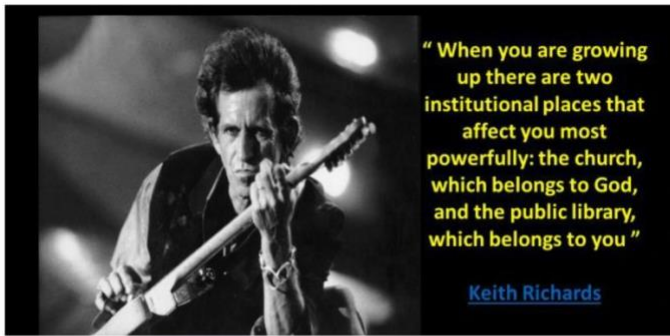


### Why cultural activity matters

‘In any civilised community, the arts ... serious or comic, light or demanding, must occupy a central place. Their enjoyment should not be regarded as something remote from everyday life.’ This was a central statement in the White Paper issued 60 years ago by Jennie Lee, the UK’s first minister for the

<sup>55</sup> A. Barker, *Women are three times as likely as men to feel unsafe in parks – here’s how we can design them better*, (The Conversation, 7 March 2025), <https://theconversation.com/women-are-three-times-as-likely-as-men-to-feel-unsafe-in-parks-heres-how-we-can-design-them-better-248465>

arts under Harold Wilson in 1965. That paper set out why the arts should be publicly supported, also arguing for increased local and regional support besides national institutions.



As we highlighted above, libraries are far more than a repository of books - they are community focal points and, for some, a vital lifeline to the outside world. Libraries are crucial to improving literacy and addressing children's reading crises. Recent studies reveal that fewer than 25 per cent of children read for pleasure frequently, and perhaps most worryingly that, only 40 per cent of pre-schoolers are read to frequently.

## 4. Evaluation and Action

### Introduction

As in other areas of public policy in Scotland, we are not short of strategies in this sector, although some are becoming dated. In particular, the data in the National Outcomes are often years out of date. What is needed is more evaluation and action. The governance structure is also complex. For example, the positioning of sports within the Department of Health and Social Care in Scotland allows for a more joined-up policy to realise improved health outcomes. However, the downside is that sports receive a limited percentage of the health and social care budget. Meir and others argue that ‘the real terms cut in funding for sport and physical activity since 2016 is evidence of a lack of commitment to sport and physical activity above and beyond the health and wellbeing rhetoric’<sup>56</sup>. Many councils and ALEOs interviewed by the EKOS report called for an urgent and honest debate about the future of culture and leisure services, often seeing this as part of a broader debate about the future of public services more generally.

### Participation in sport and activity

There are some marginally encouraging signs that the proportion of adults meeting the latest physical activity recommendations in 2021 at 69 per cent was higher than in 2019 (66%). However, it remains to be seen if this is a sustained increase and not just a post-pandemic blip, as this National Outcome has barely moved since it was introduced in 2012. For young adults (16-24), the latest figures show a sharp fall but are out of date again. Similarly, the statistics have only shifted marginally for women since its introduction<sup>57</sup>. Despite a range of strategies for public participation in physical activity in Scotland, there has not been a step change in outcomes over ten years. This points to the need to address the cause of this failure and revise the delivery plans.

In the previous chapter, we highlighted the analysis by Professor Tess Kay, which argued that social inequality and deprivation are the main causes of sports inequalities in Scotland. She recommends that addressing social disadvantage in sports is for social inequality and material deprivation to be identified as priorities focusing at the national policy level. The starting point is better data showing how the intersection of social disadvantage with the equality characteristics is related to sports participation. This should be followed by guidance and resources for the sector that recognise the constraints that reduce individual capacity to participate. This is not about behavioural change, ‘It is unrealistic to expect individuals grappling with material deprivation to change established patterns of

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<sup>56</sup> D. Meir, A. Brown, E. Macrae, & D. McGillivray, (2023). Country profile: sport and physical activity policy in Scotland. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 16(1), 181-197. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2023.2271940>

<sup>57</sup> Scottish Government, The National Outcomes – Health, <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/national-outcomes/national-outcomes/health/measuring-progress-health#Physical-activity>

unhealthy behaviour while facing the same challenges and constraints that have shaped it.’ The sports minister's commitment to seeking additional funding to tackle inequality needs to be delivered. Sport England has at least made a start, announcing investment into 53 areas highlighted in the top 10 per cent of the UK in terms of inactivity, social need, deprivation and health inequality<sup>58</sup>.

