soda

nimbus disability

The Power of Sport: A Lifetime of Opportunity

10th July 2024

DPC Disability Policy Centre

Foreword

‘The Power of Sport: A Lifetime of Opportunity’ is a collaborative research project by The Disability Policy Centre and Soda, supported by Nimbus Disability. Together we are journeying through the narrative of sports and leisure, identifying the Barriers and Solutions to improve Participation, Inclusion and Accessibility across the United Kingdom and beyond.

Sport and physical activity have the power to transform people’s lives and communities, but too often disabled people, and people with long-term health conditions, are held back from reaching their full potential. ‘The Power of Sport: A Lifetime of Opportunity’ highlights the importance of the introduction, improvement and preservation of accessibility and inclusion at every level of engagement. The paper journeys through the narrative of a lifetime of sporting engagement, from ignition of interest to participation, spectatorship, volunteering and progression. From local community clubs to Paralympic athletes, we encompass the breadth of expertise, highlighting the opportunity at each stage to transform someone’s life.

Sport and physical activity is something that impacts so many people’s lives, and getting inclusivity right impacts all of us. Sport and physical activity not only helps someone’s health, but it can tackle loneliness, build confidence and reduce isolation through building community. It is not acceptable that in 2024 that we still have so far to go to break down barriers for disabled people, and people with long-term health conditions. There is much to be done, and we hope that our recommendations can begin to address key steps to be taken by both government and civil society.

In this summer of sport in Europe, with both the UEFA European Football Championship in Germany, and the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Paris, our paper concludes with recommendations for both local and national government, as well as sports providers, from large stadiums to community clubs, as well as hospitality venues that add so much to the atmosphere around big games and events. It is incumbent upon all of us to get this right, for we know the Power of Sport to create a Lifetime of Opportunity, and to change the lives of disabled people for good.

Chloe Schendel-Wilson, Co-Founder, The Disability Policy Centre

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About the Authors

About The Disability Policy Centre

The Disability Policy Centre is an independent think tank, the first of its kind in the United Kingdom, dedicated to the development and advancement of policy ensuring that accessibility is at the heart of legislation. Led entirely by disabled people and carers, The Disability Policy Centre's vision is simple: that by developing practical solutions that deliver real-world results, we will change the lives of disabled people for good.

In nearly three years since our launch, we have worked cross-party, bringing together the disability sector, policy makers and academics to discuss and develop local and national policy solutions in areas ranging from Employment to Living Standards, to Transport. We have successfully changed legislation in this time, with our recommendation for improving access to funding for disabled candidates featuring as the top recommendation in the Government's Disability Action Plan. The Government's 'SEND and AP Improvement Plan' in 2023, setting out how they will improve lives for disabled children and young people in education, was heavily influenced by our research, including the headline announcement on introduction 'National Standards for Alternative Provision'.

About Soda

Soda is a disabled-led social enterprise, which helps impact-driven organisations design more inclusive and accessible health and wellbeing solutions. Soda's mission is to help organisations engage people with lived experience of disability, chronic illness, and neurodivergence in design processes, as experts. When people with lived-experience lead the way in creating and innovating solutions, the impact is more inclusive and more equitable products and services for all.

Soda supports organisations to co-design, embed the insights of disabled people, and apply inclusive design principles to their services and products. Soda was born of personal experience, and founded as a result of participating in Year Here's fellowship programme for social entrepreneurs

tackling Britain's toughest social problems. Soda successfully crowdfunded through The Funding Network, and are one of Unltd's Start-Up awardees. Soda works with public sector partners, including the National Health Service and Local Councils, and have had their work featured in the Department for Health and Social Care's policy papers. They also work with commercial partners designing disability-tech and health-tech solutions to ensure inclusion is embedded above and beyond solely meeting accessibility compliance standards, advocating for inclusion as the route of true innovation.

Chloe Schendel-Wilson

A scientist by training, Chloe started her career as a researcher in sustainable development, as well as working across the Health and Social Care sectors.

In 2021, Chloe co-founded The Disability Policy Centre, the United Kingdom's first ever think tank of its kind, to advance policy to improve the lives of disabled people, people with long-term health conditions, and carers.

Prior to this, Chloe was a senior political advisor, advising Cabinet Ministers on Community Engagement. She has a track record of driving through both legislative and policy change across Education, Health and Disability.

Matt Lloyd

Matt is a Paralympian, having competed for many years in Para Ice Hockey. Whilst currently working as a Business Consultant, Matt is undertaking a part-time PhD in Systems Science, and is a well-respected academic.

Matt has previously been Vice Chair of Sport Birmingham, as well as serving on the board of a number of companies, social enterprises and charities.

Specialising in applying a holistic approach to research, underpinned by the trans-discipline of Systems Thinking, Matt holds a Senior Researcher role at The Disability Policy Centre, being able to provide insight through both academic knowledge and lived experience as a disabled person.

Charli Skinner

Charli Co-Founded Soda in 2022, which was born from her lived experience. Prior to building Soda, Charli worked with organisations to measure and demonstrate their social impact. Specifically, building strategic partnerships between the UN, government and civil society organisations to work more cohesively together and better monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of humanitarian aid.

