

Cross Party Group on Sport

19 February 2020

Minutes

Welcome from Liz Smith MSP

Alison Johnstone MSP, Jeremy Balfour MSP, Brian Whittle MSP and Gavin Newlands MP in attendance

Attendance

Kim Atkinson, Scottish Sports Association

Laura Anderson, Scottish Football Association

Jeremy Balfour, MSP

John Ballantine, Edinburgh Access Panel

Susie Benson, CIMPSA

Tom Bishop, Scottish Cycling

Stu Brown, Chest Heart & Stroke Scotland

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith, sportscotland

Maggie Ellis, EKTG

David Ferguson, Observatory for Sport in Scotland

Gary Fraser, Scottish Disability Sport

Stuart Forbes

Alison Gracie, Action for Children

Bill Gray, Scottish Visually Impaired Skiers

Jane Harvey, Scottish Council of Taekwondo

Derek Howie

Graeme Hunter, Active Scotland

Anne Johnstone, Swimtime Training Academy

Alison Johnstone, MSP

Rick Kenney, Scottish ClubSport

David Laing, Borders Disability Sport

Frances Lochtie, Scottish Target Shooting

Gemma Lumsdaine, Scottish Disability Sport

Gus McKay, Cricket Scotland

Gavin Macleod, Scottish Disability Sport

Sharon MacPherson, Versus Arthritis

David McArdle, Scottish Football Association/Scottish Para-Football

Gregor Muir, Scottish Sports Association

Calum Murray, Scottish Police Recreation Association

Gavin Newlands, MP

Joan O'Sullivan, Swimtime Training Academy

Gail Prince, Scottish ClubSport

Gordon Quinton, Leisure and Culture
Dundee

Charlie Raeburn, Observatory for Sport in
Scotland

Terry Robinson, Inclusion Scotland

Roger Scrutton, SSA Outdoor Pursuits
Group

Nicola Scott, Scottish Student Sport

Tony Slaven, STUC Disabled Workers'
Committee/Unison

Liz Smith, MSP

Margarita Sweeney-Baird, Inclusive
Skating

Darren Thomson, Leisure and Culture
Dundee

Cate Vallis, RNIB Scotland

Nic Wilson, Cricket Scotland

Iain White

Brian Whittle, MSP

Apologies

Colin Rennie, Fields in Trust

Derek Grieve, Directorate for Population
Health

Ron Sutherland

Carole Sutherland

Jane Campbell Morrison, Scottish
Adventure Activities Forum

Brian Robinson, Association of British
Riding Schools

Liza Linton, RYA (Scotland)

Fiona Reid, Glasgow Caledonian University

Stew Fowlie, Scottish Student Sport

Matters arising

- Confirmation was noted of the addition of Liam MacArthur MSP, Scottish Liberal Democrats, to the Group as a Group Member.
- Congratulations was given to all of the honourees recognised in the UK Honours New Year's 2020 list from Scottish sport.
- The minutes of the meeting of 12th November 2019 were proposed Margarita Sweeney-Baird and seconded by Tom Bishop.

Meeting note

This meeting was held in partnership with the Cross Party Group on Disability and focused on the topic of disability sport.

Scottish Disability Sport (SDS) chief executive Gavin Macleod provided an introduction and overview of the work of SDS. This included a video highlighting the life-changing impact of disability sport, with table tennis player Martin Perry. GM cited the work of the physical education teacher in Martin's school as creating the link, and the importance of the partnership work done by SDS and the Active Schools programme. He also noted the importance of finding appropriate sporting pathways for individuals, based on their needs.

Despite success stories, there are still significant challenges for the majority of disabled people, GM noted. Recent Activity Alliance figures include: four out of five disabled people want to get more active, and only 2% of the current coaching workforce have a disability. There is also a clear link between disability and poverty, and affordability is a key factor.

SDS and other partners in the sector still hear from individuals who are fearful to get more active in case it impacts upon their benefits – creating a barrier for individuals who have the most to gain in terms of the physical, psychological and social benefits we all recognise.