Sports and culture are also a human rights issue. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, Article 31, states,

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.
2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.<sup>59</sup>

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 12, states, ‘1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.’<sup>60</sup>

As the Scottish Parliament Health, Social Care and Sport Committee found, there is a persistent gender gap in rates of participation in sport and physical activity that begins at the age of puberty and persists up to women in their early 40s. While it welcomed specific strategies, it recommended that more be done on data collection and evaluation. Other recommendations included:

- An appropriate balance between supporting the aims of those women and girls who want to focus on competing in their sports and those who want to focus on enjoyment.
- A wider roll-out of the "Don't Be That Guy" campaign to address negative attitudes by boys.
- Sports organisations should be encouraged to offer a broader and more inclusive range of physical activities that are suitable for women experiencing specific women's health conditions.
- Girls and women should be offered greater opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity in a single sex environment.

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<sup>58</sup> K.Hudson, *Inequalities are a ticking timebomb says Sport England as investment for 53 deprived areas is announced*, (Sports Management, 27 Feb. 2025), <https://www.sportsmanagement.co.uk/Sports-news/latest/Inequalities-are-a-ticking-timebomb-says-Sport-England-as-investment-for-53-deprived-areas-is-announced/355177>

<sup>59</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2024/1/schedule>

<sup>60</sup> UN, *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, (Dec. 1966), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

- Supporting employers becoming "wellbeing employers" to allow employees time to be physically active or to engage in volunteering as sports leaders or coaches.
- Ensure considerations around personal safety are properly integrated into decision-making around the design, construction and maintenance of infrastructure and facilities that support physical activity.
- Strong sanctions against those companies that persistently fail to regulate negative body image social media content on their platforms.

The Scottish Parliament Health, Social Care and Sport Committee also found that little progress seems to have been made towards improving access to the school estate for sport and physical activity at a community level. The use and costs associated with Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funding is also a contributory issue. There should be a targeted action plan to improve the accessibility of the school estate as a valuable community resource.

Improvement in physical activity levels has to start in the early years and our schools, as that is where children spend more time than anywhere other than the home. A whole-of-school approach to physical activity is internationally recognised as part of a whole-systems approach to physical activity. This involves prioritising regular, high-quality physical education classes and providing suitable physical environments and resources to support structured and unstructured physical activity throughout the day. The new Play Vision Statement and Action Plan for 2025, backed up with £25 million for the renewal of play parks, is welcome<sup>61</sup>. The vision 'That every child is able to play across all stages and aspects of their life to support their social development, resilience, language and communication development, health, physical and mental wellbeing' is the right one. However, this is another council service impacted by funding cuts, which are being ameliorated by a central funding pot.

### **Cultural Activity**

UK Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy's recent announcement of a £270 million funding package for the arts (which had Barnett consequential for Scotland) is a welcome step forward after years of cuts. This has been viewed as a holding action to halt the deterioration, as she said, to prevent further decay in Britain's 'crumbling cultural infrastructure'. Nandy also highlighted the importance of school provision claiming, 'culture and creativity has been erased from our classrooms.' Too many past arguments destructively pitted excellence against access when both must be cherished equally, with a more substantial structural approach required<sup>62</sup>.

