

SCOTTISH STUDENT SPORT



**Our Commitment to Equality:
Shaping the Future of Student Sport**

Our Equality Action Plan



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Foreword

Sport plays a unique role in people's lives. It has the power to bring individuals together, build confidence, support wellbeing and create a strong sense of community and belonging. Within student sport, this impact is even more significant – shaping experiences, identities and opportunities at a formative stage of life. That is why ensuring sport is inclusive and accessible to all is so important.

This has not always been an easy journey. Like many organisations, we have had to take time to reflect, to listen, and at times to confront uncomfortable truths about where we are and where we need to be. Progress has not always been linear, and there is more work ahead of us.

Our engagement with Moving to Inclusion has been an important part of this process. It has provided a valuable framework to challenge our thinking, strengthen our understanding, and guide how we approach equality, diversity and inclusion in a more structured and intentional way.

What has been consistent, however, is our commitment to learning and to improving. Through this work, we have engaged more openly with different perspectives and begun to build the focus and foundations needed to create meaningful change.

This Equality Action Plan represents an important step forward. It brings together our ambition with clear areas of focus and accountability, and sets out how we will continue to embed equality, diversity and inclusion across all aspects of our work.

I am optimistic about what comes next. Not because the challenges are small, but because the opportunity to make a difference is significant. We have a real opportunity to shape a sporting environment where everyone feels they belong and can thrive.

I look forward to the progress we will make together, and to the impact this will have across our community and the wider sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Waiyin Hatton".

Waiyin Hatton,
Chair, Equality Action Group
Scottish Student Sport

Why Equality in Sport Matters

Sport has the power to transform lives.

It improves physical and mental wellbeing, builds confidence, develops leadership skills, and creates opportunities for connection and belonging. For many students, sport is a defining part of their college or university experience, shaping friendships, communities and lifelong participation in physical activity. The vision of an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport highlights that inclusive environments lead to greater participation, stronger communities and better outcomes for individuals and society.¹

However, the benefits of sport are not experienced equally by everyone. Evidence continues to show inequalities in participation, with barriers often experienced by women and girls, disabled people, people from ethnic minority communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those living in areas of socio-economic deprivation^{2,3} We must recognise that people have different experiences and ensure that everyone has a fair chance to access the benefits of sport and being active.

In student sport, we have a unique opportunity and responsibility to change this.

For Scottish Student Sport, equality is fundamental to our vision of a thriving and inclusive student sport sector. Colleges and universities bring together people from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences and identities at a formative stage of their lives. We believe that every student should have the opportunity to experience the benefits of sport, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances. We also recognise that inequalities do not disappear on their own. Meaningful progress requires intentional action, continuous learning and a willingness to challenge existing systems and practices.

As the national partner for student sport in Scotland, we have both an opportunity and a responsibility to help address these inequalities. Student sport plays a unique role in creating environments where individuals can develop, thrive and feel a sense of belonging during a formative stage of their lives. Research demonstrates that a strong sense of belonging contributes positively to wellbeing, engagement and success within education.⁴ Sport and physical activity play a vital role in this.

By embedding equality throughout our work, we can lead the creation of a student sport sector that is more representative, more accessible and more impactful.

This Equality Action Plan sets out our commitment to that ambition. It reflects our belief that everyone should have the opportunity to participate, contribute and succeed in sport, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances.

¹ sportscotland (2024) *Sport for Life 2024 - Annual Review*. Available at: <https://sportscotland.org.uk/about-us/sport-for-life-2024>

² ibid

³ Scottish Government (2024) *Physical Activity for Health: Scotland's National Framework*. Report, Scottish Government, UK.

⁴ Advance HE (2021) *Building Belonging in Higher Education Recommendations for developing an integrated institutional approach*. Report. Available at: <https://wonkhe.com/wp-content/wonkhe-uploads/2022/10/Building-Belonging-October-2022.pdf>

How We Got Here?

Our commitment to equality is not new.

The origins of this Action Plan can be traced back to 2016, when we developed our first formal approach to advancing equality within student sport. Since then, the organisation has produced and delivered seven iterations of equality-focused action planning, each reflecting the context, priorities and understanding of the time.