She has also worked as a Consultant with the NHS and Local Councils, enabling chronically ill and disabled people to be supported in their wider health journeys, including through access to sport. Charli is an active disability advocate and public speaker, influencing policy and implementation in both public sector and commercial spaces.

Alex Eisenberg

Alex is a co-founder of Soda and is queer and neurodiverse. An experienced facilitator, workshop designer and creative participation expert, Alex has 15 years' experience working in health, digital and the arts. Alex previously worked as a curator at Live Art Development, supporting radical and inventive artists, practices and ideas. Alex has presented video and performance work with many disabled artists including *The Disabled Avant Garde* (Katherine Araniello and Aaron Williamson).

Alex has worked on projects including M21: From the Medieval to the 21st Century, which featured interventions by leading disabled artists in the birthplace of the Olympic Games in advance of the London Olympics (2012). Alex also makes short documentary films about contemporary issues in the UK which have been shown in festivals and at galleries across the UK and Europe.

Oli Clayton

Oli is one of three Co-Founders of Soda. At Soda, Oli has led research projects with communities, and supported integration between statutory and

community groups in London Boroughs for improving health provision and prevention. Oli is a Dad and a non-disabled ally.

Oli is passionate about community-based solutions to social issues. He sits on the Board of W12 Together and volunteers with the refugee support charity Breaking Barriers.

Oli has worked as a social prescriber for St Mungos and spent 5 years in documentary filmmaking. He holds a degree in Social Anthropology from St Andrews University and a Masters in Medical Anthropology from Oxford University.

Celia Chartes-Aris

Celia Chartres-Aris is a multi-award winning Disabled Government advisor, campaigner and lobbyist. She is a researcher, policy designer and legal expert, founder and investor. Celia works around the world with national, British Territories, and international governments in policy and strategy development, legislative design and supporting the implementation of international disability law.

Celia has founded several disabled-led organisations, and has received multiple awards recognising her work, including being named on The Global Diversity Leaders list and named as the 3rd most influential Disabled person in the UK changing law and policy.

About our Supporters - Nimbus Disability

Nimbus Disability is an award-winning social enterprise company - developed by disabled people, for disabled people. They are one of the country's leading providers of disability-related advice and support to professional organisations. Their clients have ranged from the Glastonbury Festival to Merlin Entertainments and Academy Music Group, as well as working with public sector partners through Local Authorities.

Nimbus Disability are particularly recognised as a lead authority of accessible ticketing in the UK and are the founders and providers of 'The Access Card'; the first accessible ticketing scheme of its type in the UK. The Access Card was recognised with The Queen's Award for Innovation in 2022.

Martin Austin MBE

Martin Austin MBE is the Managing Director and Founder of Nimbus Disability and a leading light in accessibility in the tourism and entertainment sectors and para-sports. Martin has 25 years of experience in the disability sector with backgrounds in operational management and strategic directorship across a range of 3rd sector organisations.

Martin, who has been an amputee since his diagnosis of cancer as a teenager, was named an MBE in the 2020 New Year's Honours List for services to accessibility in the tourism and entertainment sectors.

Under his leadership, Nimbus continues to play a critical role in improving the lives of hundreds of thousands of disabled people across the UK and beyond every year.

Mark Briggs

Mark Briggs PLY is the Director of Partnerships at Nimbus Disability and a celebrated Paralympian.

With an extensive background of working in strategic leadership and business across the public, private and voluntary sectors, Mark's passion for supporting disabled people to reach their potential in sport, culture and personal lives makes him a key member of the strategic leadership team at Nimbus Disability.

Mark is the previous Captain of the GB men's Para Ice Hockey squad, and was part of the 2006 Team that competed in the Torino Paralympics. He is Vice Chair of the Board of Portland College, one of the country's leading specialist colleges, recently achieving Ofsted 5 x 'Outstanding' in 2023.

Methodology

The research was developed utilising a systems thinking approach underpinned by a multimethodology framework, with data being collected through a series of roundtables, long-form interviews and an online survey, conducted by both the Disability Policy Centre and Soda.

Our survey, conducted through Google Forms, was advertised through our website, social media channels, and mailing list via email. Charities and Disabled Persons Organisations were also contacted and asked to share the survey with their own networks.

The survey questions asked people about their experiences with participating in sport and physical activity, as well as watching sport, working in and volunteering in sport. Questions varied from open-ended questions asking about people's experiences, including barriers and challenges faced, as well as closed questions, such as those that required specific 'Yes/No' answers, and rank order questions. These can be found in the Appendices of this report.

Our roundtables, and long-form interviews, advertised online through the same channels, were one-hour long, and the time was broken down into broad questions:

- 'What are the barriers in sport and physical activity?'
- 'What are good examples of where sport and physical activity is inclusive?'
- 'What can be done to overcome any barriers and truly make sport and physical accessible for all?'

Approximately seventy percent of our interviewees and roundtable attendees were disabled people, and those with long–term health conditions, and others were professionals who worked in disability sport - either through charities, community organisations or through Local Government.

