

OSS Manifesto: Scottish Elections 2021

The crucial role of sport in Scotland's recovery



WHAT IS THE OBSERVATORY FOR SPORT IN SCOTLAND?

The OSS is Scotland's **ONLY** independent think tank dedicated to widening understanding of the value of all kinds of sport activity in improving health, education and the economy. The OSS was created in 2016 to emulate the world's most active countries' use of research and evidence to improve physical and mental health and wellbeing in all ages and abilities, and help to create synergy across Scotland.



OUR ASK OF THE NEW SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

We are inviting the newly elected Scottish Government to work with the OSS and commit to three key pledges that will provide a platform for meaningful change and a healthier nation.

ENGAGEMENT...

Launch a first **NATIONAL CONVERSATION** into 'The Role of Sport in Scottish Society'. Through nationwide consultation, this will engage people from national to community levels in discussion on how community sport activity could and should support health and wellbeing, education and the economy.

LEADERSHIP...

Appoint the new Health Secretary to chair a **MULTI-STAKEHOLDER NATIONAL SPORT FORUM**. This will focus on 'Building Back Better' with sustainable delivery models of community sport, leisure and recreation with the ability to transform Scotland's health and wellbeing, focusing on inactive and vulnerable people. This will engage all sectors in creating a 'National Sport Agreement', as successfully introduced by the Netherlands and other nations, to bring joined-up thinking and clarity to how stakeholders fund and deliver community sport.

EVIDENCE...

Commission the **FIRST INDEPENDENT NATIONWIDE RESEARCH** into community sport participation for all ages and abilities. This will investigate local provision, delivery mechanisms and real and perceived links to health, education and the economy, with international comparisons. With a system to monitor change and adapt policy, this will create a more informed and evidenced narrative around sport activity.

HOW ENGAGEMENT, LEADERSHIP AND EVIDENCE WILL INSPIRE CHANGE

ADDRESS INEQUALITIES

Community sport in Scotland has provided a social glue across society for centuries, but the current structures of delivery were at breaking point prior to the Covid pandemic in a polarisation of access between high and low socio-economic areas. A new focus on increasing activity and making sport fun among Scotland's disengaged 46% would address many inequalities.

REDUCE COST TO THE PUBLIC PURSE

The impact of declining sport activity in deprived communities on health, education and the economy is significant, and costly, in societal and financial terms. Prevention is key to reducing the local and national state burden in all age groups. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated isolation and mental health pressures, and pressure on facilities in deprived communities, further reducing opportunities to exercise.

TURN COVID RISK INTO SUSTAINABLE RECOVERY AND FUTURE RESILIENCE

Regular dialogue across the OSS stakeholders in public, private, voluntary and charity sectors shows positive agreement that Scotland has a unique opportunity provided by the Covid pandemic. It is to re-think its approach to community activity, and use sport positively, as the most active European nations do, as a tool for improving population health and wellbeing, and creating stronger levels of resilience in response to the Covid pandemic.

HOW OSS SHAPES CHANGE

THE OSS USES WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH, ANALYSIS AND EVIDENCE TO:

- inform, influence and unite stakeholders from national to community levels to increase and widen participation in all forms of sport activity; and
- work with government to shape public policy and better outcomes for all in Scotland.

THE MOST ACTIVE European countries have changed approach in the past 20 years to address similar health and wellbeing problems, with health, social and economic benefits. The Netherlands responded to the economic crisis of 2008 by investing in community sport to mitigate the worst effects of unemployment, mental health and social isolation. It worked, and they are doing it again in response to Covid, as are other nations - using sport to strengthen mental health.

SPORT ACTIVITY IN SCOTLAND DECLINES SHARPLY FROM 11 YEARS as opportunities reduce and barriers increase, and through teenage years Scotland moves from among the world's most active to the least active nations. Many countries have addressed this drop-off with changes to teenage sport. We know this because **the OSS works closely with universities and research institutes from the Netherlands to Australia, Scandinavia to Africa**, to understand how their governments use sport to improve key priorities across physical and mental health, education and the economy.

THE KEY IS CONNECTION, and the OSS acts a linchpin bringing together universities and more than 2,000 stakeholders across Scotland to accurately identify the problems and knowledge gaps, and drive partnerships for evidence-based policy development that can make a difference.

SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND DEPRIVATION IS NOW THE MAIN BARRIER to sport participation in Scotland, as revealed by OSS research and analysis published in 2019-20. This drives our mission.

TIME FOR A NATIONAL CONVERSATION... AND ACTION

There is a powerful momentum for change across Scotland, an appetite to contribute and to grow collective intelligence in pursuit of sustainable development goals at national and local levels. In cultivating knowledge from across Scotland and globally, the OSS has identified policy priorities that can be developed through improved engagement, leadership and evidence. We feature some here for illustration purposes.



- **HEALTH INEQUALITIES:**
Focus public funding to address barriers to sport activity, e.g. fund only sports and clubs that provide equitable access across age, gender and ability in all communities to strengthen links between sport activity and health of all in society.
- **CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND EDUCATION:**
Enable extra-curricular activity and remove variable, postcode lottery nature of opportunity available to children of all backgrounds.
- **OLDER POPULATION HEALTH:**
Support 'Senior Sport' programme in partnership with key stakeholders, including Age Scotland and Health and Social Care Partnerships, in all regions.
- **SOCIAL PRESCRIBING:**
Research, map and analyse Scotland's '**Social Prescribing**'/GP referral' approaches in partnership with NHS, Public Health Scotland, HSCPs and trusts.
- **SUPPORT TEENAGERS:**
Lead on free and low-cost access to school and community sport to enable and empower children and young people of all abilities, in partnership with stakeholders, to tackle Scotland's participation decline from 11 years old and inequalities.
- **EDUCATE COMMUNITY LEADERS:**
Include in ALL sport/sportscotland qualifications **professional guidance** on poverty, disability, mental health and gender issues to improve coach and club understanding and address key barriers to participation, guided by expert agencies.
- **COMMUNITY SPORT REGENERATION:**
Energise community, school and youth sport in all 32 local authorities, at least temporarily, with focus on shorter travel distances and sport seasons to reduce costs, widen inclusion and **re-grow volunteer base** post-Covid with participants, coaches, administrators, families, and the business and wider communities.
- **TOWN/VILLAGE CENTRE REGENERATION:**
Stimulate, through more engaged and inclusive community planning, **sport and recreation activity**, in town and village centres, linked to active travel and 20-minute neighbourhoods.
- **ACTIVE TRAVEL:**
Grow a new generation of cyclists by enabling all children to learn and develop confidence with cycle routes, pump tracks and bike stores in all new school builds.
- **INNOVATION:**
Create a research, innovation, tech and teaching capability in Scotland for sport and social impact linked to policy and practice, engaging widely across sectors and enabling the wealth of global research to be collated, analysed, shared and developed.
- **SCOTLAND'S GREAT OUTDOORS:**
Link outdoor recreation, planning and visitor management in a national strategy, tying together work of Active Scotland, Nature Scotland, visitscotland and landowners, to build on the growth of outdoor recreation during the Covid pandemic.

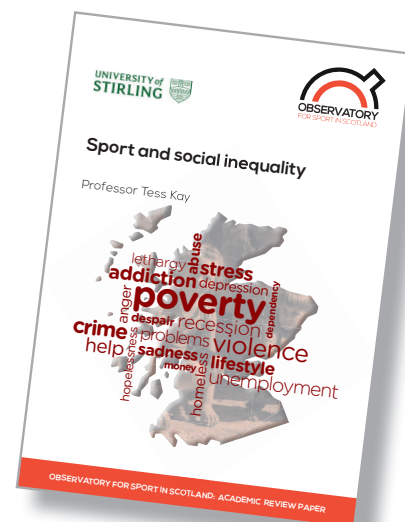
APPENDIX

HOW SPORT IS HELPING SCOTLAND'S COMMUNITIES RECOVER FROM COVID-19

POVERTY AND DEPRIVATION

JIMMY WILSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF FARE SCOTLAND:

"We launched FARE in 1989 in Rogerfield and Easterhouse in Glasgow. The charity has grown into a lifeline across deprived communities in Glasgow and now nationally. It has always been about survival. But sport helps us look beyond that. It brings together people of all ages, from young children to great-grandparents. We have raised £4m to breathe new life into a sports centre that Glasgow Life could no longer run, and it will help us to engage families and communities struggling with poverty. Then we can help their physical and mental health, and employment prospects. The OSS can help us to understand where it works, and where it doesn't, to reach more people and make it sustainable."