In recent years, the organisation has undergone substantial change and the sector has been through significant challenges. While change can bring challenges, it also creates valuable opportunities to reflect, reassess and consider how we can best deliver on our commitments.

Over the past decade, significant progress has been made across the student sport sector. Conversations around equality, diversity and inclusion have become more prominent, expectations have evolved, and our collective understanding of barriers and lived experiences has deepened. Throughout this period, Scottish Student Sport has sought to learn, adapt and improve its approach to equality.

This journey has also provided opportunities for reflection. While previous plans have supported positive action and meaningful progress, they have highlighted the importance of moving beyond individual initiatives and towards a more strategic, embedded and collaborative approach to equality.

Recognising this, in 2025 we began a comprehensive review of our approach. Over the past twelve months, we have engaged in consultation, discussion and reflection with a range of stakeholders across the student sport sector. This process has challenged us to consider not only what we do, but how we do it in a meaningful manner.

A key part of this work has been the redevelopment of our equality structure with the shift from an Equality **Steering** Group to an Equality **Action** Group. Though a small linguistic change, through refreshed membership, revised ways of working and a renewed focus on accountability and impact, the group has played an important role in shaping both this Action Plan and the approach that sits behind it.

The result is not simply another version of a plan. It is a new chapter in our equality journey.

This Action Plan represents a shift towards a more intentional, evidence-informed and collaborative approach. It is designed to embed equality across our organisation, strengthen accountability, and create meaningful opportunities for our members and partners to shape the future of student sport in Scotland.

Our Role in the Sector

Scottish Student Sport occupies a unique position within the sporting landscape. We work across colleges, universities, student representative bodies, sports clubs, governing bodies and sector partners. This places us at the centre of a diverse network of organisations and individuals who share a common goal, creating positive sporting experiences for students.

While we cannot deliver equality alone, we recognise the influence we have in helping to shape a more inclusive student sport sector. Our role is to lead by example, champion good practice, support our members, and create opportunities for collaboration and shared learning throughout the sector.

We believe meaningful change happens when organisations work together. Through our events, competitions, programmes, training and networks, we can bring people together to share experiences, challenge barriers and identify collective solutions. We can amplify the voices of underrepresented groups, encourage new perspectives, and create spaces where difficult conversations can take place constructively.

We also have a responsibility to ensure that equality is embedded within our own organisation. The decisions we make, the programmes we deliver, the partnerships we build and the opportunities we create should reflect the values we want to see across the sector.

Our ambition is not simply to increase participation, but to help create a student sport system where everyone feels they belong, where opportunities are accessible and equitable, and where diversity is reflected at every level – from participants and volunteers to leaders and decision-makers.

Through this Equality Action Plan, we commit to using our position to influence positive change, support our members on their own equality journeys, and work collaboratively towards a more inclusive future for student sport in Scotland.

Our Areas of Focus

To guide this work, Scottish Student Sport has and will continue to adopt the Moving to Inclusion framework. Developed by the UK Sports Councils, the framework provides a structured approach to embedding inclusion across organisations, encouraging reflection, learning and action through the interconnected themes of Leadership, Culture, Experience, Relationships and Communication.

The framework recognises that inclusion is not a destination but an ongoing journey. It challenges organisations to consider not only what they do, but how they do it, ensuring that equality becomes embedded throughout decision-making, behaviours, systems and practices.

Alongside this organisational approach, we have identified four priority areas that will provide additional focus throughout the lifetime of this plan:

- LGBTQ+
- Disability
- Race and Ethnicity
- Women and Girls

These priorities have been informed by evidence, sector insight and the opportunities available to Scottish Student Sport to create meaningful impact. They represent areas where we believe focused attention, collaboration and action can help drive positive change across the student sport sector.

While these priorities will shape much of our work, they do not define the limits of our commitment. We remain committed to creating a student sport environment where everyone feels welcome, valued and able to participate, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances. As we learn, listen and evolve, we will continue to review our approach to ensure it reflects the needs of the communities we serve.

How Will We Deliver Change?