Soda also commissioned a series of research videos, undertaken through the channel 'Opiner'. This asked participants about their experiences with sport and physical activity, and they were asked questions such as:

- ‘What does sport mean to you?’
- ‘How do you interact with sport in your daily life?’
- ‘What impact has sport had on your physical health?’
- ‘What barriers have you experienced accessing sport?’
- ‘What changes would you like to see to make sport more accessible?’

These questions were asked in order to paint a picture through storytelling, to understand how sport impacts the lives of those interviewed. We can define each person’s answers, but we can also identify through storytelling what it means to each individual, and therefore the impact that can be made as we overcome barriers to unlock opportunity.

In total the research directly engaged with 95 people to obtain primary data as well as using publicly available documents and academic papers to provide secondary research.

The breakdown was as follows:

- Survey: 60 people.
- Opiner Videos: 6 people.
- Roundtables and Interviews: 29 people.

As reiterated before, the respondents to the survey and the Opiner videos were all those with lived experience of being disabled, as were the majority of our roundtable and interview participants. The rest of the interviewees that we spoke to were those who worked in the sector and had experience to share - whether they worked for large sporting bodies, ran community and grassroots clubs, or were in relevant roles in Local Authorities.

Although the sample size does not make this a representative figure, the ‘storytelling’ element that we have obtained, through the ‘Opiner’ videos and the qualitative data, all highlight the pressing need for change, and help shape this paper’s final recommendations.

Key Findings

- **51.8%** of disabled people surveyed were **prevented from watching sport** due to a lack of accessibility in their venue of choice.

- **49.1%** of respondents said that there were **a lack of suitable options** to play sport, or take part in physical activity, **near where they lived.**

- **26.4%** said that the **lack of Social Care support** was what prevented them from taking part in the activity they wish.

- **22.6%** said that **Accessible Transport was a major barrier** for them.

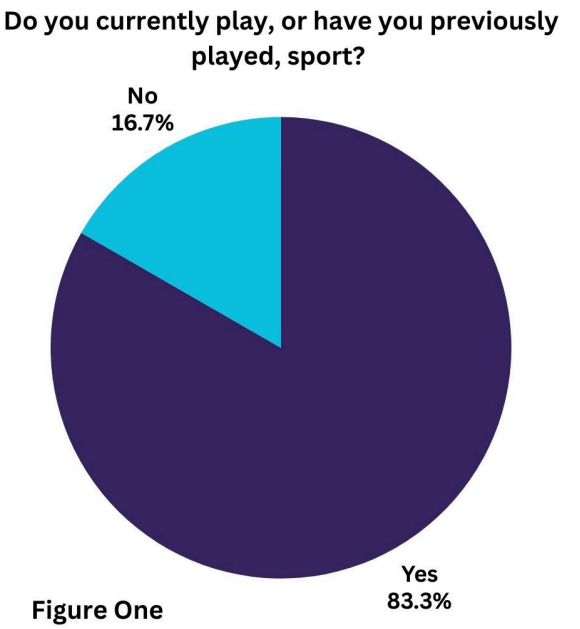


Figure One

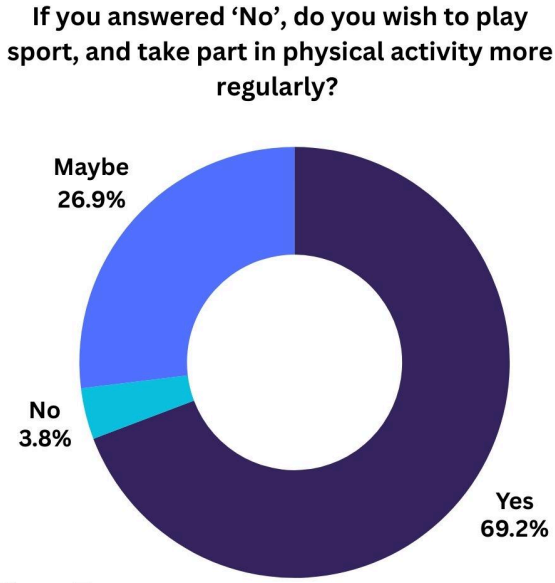


Figure Two

[Image Alt-Text: The first picture, on the left, is a pie chart, in turquoise and purple, with the question reading 'Do you currently play, or have you previously played, sport?'. 'No', in turquoise, is 16.7%, whilst 'Yes', in purple, is 83.3%. To the right is a doughnut chart, in the colours blue, turquoise and purple. The question reads 'If you answered 'No', do you wish to play sport, and take part in physical activity more regularly?' 'Yes', in purple, is 69.2%, 'No', in turquoise, is 3.8%, and 'Maybe' in purple 's 26.9%.]