SDS works with 37 Scottish Governing Bodies of sport on inclusion and coach development and with all 32 Local Authorities. Part of this work is in education on inclusion and the sharing of appropriate inclusion models that encourage open, modified, parallel and specific activity.

GM noted that it is everyone's responsibility to make sport and physical education inclusive. In his experience, people largely want to be inclusive, but do not always know how to practically adopt an inclusive approach. The inclusion model has been a key tool in recent years for this reason.

SDS operates a branch structure, allowing for regional contacts to help facilitate local engagement between individuals and appropriate sporting clubs or organisations. This structure feeds into a wider pathway which consists of engagement, activity and progression.

GM reiterated how fundamental partnerships are to the work of SDS. The organisations works with Local Authorities/Trusts, SGBs, education, disability organisations, health and social care, policy makers, **sportscotland**, and more.

When GM started in post, SDS was working with six sports – it is now 37. The scale of work has driven on massively in recent years.

Among the current opportunities facilitated are 228 weekly local clubs and sessions, with 684 volunteers across the country, Parasport festivals, national engagement days and the Get Out Get Active programme, with Spirit of 2012. Activity has to be fun, local and developmental.

New progress includes embedding with the health sector for the first time with a Tayside project, the addition of disability inclusion training in PE teacher training, and the ongoing push to get more people with disabilities into coaching, official and admin roles.

On a performance sport level and the ParalympicsGB team, GM noted that Scotland has punched well above its weight in terms of representation and medals, with success at Rio, Pyeongchang and the Gold Coast in recent years.

None of the progress made means that there are no longer any challenges to overcome. Local Authority resources are always challenging, which places greater pressure on SDS branches (including increasing reliance on funders such as the Robertson Trust).

The SDS Athlete Academy does good work to support athletes, but still demonstrates just how much support is needed. Networks need to be widespread and supported enough to provide connections between local individuals and appropriate pathways, for example with boccia player identification.

All stakeholders in disability sport need to continue to tell stories better and communicate to meet the ambitions of inclusivity in sport.

Wheelchair basketball coach and rugby player Gemma Lumsdaine shared the story of her athlete journey and personal development, and the benefits that sport has given her.

GL expressed that she had a negative identity of herself and the limiting nature of her wheelchair prior to the 2012 Paralympics, which led to a change in perceptions for her personally and for those she interacted with. She didn't consider herself as an athlete, but having seen the coverage of the Paralympics GL noticed a change from outsiders from expressions of sympathy to questions about what sport she was involved in. Events like that allow people to see people with a disability in a positive light.

GL joined her local wheelchair sports club, which was her first experience of team sport with other disabled people, and developed a peer group. She met other people with achievements not limited by disability, role models to admire and learn from. Having previously shied away from opportunities, GL now took the chance to represent Scotland at wheelchair basketball.

Young disabled people are often not encouraged to be independent, GL noted. Sport provided an impetus to want to do more for herself, provided perspective and helped foster a mindset to consider what she can do, rather than what she can't.

GL added that the social impact of sport was something she had not experienced before, allowing her to meet other people her age with disabilities.

In time, GL found sport increasingly contributing to her identity and took on a coaching and leadership role with Dundee Dragons and took part in the Inclusive Coach Membership programme, the support of which has helped with her personal development. More recently GL has been working to help deliver disability inclusion training to others.

GL noted that key elements for her experience have been having role models and people that she could look up to, and to now be a person that others can look up to as well. GL suggested that people should not be afraid of disability, and to have open, honest conversations. In sport, we should see the person before the disability.

GL reiterated that for her, sport has been life changing. She found the sport of wheelchair rugby through working with SDS to help find a sport that works for her. GL added that sport is so much more than the actual activity – it means employment opportunities, psychological and social benefits, and we should not lose sight of that.

Barriers do exist to participation for people with disabilities, but by recognising those we can work to help overcome them and allow inclusion for all.

Questions

Jane Harvey, Scottish Council of Taekwondo, raised a question on people with disabilities officiating in sport, as it remains an underrepresented area.

GL noted that she fell into officiating through her coaching, and that the GB Rugby official training should be commended for being quite inclusive already. Opportunities have been there for her, but provision might not be equal in other sports.