Our Equality Action Plan is our commitment to moving from intention to action. The following actions set out how we will embed equality across our organisation and support a more inclusive student sport sector in Scotland. Our action plan is split into two distinct delivery spaces. Firstly, those elements delivered by our SSS staff team and secondly, that delivered via our Equality Action Group. These key volunteers will also be responsible for check and challenge of the action plan as a whole.

Goal	Objective	Success Measure	Current Action	Moving to Inclusion Pillar
Understand the demographic of the SSS staff and volunteers by ensuring staff and volunteers complete an equality monitoring form annually.	From this understanding and baseline we will work to feed into the EAG work on strategy.	Our staff and volunteers are increasingly reflective of Scottish society as a whole.	Analysis of 2025/2026 data to allow benchmarking against other voluntary organisations, wider Scottish TE and to inform next steps.	Experience
Committee and key volunteers to have completed appropriate equality training.	SSS has an efficient process, embedded in the Executive Committee onboarding procedure, to analyse the knowledge gaps & needs of all Executive members.	Decision makers have appropriate knowledge, awareness and understanding of various EDI challenges.	All committees to complete Staff & Key Volunteers knowledge audit to allow future mapping of training.	Leadership

Showcasing of equality-focused campaigns across the SSS offering.	Highlight the power of sport and physical activity to have an impact on under-represented groups across the membership.	There will be a minimum of six equality focused campaigns delivered across the SSS offering guided by the EAG and drawing on relevant experiences from the student community.	Develop and implement a coordinated approach to identify and showcase equality-focused campaigns across the SSS network, including a centralised calendar and regular promotion through the relevant communication channel.	Communication
Deliver an inclusive communications approach through our staff and volunteers.	To support staff and volunteers to deliver inclusive and accessible communications through guidance, training and consistent standards.	Staff and volunteers engaged with inclusive communications guidance, with a high percentage of communications outputs aligned to agreed inclusive standard.	Creation of a SSS guide to inclusive comms to support internal and external comms.	Communication
Explore opportunities to incorporate or bring para-sport activity to Scotland's students.	To act as a connector and facilitator, bringing together partners to increase the availability and visibility of para-sport opportunities for students.	To support para-athlete inclusion either in our events or SGB delivery	Map existing para-sport provision and key stakeholders across Scotland to identify current activity, gaps and how students can be involved in activity.	Experience
Deliver inclusive event experiences across our offering.	To design and deliver events that are accessible, inclusive and culturally aware, ensuring the needs of diverse participants are anticipated and met.	All events meet agreed inclusion standards, alongside increased participant satisfaction and a positive sense of belonging reported across diverse groups.	Develop and implement an event inclusion framework and checklist to be applied across all competitions and events, supported by staff and volunteer training.	Communication

To sustainably improve the diversity of the student sport workforce in Scotland by strengthening development pathways.	To collaborate with key partners to enable the design and development of structured workforce development programmes that increase diversity and create clear progression pathways.	There will be an increase in the number of individuals engaged in workforce development programmes (disaggregated by relevant demographic groups where available).	Continue to focus on coaching delivery while exploring and developing the need for entry-level programmes that support underrepresented students to gain experience in the sport sector.	Leadership
To improve the consistency, confidence and inclusivity of event delivery across the membership by strengthening the knowledge and capability of student leaders within the membership.	To audit current volunteer training provision and develop targeted training opportunities directly for students to improve inclusive practice in event and competition delivery.	300 student responses collected across our member institutions through the volunteer training and inclusion audit.	Undertake a student-led audit of volunteer training and development needs to inform the design of targeted inclusive practice training for student leaders.	Experience
To establish a clear, evidence-based and collaboratively developed equality strategy that drives long-term inclusive practice across the organisation and membership.	To lead the development of an equality strategy through engagement with key stakeholders, ensuring it reflects the needs, priorities and experiences of diverse groups across the student sport sector.	Completion and approval of an equality strategy informed by engagement with a number of stakeholders across the student sport sector.	Undertake a structured consultation process with students, staff and partners to gather insight, identify priority areas, and inform the development of a comprehensive equality strategy.	Leadership