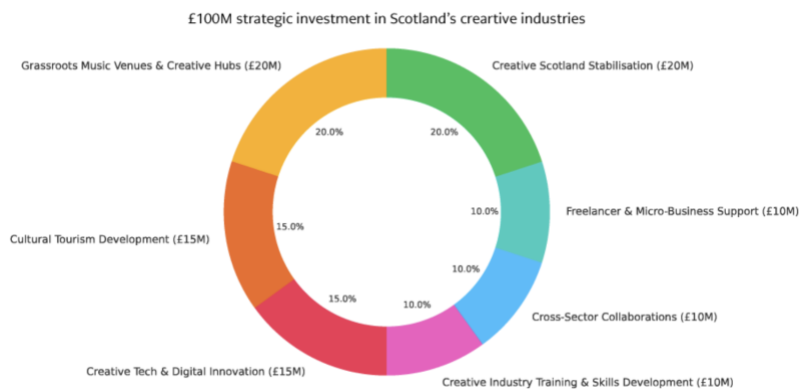
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<sup>61</sup> Scottish Government, *Play: vision statement and action plan 2025 to 2030*, (24 March 2025), <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-play-vision-statement-action-plan-2025-2030/pages/2/>

<sup>62</sup> A. Behr, *UK arts sector is getting a £270 million funding boost – but there are winners and losers*, (The Conversation, March 2025), <https://theconversation.com/uk-arts-sector-is-getting-a-270-million-funding-boost-but-there-are-winners-and-losers-251340>



Dougal Pearman makes a strong case for a strategic investment of the long-promised £100 million in the sector<sup>63</sup>. He points to Arts Council of England research that indicates that £1 invested in the arts yields £5 of tax revenue, suggesting an impact of up to £500m. He argues that investment could include the preservation and growth of grassroots venues, job creation, IP exploitation and expansion of cultural tourism, with long-term asset yields and multiplier effects potentially contributing an additional £2.5bn. Social and environmental impact would yield significant cost savings, although they are more challenging to quantify. Others may argue for different priorities, but the case for this level of strategic investment is well made.



We highlight the cuts in public libraries in Scotland and across the UK above. Reductions in local government funding primarily cause this. The Scottish Government claims it ‘places great importance on public libraries. We believe that everyone should have access to library services’. However, council funding cuts have not been offset by very modest Scottish Government grants through the Public Library Improvement Fund (PLIF)<sup>64</sup>. It is equally important that we invest in the libraries of the future through innovative design<sup>65</sup>.

We also highlighted the threat to historic battlefields. The Scottish Battlefields Trust and others make a strong case for greater protection of these sites, saying, ‘It’s very clear that Scotland needs to up its game when it comes to preserving its national heritage.’ Along with other heritage and cultural sites, they need increased and long-term investment, recognising them as powerful engines for attracting investment, raising aspiration and building stronger, healthier communities.

## Workforce

The sports and leisure sector relies heavily on the workforce in various roles. We have highlighted many challenges facing workers in this sector, including low pay, poor job security and better training and development.

<sup>63</sup> D. Perman, *Seven steps to save Scotland’s creative economy*, (Sceptical Scot, 30 October, 2024), <https://sceptical.scot/2024/10/seven-steps-to-save-scotlands-creative-economy/#:~:text=I%20propose%20mission%20oriented%2C%20strategic,supporting%20over%2070%2C000%20jobs%20directly.>

<sup>64</sup> SLIC, Public Library Improvement Fund, <https://scottishlibraries.org/public-library-improvement-fund-2024-open/>

<sup>65</sup> Designing Libraries, <https://designinglibraries.org.uk/about-designing-libraries/policy-framework/>



The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity's annual workforce report makes several helpful recommendations, including improved reward and development opportunities<sup>66</sup>.