Maggie Ellis, EKTG, raised than many of the issues raised in the 2014 disability equal opportunities report still apply today, for example with regard to facilities with appropriate accessible toilets.

GM agreed that facility provision is not perfect, and there are a lot of historic facilities which would not meet the standards we expect now. There is a challenge in funding existing facilities in some areas to make them fully inclusive and appropriate. GM added that it is not only the buildings themselves which are important – the ethos of inclusion in staff and volunteers in facilities has moved significantly in the past decade and standards are now being more widely introduced. Specific inclusive requirements such as changing hoists/toileting facilities are more widely available than before, but there is a need to continue to improve so that access to appropriate facilities is available to people who need them.

David Ferguson, Observatory for Sport in Scotland, noted the opportunity to better research the specifics of disability sport in Scotland and understand where gaps currently lie. There is a reasonable amount of England-based research, but OSS is continuing its own research looking at increasing access for all at a community sport level. A review of current research is underway and OSS are happy to receive input.

Terry Robinson, Inclusion Scotland, raised that recreation for people with disabilities also needs to be considered, not just sport.

GM added that the focus is increasingly on physical activity and recreation. The Get Out, Get Active programme focuses more on the recreational piece rather than specifically sport. It is important to find activity that is right for the individual - that might be going for a walk, it might be aiming to win a medal at an international tournament.

Kate Vallis, RNIB Scotland, raised whether additional funding would be available to better grow activities and opportunities.

GL agreed that it would be fantastic to see more funding support, helping to get more athletes competing and inspiring more people to take part.

Brian Whittle, MSP, noted that while sport and physical activity are different, getting physically active is the gateway to sport.

GM added that with physical inactivity, people often feel guilty. We need to collectively get over the stigma of physical activity. It is still a big jump to get someone who has been inactive into a sports club – the onus to be on activity that is fun and social.

P.E. should get people physically active, and wider opportunities can then support people to take part in extra-curricular activity.

Malcolm Dingwall-Smith, **sportscotland**, noted that strategic discussions between the national agency and SDS will be ongoing as they reach the end of an investment cycle. Those discussions are not just about direct funding going to SDS, but also about how other SGBs are improving inclusion work.

MDS also highlighted the interesting work going on with organisations such as Age Scotland, for example walking football, and the potential opportunities there.

Gavin Newlands, MP and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Scottish sport in Westminster, asked how SDS works with supranational bodies such as UK Sport.

GM noted that SDS has recently met the new chief executive of UK Sport, through **sportscotland**. The important connection is on the talent development part of the pathway. The transition to a performance programme is a difficult point for many individuals and the support package needs to be right. Work needs to continue to future proof that support for athletes.

Margarita Sweeney-Baird, Inclusive Skating, raised that inclusion remains a significant gap. Volunteers, families and carers need to be better involved in order to overcome some of the existing barriers. Sport and physical activity for people with disabilities will often have to be supported so that it can be low cost, due to the noted links between disability and poverty.

MSB added that organisations and individuals looking to improve their inclusive approach should not be afraid of new ideas and ways of doing things.

Alison Johnstone, MSP, asked whether having para and able-bodied events in the same platform would be a positive or negative.

GL noted that realistically, logistics would be a challenge, given some of the specific needs of disability athletes. There is also a risk that disabled athletes might be pushed into the background by able-bodied sports if they were all part of the same event. For some smaller sports or events, it would also just not be feasible for the numbers of participants. Holding dedicated events provides the opportunity for equal recognition, respect and publicity.

Finally, Gemma and Gavin were asked what attendees could take away as priorities:

GL recommended communication and collaboration. Sport has so many benefits, and it is down to Government, SGBs, clubs and individuals to have that discussion and make sure everyone is involved in the conversation.

GM suggested better engagement and influence and join up health, education and physical activity/sport. There are still significant barriers – cost, transport policy, how benefits are assessed – and these need to be removed or better aligned to encourage all people to take part in sport.

Thanks were given to all speakers and attendees.

Next meeting date: April 22nd (postponed due to impact of COVID-19)