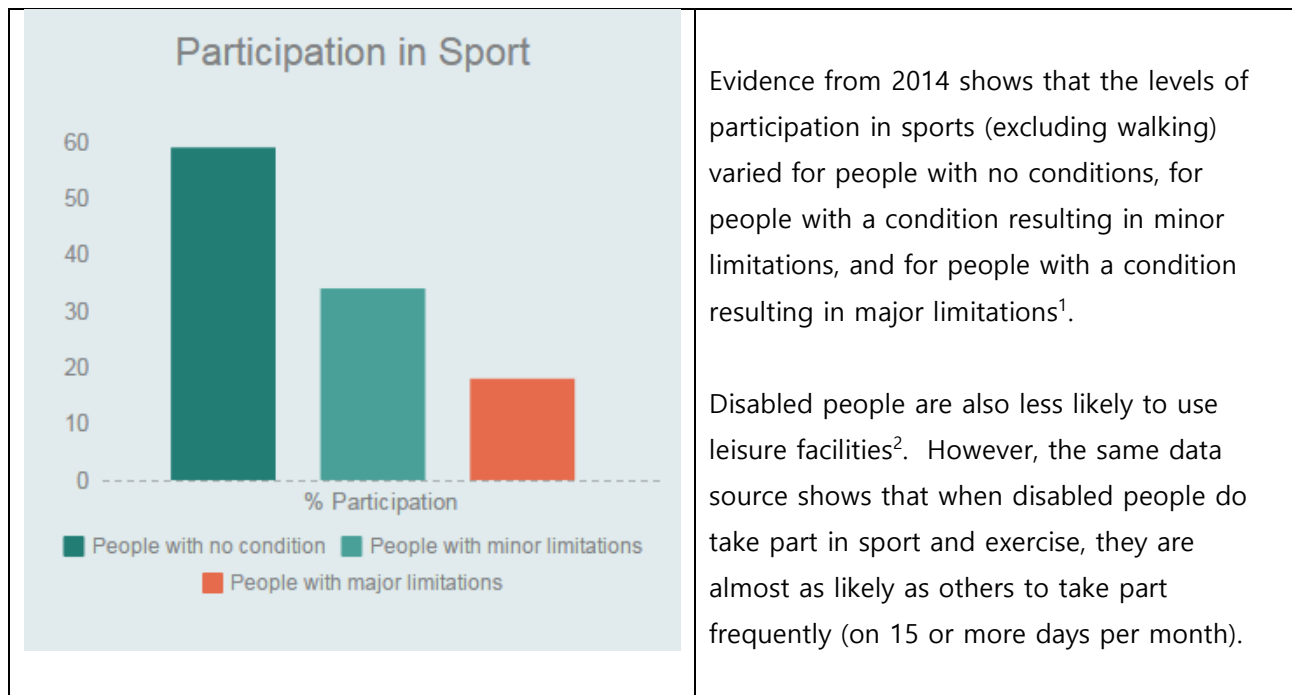


# Disability and sport

## What are the important issues?

Disabled people in Scotland are much less likely than non disabled people to participate in sport.



Low participation in sports by disabled people is important because it can:

- limit disabled people's opportunities to pursue a healthy lifestyle;
- limit the positive portrayal of disabled people;
- prevent sports organisations from drawing on the expertise and custom of disabled people;
- contribute to the isolation of disabled people; and
- discourage inclusion and diversity in the community.

<sup>1</sup> Active Scotland Outcomes: Indicator Equality Analysis, Scottish Government, 2015

<sup>2</sup> As above, Scottish Government, 2015

# What do we know about the problem?

## Barriers to participation

There can be a range of barriers to disabled people taking part in sport. Literature emphasises that it is crucial to understand that disabled people are individuals, and have a range of different experiences. However, there can be some commonly experienced barriers which can impact on disabled people's participation in sports.

### 1. Attitudes

Negative attitudes and stereotypes can hinder some disabled people from participating in sport. There is a strong body of literature suggesting that attitudes can be a major barrier. This includes the attitudes of disabled people themselves, of those planning and delivering sports, and of other sports participants.

Literature suggests that disabled people themselves may feel self-conscious, have low levels of confidence or fear of failure in relation to sports. Some suggest that this is strongly influenced by experiences at school<sup>3</sup>. Others suggest that the strong focus on physical perfection in sports can make those who do not feel physically perfect feel inadequate<sup>4</sup>.

However, there is also strong evidence that sport is very important to disabled people. For example, the Disabled People's Lifestyle Survey in England in 2013 found that disabled people said that keeping healthy and having time for hobbies and interests were among the most important things to them.

### 2. Accessibility

Physical accessibility and inclusion can also be issues. UK wide research<sup>5</sup> has found that only one in four clubs thinks it has suitable facilities for disabled people to participate, suitably trained staff, and appropriate equipment. This indicates that three quarters of clubs need some form of additional support.

Some clubs may believe that they need specialised equipment to allow disabled people to take part in their sport, when in reality, some simple adaptations to the equipment they already have could be enough. Other barriers can include equipment, health and safety and support for disabled people.

There is a range of guidance on physical accessibility in sports facilities, largely focused on organisations in England. The Equality and Human Rights Commission strongly supports the Private

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<sup>3</sup> Sport and People with a Disability: Aiming at Social Inclusion, sportscotland, 2001

<sup>4</sup> Perceptions of Disability and their Impact Upon Involvement in Sport for People with Disabilities at all Levels, Ian Brittain, 2004

<sup>5</sup> Olympic and Paralympic Games Legacy Survey, Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2013

Member's Bill currently under discussion, to require sports bodies to comply with 'Accessible Stadia' guidelines published by the Sports Grounds Safety Authority.