The main barriers found include:

- **Accessibility of Venues and Facilities**
- Transport Options
- **Opportunities being dependent upon Geography**
- Lack of Social Care Support
- **Ableist Cultures Within Sports Clubs and Teams**

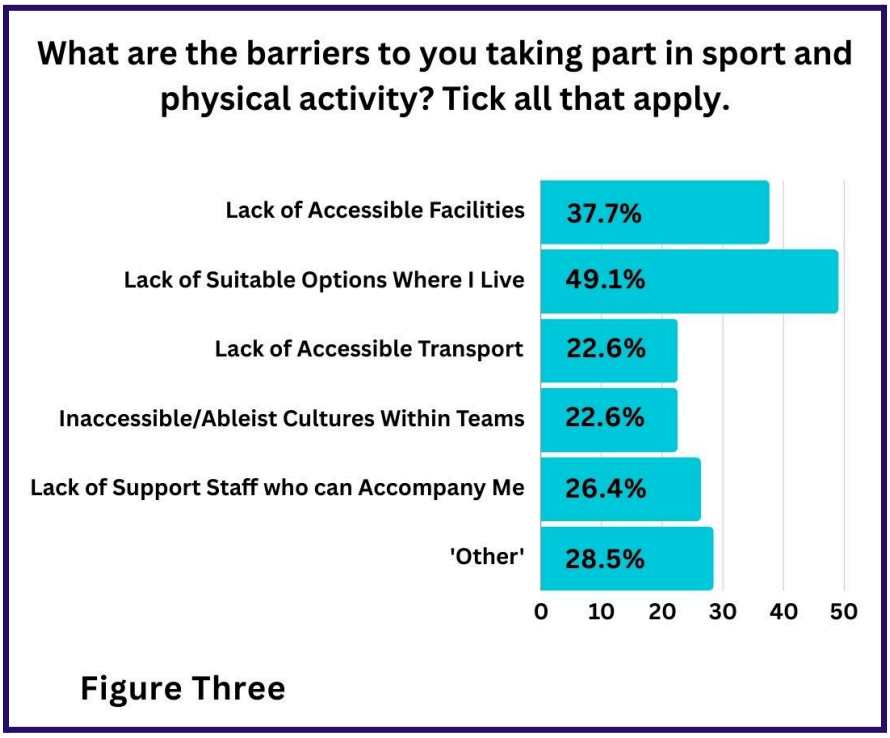


Figure Three

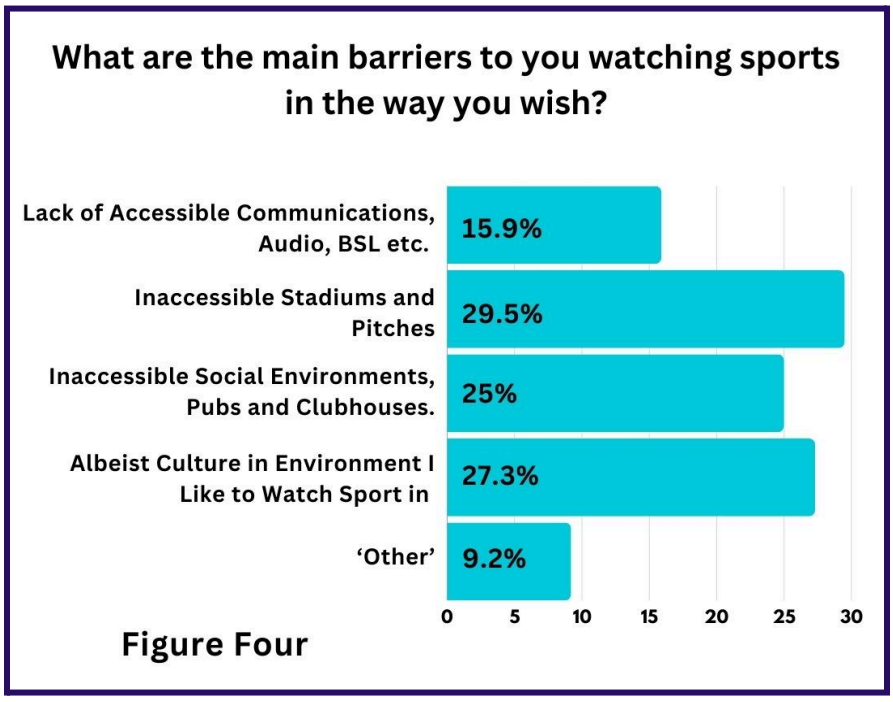


Figure Four

[Image Alt-Text: Two row charts, in turquoise. The first question reads 'What are the barriers to you taking part in sport and physical activity? Tick all that apply. 37.7% clicked 'Lack of Accessible Facilities'. 49.1%, 'Lack of Suitable Options where I live'. 22.6% ticked both 'Inaccessible/Ableist cultures within teams' and 'Lack of Accessible Transport'. 26.4% say 'Lack of Support Staff who can accompany me'. 28.5% clicked 'Other'. The second question reads 'What are the main barriers to you watching sports in the way that you wish?' 15.% have answered 'Lack of Accessible Communications, Audio, BSL etc'. 29.5% say 'Inaccessible stadiums and pitches.'' 25% 'Inaccessible social environments, pubs and clubhouses.' 27.3% answer 'Ableist culture in environment I like to watch sport in'. 9.2% have answered 'Other'.]

Not only is physical access a barrier, in the form of both communications and venues, but it is notable the issue of 'Ableist cultures' have featured as reasons for people both not taking part in, or not watching sport in their venue of choice. This highlights clearly that the solutions will not only be practical and policy based, but they will require a shift in societal attitudes over time.