To strengthen organisational practice by developing and embedding clear, robust and inclusive equality policies across the organisation.	To review, develop and implement equality-related policies that support inclusive practice and provide clear guidance for staff and volunteers.	Number of new or updated equality-related policies developed and approved.	Undertake a review of existing policies and develop a framework for new and updated equality policies, informed by best practice and stakeholder input.	Culture
To improve the confidence and capability of student coaches to deliver inclusive coaching sessions that support disabled participants.	To develop and promote a disability inclusion resource pack for student coaches, providing practical guidance to support inclusive coaching practice.	Completion and launch of the disability inclusion resource pack.	Design and co-develop a disability inclusion resource pack for student coaches, incorporating practical tools, guidance and examples to support inclusive coaching delivery, and promote its use across the membership	Culture
To improve awareness, understanding and engagement in student sport among international students across the membership.	To review, develop and implement equality-related policies that support inclusive practice and provide clear guidance for staff, volunteers and members.	A number of international students will be engaged in the co-design and development of a shareable transition resource.	Pilot the co-development of a practical guidance resource for international students, working with stakeholders to identify key barriers and provide clear, accessible information to support their transition into student sport in Scotland.	Experience
Menstrual health is recognised as a normal part of student wellbeing and is never a barrier to participation in sport and physical activity.	Lead and support a coordinated national approach to improving menstrual health support within student sport through partnerships, advocacy, education and practical interventions.	Increased number of institutions actively supporting menstrual health through products, facilities and education.	Continue working alongside sector partners to improve access to free period products, share good practice, raise awareness of menstrual health, and support institutions to create environments where students can participate with confidence.	Experience

Looking Ahead

This Equality Action Plan marks an important step in our journey, but it is only the beginning. Creating a more equal and inclusive student sport sector will require sustained commitment, collaboration and a willingness to learn from both our successes and our challenges.

We do not expect change to happen overnight. Some actions will deliver immediate improvements, while others will require longer-term cultural and systemic change. What matters is that we continue to move forward with purpose, remain accountable for our commitments and keep equality at the heart of our decision-making.

As an organisation, we are excited to move from planning to action. The ambitions set out within this document will now be translated into tangible activity across our programmes, partnerships and ways of working. We recognise that meaningful progress depends on listening to the experiences of our communities, working collaboratively with our members and partners, and being prepared to adapt our approach as we learn.

This Action Plan will be reviewed regularly to monitor progress, reflect on emerging challenges and opportunities, and ensure our work remains relevant to the needs of the student sport sector. Equality is not a destination that can be reached through a single plan; it is an ongoing commitment that must evolve alongside the communities we serve.

We know there is more work to do, and we will not always get everything right. However, we are committed to learning, improving and taking action. By working together, we believe we can help create a student sport sector where everyone feels welcome, valued and able to thrive.

Our Commitment

This Action Plan marks an important milestone for Scottish Student Sport, but it is not the end of the journey. In many ways, it is the beginning of a new chapter.

Throughout the development of this plan, we have listened, reflected and challenged ourselves to think differently about the role we play in creating a more equal student sport sector. We have celebrated the progress made over the past decade, while also recognising that there is still much more to do.

Equality cannot be achieved through a single document, project or initiative. It requires sustained commitment, meaningful action and a willingness to continually learn and improve. It requires us to listen to the experiences of others, to challenge barriers where they exist, and to hold ourselves accountable for the progress we make.

As SSS Chair, I am committed to ensuring that equality remains a priority across every aspect of our work. This means embedding the principles of this Action Plan into our decision-making, our programmes, our partnerships and our culture. It also means being honest about where we are succeeding, where we need to improve, and how we can work alongside our members and partners to create lasting change.

Student sport has the power to enrich lives, strengthen communities and create opportunities. Our ambition is that every student, regardless of their background, identity or circumstances, feels welcome, valued and able to thrive within our sector.

This Action Plan sets out the direction of travel. Delivering it will require collaboration, challenge and commitment from all of us. I look forward to continuing that journey together.



Jonny Pearson
Chair
Scottish Student Sport



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