### 3. Pathways

Another important barrier is pathways into sport for disabled people - from school to community and onto competitive sport. Some popular sports such as wheelchair basketball have a higher profile and pathways are clearer. Scottish Disability Sport is working to ensure networks of opportunities for 13 sports, linked across local, regional and national level. But other areas are not always clear. This means that people can 'fall out of sport' where there are no suitable or known opportunities for them<sup>6</sup>.

## Sporting system issues

### 1. Coaching and volunteering

There is some evidence that disabled people are under represented in the coaching workforce. Research showed that eight per cent of coaches in the UK are disabled, which is significantly below the estimated 15 per cent disabled population across the UK<sup>7</sup>. The research also highlighted falling proportions of disabled coaches, from 10 per cent in 2006 to eight per cent in 2008.

More recent evidence from Scotland highlights that people with long term conditions engage in volunteering in sports and activities less than those without conditions (3% compared with 5%)<sup>8</sup>. However, because of the small numbers involved it is important to treat these figures with caution.

With this gap in coaching representation, literature highlights concern about the skills, confidence and experience of coaches to work with and support disabled people. There is a significant body of guidance for coaches on how to be inclusive, and how to coach people in different settings or with different impairments. However, many sports providers lack the confidence or experience to support disabled people, or to provide 'all inclusive' mixed opportunities<sup>9</sup>.

### 2. Media coverage

Media coverage can also have an impact on attitudes, aspirations and behaviours. However, research has shown that despite coverage of Paralympic competitions, sports clubs are not seeing increased uptake among disabled people as a result. Research<sup>10</sup> found that only one in ten sports clubs saw an increase.

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<sup>6</sup> Solution Series 6, ILiS, 2014

<sup>7</sup> Sports Coaching in the UK III, Sports Coach UK, 2011

<sup>8</sup> Active Scotland Outcomes: Indicator Equality Analysis, Scottish Government, 2015

<sup>9</sup> Active Together, English Federation of Disability Sport, 2014

<sup>10</sup> Olympic and Paralympic Games Legacy Survey, Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2013

## What can we do about it?

### 1. **Listen to disabled people**

It is vital to understand lifestyles of disabled people in relation to sport, listen to disabled people and involve them in the development of opportunities. Remember that everyone is an individual, and will have different preferences.

### 2. **Train and educate those working in sport**

Training and education, both on physical activity and disabled equality is essential. It should be delivered to the right people, at the right time and has the potential to address many of the issues and raise awareness of access, attitudes and assumptions. It can help if disabled people's organisations are involved in delivering this training.

### 3. **Build inclusive clubs**

Clubs are often the first point of contact, so disabled people need to know that clubs value their membership<sup>11</sup>. Clubs can include disabled people in a variety of ways. Some clubs run fully inclusive sessions which include all its members. Other clubs have bespoke groups and sessions for disabled people, but they are still delivered within the main club structure. These both benefit disabled people to enjoy sport as much as non-disabled people.

### 4. **Profile disabled people's participation**

It is important to show disabled people participating in non-elite and non-competitive sports. Make sure that communications reflect a diverse range of images, and that the successes of disabled people are recognised and celebrated.

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<sup>11</sup> Report of the Sport and Recreation Alliance's Sports Club Survey, English Federation of Disability Sport, 2013

## What is already happening?

There is lots of good work already happening. Here are just some examples.

### Example

Trust Rugby International RFC is Scotland's first registered unified rugby club. This is where disabled players train and play in the same team as non-disabled players. TRI has worked closely with health promotion teams to build links and referral arrangements with relevant organisations. TRI is also working in partnership with Scotland Rugby League to support and develop a wheelchair rugby league. And it is working with communities to create a series of taster sessions to give participants the chance to experience the game.<sup>12</sup>

### Example

The Royal Caledonian Curling Club has worked to ensure that everyone, regardless of any impairment, can take part in curling. It has appointed a development manager who has a specific remit for disability curling (among other responsibilities) and has developed coach education modules for players with a visual impairment, deaf players and wheelchair users. It has also introduced wheelchair taster sessions and has developed a competition for all curlers, which emphasises inclusion. Training for coaches has been a key success factor of this work.<sup>13</sup>

### Example

The English Cricket Board was one of the first sports governing bodies to introduce its own cricket specific disability training course. It has a dedicated disability cricket contact. It has also proactively offered cricket to disabled people in schools. It promotes the concept of inclusive clubs, with support provided. It has a target of having one inclusive club in every area by 2017. It stresses that clubs need to take time to think about what makes their club welcoming to disabled people.

## Find out more...

Useful sources for finding out more include:

- Scottish Disability Sport - <http://www.scottishdisabilitysport.com/sds/>
- a [report by a Think Tank led by ILiS](#) (Independent Living in Scotland) into disabled people's equal participation in sport<sup>14</sup>;
- the documents referenced throughout this Learning Note – as footnotes; and
- the full research report on equality in sport, produced for **sportscotland** in 2015.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.trustrugby.com/#!wheelchair-rugby-league/c1feo>

<sup>13</sup> **sportscotland** Equality in Practice Guide, **sportscotland**, 2015

<sup>14</sup> The Solutions Series, 'On your Marks...disabled people's equal participation in sport', The Independent Living in Scotland project, 2014