Further analysis could be undertaken for this chart in Figure Five. It could be further ascertained as to whether 'lack of accessibility' is meant to be purely physical, or whether cultural factors - ableism and discrimination - are also meant by a lack of accessibility.

Are you prevented from watching sport in your favourite venue because of a lack of accessibility?

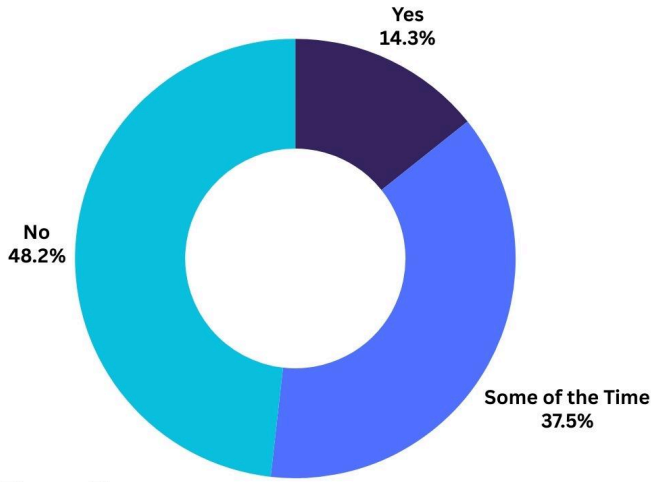


Figure Five

[Image Alt-Text: A doughnut chart, in the colours turquoise, blue and purple. The question reads 'Are you prevented from watching sports in your favourite venue because of a lack of accessibility?' 'Yes', in dark purple, is 14.3%, 'No', in turquoise, is 48.2%, and 'Some of the time' in blue is 37.5%.]

Do you think that the opportunities you have to play and watch sport are dependent upon where you live?

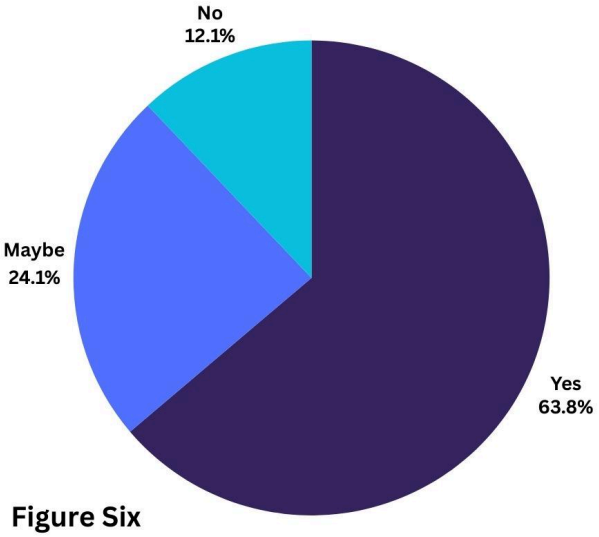


Figure Six

[Image Alt-Text: A pie chart, in the colours blue, turquoise and purple. The question reads 'Do you think that the opportunities to play and watch sport are dependent upon where you live?' 'Yes', in purple, is 63.8.%, 'No', in turquoise, is 12.1%, and 'Maybe' in blue is 24.1%.]

Introduction

The Power of Sport is a power in society like no other. It is one that can bring together communities and nations, create shared experiences as we share our joy and our heartbreak. For those who embark on our own journey of taking part - it improves our health, self-esteem and confidence.

Whether that is us as spectators, participants, competitors or volunteers, sport has the ability to transform all of our lives, as it creates that 'Lifetime of Opportunity.

Sport also has the power to break down barriers for different communities. Representation matters, and the impact of the England Lionesses win in the Women's Euros in 2022 was tangible. Data provided by the FA found that the increase in women over 16 was 53% - the equivalent of 2.3 million more women and girls playing football post tournament than the prior season[79]. 84% of the spectators surveyed by the FA also said that the UEFA Women's Euro 2022 had improved their perceptions of women's football.

But despite the huge benefits, for society, for communities and for individuals, so many barriers still exist when it comes to the participation of disabled people and people with long term health conditions in sport - both as spectators and participants.

For the purposes of this report, we will use the Council of Europe charter[80] on sport:

"Sport means all forms of physical activity, which through casual or organised participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels".

In 2018, The Office for National Statistics (ONS) concluded that 'Sports and Exercise' conducted an analysis of disability and social participation - from a list of activities including social action, volunteering, civic engagement and participation in groups, clubs and organisations[82]. Despite the proportions of disabled people and non-disabled people being involved in civic action, or groups, clubs and organisations being similar, data showed that only 27.6% of

disabled people had participated in a sports and exercise group compared to 43.1% of non-disabled people, a difference of 15.5%[2]. Sport England's 'Active Lives' research shows that disabled people are also twice as likely to be physically inactive (43%) than non-disabled people (23%).[81]

The evidence shows that the picture has progressively worsened since the Coronavirus-19 pandemic. The 2021 Active Lives survey unearthed that participation in sports by disabled people dropped by 2.1% compared to the previous twelve months[3]. When restrictions began to lift, these statistics did not rise in a manner that mirrored the rise across sports participation for non-disabled people[4].