#### CIMSPA recommendations

Based on a number of themes emerging from the report, CIMSPA and its partners have a number of recommendations that seek to further develop the sector, including:

- Build better **talent retention strategies**, with improved recognition, reward and development opportunities for all S&PA professionals. As the sector continues to professionalise, it's critical that the workforce receive parity in the recognition, reward, security and opportunities reflective of their high levels of skill, experience and value.
- Prioritise recruiting and supporting a **more diverse workforce**. For the sector to reach more people and broader audiences, a more diverse workforce reflective of the general population is essential. The shift towards greater demand of general skills is a positive sign that strides are being made, there is more work required to eradicate barriers to entering the workforce and making careers in the S&PA sector more accessible.
- **Develop talent transfer strategies to enable volunteers and those non-S&PA specialist roles to transition to be part of the professional workforce**, enabling volunteers and those in non specialist roles e.g. hospitality and catering professionals to transfer to the S&PA the professional workforce will save time and cost in recruitment and training. At a time whereby attracting and keeping talent is proving difficult, it's key to recognise the value and opportunity of the workforce that are not S&PA roles. The sector should recognise the transferable skills of the voluntary workforce and make it easier for them to transition to be part of the professional workforce.
- **Harness the power of community** locally and hyper locally to ensure local services, and skills meet local needs. The data shows us there is no single picture accurately reflecting the UK as a whole; more a series of nations, regions and places with unique needs, wants and opportunities. As CIMSPA continues to develop local skills hubs across the UK it calls upon all employers and educators to engage forming a unified foundation to best service the needs of all UK communities.
- Build clear, **career pathways** for S&PA professionals, from entry roles to professional opportunities. There is now greater focus on careers than ever before, the focus on recruiting, training, supporting and retaining exceptional talent within sport and physical activity is vital for the sector's potential to be unleashed. It's critical for the sector to get behind CIMSPA's professional recognition pathways acknowledging expertise, qualification and experience through professional status and crucially available for all sector roles including coaches, instructors, educators, managers and leaders.

There are similar issues in the cultural sector, such as low pay, trade union recognition, and good standards for training. The creative sector is undoubtedly one of the most precarious, with high levels of self-employment and freelance workers and insecure project-to-project work. We highlighted the high suicide rates amongst musicians above. Professional artists, musicians, writers and cultural workers should be paid properly and not asked to perform for free. The STUC and its creative unions – the MU, Equity, Bectu/Prospect, the Scottish Artists Union, the National Union of Journalists, the Society of Authors, the Scottish Society of Playwrights, and the Writers Guild have created a survey to collect the experiences of workers in the creative industries<sup>67</sup>. They aim to use the results to create a Fair Work Charter and campaign for Fair Work across the creative industries.

There are also concerns about the longer-term impact of AI on creative careers, which might be at odds with UK Government strategies for AI growth with those in the creative industries and organisations. Artists object to a suggested exception to copyright restrictions that would require them to actively “opt out” of their work being used to train AI models, which benefit AI companies with the presumption that works can be used for that purpose. The Musicians Union argues, ‘Essentially what you'd be doing is creating AI-generated works that would be in competition with the work that they've been trained on for free, making opportunities for human creators less easy to come

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<sup>66</sup> CIMSPA, Workforce Insight Report, (2023) p.84. <https://www.cimspa.co.uk/news-blog/news/2023/workforce-insight-report-available/>

<sup>67</sup> Musicians Union, *STUC and Fellow Unions Launch Fair Work Survey for Creative Industries*, (14 March 2025), <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/news/stuc-and-fellow-unions-launch-fair-work-survey-for-creative-industries>

by and affecting creative workers' income significantly.<sup>68</sup> The TUC has launched an AI for Creative Workers Manifesto to protect UK music and creative industries<sup>69</sup>.

### **Building Stronger Social Infrastructure**

The problems facing sport and leisure in Scotland undermine the social infrastructure of our communities. It is certainly not the only reason, and the solutions require a range of actions we set out in our *Building Stronger Communities* paper<sup>70</sup>. The comment here comes from a Scottish Parliament consultation on community wellbeing, which eloquently describes how sport and leisure facilities help build stronger communities. Giving more power to communities will help create a more preventative approach that tackles problems at source rather than merely managing them once they happen.