SCOTLAND'S AGEING POPULATION

BRIAN SLOAN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF AGE SCOTLAND:

"Social isolation has been highlighted as a major issue for older people during Covid, but it's always an issue for older people and as the Scottish population ages the problem is growing. Inevitably, the lockdown periods significantly increased sedentary behaviour, increasing muscle deterioration and loss of social connection, and the potential for long-term damage. Whether it's walking football or netball, memories projects for people with dementia, or simple walking groups, sport activity creates a powerful 'pull' that has a massive impact on physical health, balance and confidence, but also mental health, friendships and community benefits. It's great to have the OSS support in researching and understanding that."



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT GAP

INCLUSION AND WELLBEING TEACHER:

"We have a growing number of children whose home life makes staying in school, learning and forming relationships difficult, and Covid-19 lockdowns have exacerbated challenges. The ability of sport to improve education and contribute to **GIRFEC** and the **Shanarri indicators**, is under-rated. We have seen children for whom school was considered impossible, and full-time residential care the most realistic option, turned around by simple access to affordable and inclusive sport activity. It has developed a sense of purpose, belonging, self-belief and self-worth, friendships and, crucially, a desire to be part of school again. It has also saved local authorities millions of pounds in residential costs, but, more importantly, it has enabled children to contribute to their school and community, and fulfil their potential. Research and evidence is key to enabling wider benefit."



CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY COHESION

POLICE SCOTLAND CHIEF INSPECTOR:

"We always used sport to tackle a variety of issues in the police force and our communities. We've lost a lot of that for different reasons. A community sport focus with local partners has been proven to improve our relationships with young people and their relationships with their community. Research shows a drop in crime around such interventions and it's generally simple and inexpensive, yet has short and long-term benefit to youngsters, families, policing and wider communities. The support of the OSS is crucial to turning these interventions into sustainable strategies we can scale up across Scotland."



TACKLING SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND INEQUALITY

DAVID DUKE, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF STREET SOCCER SCOTLAND:

"Since 2009 we have harnessed the power of sport to create lasting change in the lives of thousands of adults and young people across Scotland. Many of our players have experienced homelessness, mental health, addiction or have been involved in the criminal justice system. Often people's challenges are complex, but the solution isn't. Creating access to sport allows connections and relationships to be formed as well as provide support networks, all of which are needed to move forward. We also use the platform of sport to connect people with additional services they may need. We have developed a good partnership with the Observatory for Sport who will help us to properly monitor how we do that and bring scientific research to understanding how it changes behaviour, where it doesn't, and how we adapt what we do to sustain the life changes and improve not just whole families but whole communities."



MENTAL HEALTH IN CHILDREN AND ADULTS

FRANCES SIMPSON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF SUPPORT IN MIND SCOTLAND:

"During the Covid-19 pandemic, the lack of access to community sport has severely impacted on people's mental health, underlining the value of sport and its social connections to health and well-being. We have a strong evidence base that sport, fitness and regular exercise provide enormous benefits to the mental health and well-being of people of all ages, as a proven way to reduce stress, lower anxiety and improve mood and confidence. Many people we support, living with mental illness, face additional barriers to participating in sport, such as poor physical health, lack of self-confidence, and the fear of stigma and discrimination, so we are keen to explore this with the OSS to make community sport in Scotland more inclusive."



BUSINESS AND THE ECONOMY

MARTIN GILBERT, OSS BUSINESS ADVISER AND FOUNDING FUNDER:

"The value of sport to the economy in Scotland is significant. It is most obvious in the international sporting events we bring to the country, and the benefits of international competition, but it is more valuable for the cohesion it brings to Scottish communities, to the physical and mental resilience in the population, and in underpinning a strong workforce and improving productivity. If we can address the barriers to sport that nearly half of the population now experience how much of a boost would that provide to our public services, our local, national and international business, and the Scottish economy as a whole? A National Conversation would investigate that and I am delighted to offer my and the OSS support."