Our latest research has compounded this. Showing that a multitude of barriers still exist at every stage of someone's journey through a lifetime of sporting engagement. From inaccessible stadiums, to overt ableism not going challenged, we have a long way to go to ensure that we have real equality of opportunity, to unlock the power and potential for everyone.

Conversations about increasing participation and engagement, and breaking down barriers in areas from spectatorship, to volunteering to progression, cannot be done without encompassing the Social Model of Disability. The Social Model of Disability highlights that it is the environment, rather than the disability itself, that disables someone.

Society itself must therefore take responsibility, to adapt and allow for disabled people to flourish. The Social Model also emphasises the talents, aspirations, intelligence and skills of disabled persons and does not adhere to negative stereotypes laid out within the Medical Model, which places sole focus on the impairments and limitations of disabled persons.

The Social Model promotes that disabled people are prevented from engagement and participation as a direct result of inaccessible environments, and not solely as a consequence of the medical limitations of their disability.

It is therefore incumbent upon all of us to break down barriers for disabled people, to unlock the potential to a Lifetime of Opportunity that Sport can bring. This paper concludes with recommendations for Government, but also for civic society - including sports teams, hospitality venues and community clubs.

The History of Disabled Sports

Throughout history, sport has played a significant role within society. It has been depicted in cave paintings in Lascaux, France, at the monuments of the Pharaohs in Egypt and most famously in the original Olympic Games in Greece in approximately 776 BC[85] providing multiple benefits including entertainment, warfare and the development of basic human skills. Although sports competitions that were specifically for disabled people are relatively new in comparison, there is no reason to believe that disabled people didn't participate in sport simply because there were no formally organised competitions.

In 1924 an organised games for deaf athletes took place in Paris a few weeks after the Olympics Games and was called the International Silent Games. Apart from during wartime, the games have continued uninterrupted and formally became known as the Deaflympics in 2001[86]. Although there is evidence of organised sport for people with a physical impairment as early as 1911, it wasn't until post World War 2 that there was more awareness of organised sport for the disabled, most notably as a result of the Stoke Mandeville Games, organised by Ludwig Guttmann.

The Stoke Mandeville Games marks the start of the shift of the purpose of disabled sports in the UK, moving from a position of medical rehabilitation, to leisure and the concept of disabled professional performance athletes; opening up opportunities and altering perceptions.

The first Stoke Mandeville Games took place on the 29th July 1948[87], the same day as the Opening Ceremony of the London 1948 Olympic Games and featured 16 injured servicemen and women taking part in an archery competition. In 1952 the Stoke Mandeville Games became international, with Dutch athletes taking part, leading the way to the first Paralympic Games held in 1960 in Rome, Italy. 1960 was also notable for the creation of the International Working Group on Sport for the Disabled with the support of the World Federation of ex-Servicemen and which led to the creation of the International Sport Organisation for the Disabled (ISOD) in 1964 [88].

With the rise of the awareness of the Paralympics, the concept of Parasport began to emerge, being used as a way to describe sports for disabled people,

regardless of whether or not those sports were competed in at the Paralympic Games. This could be seen to be appropriate given that the term Para in Paralympics comes from the word 'parallel' and not from 'paraplegic'.

Although undoubtedly important in bringing disability sport into public awareness, it is also essential to highlight that as well as organised sporting competitions for people who are d/Deaf and people with a physical disability, there has long been organised sports for people with an intellectual disability. In 1960, the same year as the first Paralympic Games, Eunice Kennedy Shriver opened a camp for Maryland to enable children with special needs, with the camp evolving to provide access to sports leading to the creation of the Special Olympics, with the first Special Olympics World Games taking place in 1968[89].

The 1976 games, which were held in Toronto were the first games to include athletes with a visual impairment, with the sport of Goalball being included for the first time. As the desire to provide sport for all people with disabilities continued to grow, the International Blind Sports Federation (IBSA) was founded in 1981 to represent athletes and sports for people with visual impairments[90]. IBSA was one of four organisations who in 1982 formed the International Co-coordinating Committee Sports for the Disabled in the World", known as the ICC[91]. The ICC was originally composed of the four presidents of CPISRA (Cerebral Palsy International Sports and Recreation Association), IBSA, ISMGF (International Stoke Mandeville Games Federation) and ISOD.

In Seoul, in the summer of 1988 disability sport would evolve further, with both the Paralympics and the Olympics being hosted by the same city and featuring 3041 athletes from 60 nations[93]. The following year, 1989, saw the creation of the International Paralympic Committee, in Dusseldorf, Germany with Canadian Bob Steadward as President[92].

Although in the United Kingdom, summer sports have always achieved prominence, it is important to note that the first Deaflympics took place in 1949 in Seefeld, Austria with 33 athletes from 5 countries taking part[94]. The first Winter Special Olympics took place in 1977 in Steamboat Springs, USA, with 500 athletes competing in skiing and skating events[95]. However, it was not until the Lillehammer 1994 Winter Paralympics were the first to fall under

the responsibility of the IPC (International Paralympic Committee (IPC)[96]. A total of 471 athletes from 31 countries compete and ice sledge hockey makes its Paralympic Winter Games debut.