#### **How does this impact on Community Wellbeing?**

Strong communities are those supported by good local facilities. Everyone should have access to community facilities (like leisure centres, museums and libraries) within walking/cycling distance of their homes. These places provide a focus for the community, an affordable place to go and meet people within the local area. Each facility also delivers either physical or mental health benefits. When we provide a safe environment for people to meet, people of all ages make connections and this strengthens their sense of being part of the community. It may be the 21st century but people still need places to meet face to face in order to avoid feelings of isolation and loneliness. Those face to face connections are what lead to community wellbeing.

All of this requires a serious debate about how we fund public services in Scotland, including sport and culture. We would highlight the work of Tax Justice Scotland on this issue, focusing on broadening the local tax base needed for services like sports and culture<sup>71</sup>.

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<sup>68</sup> Musicians Union, *BBC News Explores Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Musicians and Creative Workers*, (10 March 2025), <https://musiciansunion.org.uk/news/bbc-news-explores-impact-of-artificial-intelligence-on-musicians-and-creative-workers>

<sup>69</sup> TUC, *Artificial intelligence for creative workers*, (3 March 2025), <https://www.tuc.org.uk/research-analysis/reports/artificial-intelligence-creative-workers>

<sup>70</sup> D. Watson, *Building Stronger Communities*, (Reid Foundation, 2020), <https://reidfoundation.scot/2020/08/building-stronger-communities/>

<sup>71</sup> Tax Justice Scotland, <https://taxjustice.scot>

## 5. Conclusion

The above analysis shows that local sports and cultural services are under considerable strain. Facilities are closing, opening times are being reduced, or they are understaffed. Many more will have to close unless there is a significant investment in the physical infrastructure.

The consequences are that there is very little progress in the many national plans to improve the levels of physical activity and cultural capacity and strengthen our social infrastructure. This will lead to further pressure on our health services and damage the Scottish economy.

We need to move beyond the many worthy plans into action. Sport and culture are essential to building stronger communities, and investment in these services is just the sort of preventative spending that will minimise the failure demand identified by the Christie Commission. There are many suggestions in the reports and action plans we highlight in this paper. However, we recommend six high-level actions:

1. Create one coordinated plan for sport and culture that combines the many uncoordinated initiatives with measurable outcomes. A plan that clearly explains the role sport and culture can play in improving our physical and mental health, the economy, and building stronger communities.
2. Put the provision of sport and culture on a statutory basis, with recognised standards of provision, and develop statutory reporting standards for national and local government.
3. Develop a long-term programme for the capital investment needed to sustain and improve facilities and ensure better access to underused facilities.
4. Identify the revenue resources required to meet the planned outcomes. Then, the local tax base should be broadened to give communities the power and resources to strengthen social infrastructure, such as sports and culture.
5. Reducing inequalities should be at the heart of every plan to improve sports and culture, targeting investment and ensuring access to facilities for everyone in our communities.
6. Develop a workforce plan for the sector that ensures we are training the workforce of the future, creating career pathways and embedding Fair Work conditionality at every level.

## Author and Acknowledgements

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Dave Watson is the Director of the Jimmy Reid Foundation. Dave was the head of policy and public affairs with UNISON Scotland until his retirement in 2018. His first career was in sports and leisure management, and he has retained a lifelong interest in the sector.



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Born in Liverpool, he spent his teenage years in London before working in leisure management, then for UNISON in Wales and Dorset, and 34 years in Scotland, apart from government secondments. He lives in Ayrshire and is a published historian and secretary to the Socialist Health Association Scotland and the Keir Hardie Society. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and an Associate Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

The author acknowledges the contribution of the Reid Foundation Project Board, colleagues and those working in the sport and leisure sector in the research for this report. Any errors or omissions are the author's alone.

**Publication information:** When citing this document, please use the following citation: Watson, D. *Sport and Leisure provision in Scotland* (Glasgow, Jimmy Reid Foundation, 2025).

This report is published by the Jimmy Reid Foundation, 14 West Campbell Street, Glasgow G2 6RX,

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