Athletes with intellectual disabilities competed for the first time in the 1996 Paralympic Games, in Atlanta[97]. They competed again in Sydney four years later - but a scandal erupted when 10 out of 12 members of the Spanish basketball squad were unmasked as impostors without any disability[98].

The Spanish players went to great lengths to conceal their deception - growing beards and wearing bobble hats off the court, in the hope that they wouldn't be recognised. They won gold, but one player blew the whistle, an investigation followed, and they were stripped of their medals.

After that, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) said that until there was a reliable system for verifying intellectual disability, no further events in this category would be held. It was not until 2009 that a new system for verifying athletes with an intellectual disability, leading to their inclusion in the London 2012 games[99]. However, Para athletics remains one of only three Paralympic disciplines open to athletes with an intellectual disability alongside Para swimming and Para table tennis.

In the UK, the London 2012 Paralympic Games provided a significant spotlight for disabled sport and led to Paralympic sport being featured within the media on a regular basis. At the time prominent figures including Tony Blair, Ken Livingstone and the chairman of the London Organising Committee, Sebastian Coe, placed diversity and inclusion at the heart of the London legacy plans, claiming that the magic of hosting Olympic and Paralympic games is the ability of such events to address endemic social problems.

This report is being published nearly 12 years on from the London Paralympic Games. According to a report by Bournemouth University the London 2012 Paralympics were seen to ‘destigmatise’ disability by ‘humanising’ through increasing the visibility of disability on television, improving forms of disability representation, and challenging non-disabled audiences' understanding of what disabled people can do [102].

Research suggests that the success of these athletes may have a direct impact on breaking down barriers, shifting perceptions and increasing opportunities for all disabled people. 84% of UK adults say the achievements of ParalympicsGB athletes have a positive impact on society overall, 74% of UK adults perceive ParalympicsGB to be an inspirational sports team – more than any of the other teams listed 82% of disabled UK adults believe the Paralympic Games provides positive media coverage of disabled people[103].

What the London 2012 Paralympic games has done, is create an awareness of disability sport in the UK, albeit with a very strong focus on Paralympics sports rather than disability sport as a whole.

Whilst awareness shows evolution, it is essential that there is a shift of focus from sports which feature in the Paralympics, to a vibrant and diverse selection of disabled sports coverage in the media, thereby providing heroes for everybody - not just those who are at an elite level.

As this paper will explore, sometimes stereotypes can be harmful, as disabled people feel pressure to be “Paralympians and superheroes - or those who do not contribute to society”. We heard similar comments to this frequently in our research.

Although we are 12 years on from the Games, and positive steps were made in terms of representation, particularly in the media - we still have a long way to go to achieve meaningful change -particularly at a grassroots level, and in the culture of our society, to break down barriers for disabled people, and create a Lifetime of Opportunity for all, through the Power of Sport.

Grassroots Disability Sport

According to Sport England, "Grassroots groups are one of the engines of our communities. They help get people of all ages active, but they're more than that. They're also social spaces where young and old get to know one another and share experiences, and where the natter between parents forges bonds that extend beyond a club's night"[104]. Therefore, it is essential that disabled people have the same access to engaging in grassroots sports as everybody else. Taking part in grassroot sports can be transformational for improving mental and physical health, as well as reducing isolation, improving confidence and bringing communities together.

In the past 30 years there has been a significant change in the opportunities for disabled people, and this is especially notable within sport which has seen a shift from a disability centred model of sports to provision to one in which sport for disabled people is incorporated within mainstream sports structure. Within the UK this is instead addressed within the 2001 DCMS document, 'A Sporting Future for All: The Government's Plan for Sport'[105]. As part of the document, National Governing Bodies, and consequently community sports clubs, were given the lead role in mainstreaming disability sport and providing sporting opportunities for disabled people, with this becoming a prerequisite for direct, and indirect, government funding.

According to research undertaken by Leonard Cheshire, Less than 1% of clubs sourced through Parasport.org.uk (a website developed by ParalympicsGB in partnership with Toyota to enable people to find inclusive activities) offered relevant opportunities to disabled people, despite athletics accounting for more than a quarter (27%) of the 98 gold medals obtained by Team GB at the last two Paralympic games[106]. According to the National Audit Office, "Grassroots participation in sport did not receive the post-London Olympics and Paralympics boost hoped for at the time"[107].

One of the key drivers in disabled people wanting to take part in sport is surprisingly not a strong desire to take part in the activity itself. According to research undertaken by Disability Sports Coach in 2021, the main reason for seeking out a sporting activity is to meet friends, make new friends and to feel part of a community. The research highlights that prior to joining their sports club, 50% felt excluded from their community and 54% lacked any

companionship at all[108]. On this basis it is clear that playing sport is not the only motivating factor in getting involved with a sport, but that social inclusion is a huge driver, and that sport has many benefits other than improving physical health.

The BBC Bitesize website identifies the following barriers to participation[110]:

- Physical barriers – many sports/activities need to be adapted in some way to allow disabled participation.
- Access – special doors, ramps and equipment often needed.
- Transport – may be difficult; specialised transport and carers are often needed.
- Communication – needs to be appropriate from coaches and other participants, for example, sign language or digital amplification equipment.
- Psychological - lack of confidence, unsure of ability.
- Discrimination/negative attitudes – facilities, clubs or organisers not planning or providing for disabled participants.
- Opportunity – appropriate sports or sessions need to be local and available.
- Awareness – disabled people may not be aware of organisations/facilities catering for their needs.
- Lack of media coverage and role models – this is improving with the inclusion of disabled sports in the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

What is noteworthy is that there is significant evidence that the incorporation of disability sport into mainstream sport has not necessarily led to inclusive outcomes in the field, as organisations have not had human, financial and structural capacity to deliver what is required in order to allow mainstreaming to be successful[109]. Indeed, this is evidenced in the UK where a 2019 Sport England report highlighted that 41% of disabled people are not participating in sport, compared to only 20% of non-disabled people[112].

Unfortunately, there has not been significant research into how inclusive community sports clubs are in practice. A 2019 report found that whilst community sports clubs consider themselves inclusive the reality is that there is an ableist approach applied in the provision of opportunities[113]. For instance, whilst people wanting to use racing wheelchairs may be welcome at athletics

clubs, with buildings having the necessary facilities such as disabled friendly changing rooms, the clubs do not have equipment for new participants to try, do not have knowledge of how to safely use a racing wheelchair or a coach with the skills to coach someone using a racing wheelchair.

This extends to sports that don't require specialist or modified equipment. For instance, there are disabilities that allow them to play sports within a mainstream environment but where there is no guidance or support to enable disabled people to participate. For instance, the British Canoeing requires instructors to have undertaken first aid and safeguarding courses to be a licensed coach but there isn't a requirement to attend training on how to provide coaching to disabled people[111]. On this basis, whilst a coach may be qualified to coach in terms of the sport, it does not mean they have been equipped with the skill to coach disabled people, and therefore may not be able to provide coaching that enables participation within a mainstream activity.

This highlights another issue, the barriers which enable disabled people to participate in sports at a grassroots level in a non-playing capacity. Whilst dispensations or "reasonable adjustments" may be made to facilitate participation on an individual basis through discussion, the message it sends to disabled people is that their requirements have not been considered, something which presents an additional barrier. After all, a disabled person who wishes to coach may not wish to be seen as a "troublemaker" by simply having to instigate a discussion around how rules can be adjusted for them.

One of the key findings in the "Developing inclusive leaders in Haringey"report published by the Activity Alliance[114] is Disabled people are underrepresented among the people working in the sport and activity sector: only 22% said they see 'people like me' working in sports and physical activity roles. Underrepresentation applies to both voluntary and paid roles, however if people cannot see similar people to themselves in a role, they may think that they are prevented in undertaking that role. Whilst there are many resources available to assist with disabled people in taking part in sport, there are very few aimed at ensuring that disabled people can take part in a volunteering or professional role.

If it is considered important to enable disabled people to engage with grassroot sports, whether as an athlete, as a volunteer or in a paid role, then there is a need to fully understand and support that engagement. Rather than simply seeking that organisations and events include disabled people it is clear that a holistic approach is employed; essentially a change of perspective is required. Instead of seeking to find ways to tick boxes and claim inclusivity, what we need to do is find a way for equitable participation to become embedded within all aspects of sport.

This paper highlights some excellent examples of where grassroots sports have been adapted to be more inclusive of disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions. However, there is no set standard for training, development, reasonable adjustments provided to increase accessibility - and no obvious regulations or standards of best practice set.

If we really want to unlock the potential of the 16 million disabled people in the UK, and beyond, reduce isolation and enhance our communities, we must do more to break down barriers at a grassroots level of sport, across the country.

Current Legislation, Rights and Protections

In the United Kingdom the Equality Act is the main piece of legislation which ensures the enacting of accessibility and participation for disabled people in sport, replacing the Disability Discrimination Acts of 1995 and 2005[31]. The Equality Act intends to prevent people being denied or receiving a lesser service as a direct result of their disability[32]. The Act also encompasses 'associates' of disabled people such as carers[33].

The Equality Act 2010 stipulates that under no circumstance is an individual to be placed at a disadvantage, treated unfavourably or discriminated against due to actions with reason relating to their disability, this may be trifold in its existence; direct discrimination, indirect discrimination or failure to make reasonable adjustments. Direct discrimination occurs where an individual is treated unfavourably by another due to their disability, indirect discrimination occurs where an individual is treated unfavourably by another due to the current circumstances impacted negatively on a disabled person. Both indirect and direct discrimination are illegal unless proportionate objective demonstration can be shown. For example, the prevention of a disabled person's participation due to a threat to safety or life. The legally binding nature of the Equality Act means that venues, sporting centres, clubs and associations, charities and local authorities administering sporting programs, have a responsibility to ensure the enactment of its premises. Sporting related organisations cannot, without providing valid reasonable exception, treat disabled people less favourably than non-disabled people[34].

Reasonable adjustments require these service providers to ensure reasonable adjustments are met. The Equality Act also stipulates positive action. Positive action means that a disabled person should not have to make a reasonable adjustment request, action must be preemptive and proactive as opposed to reactive; anticipatory duty[35.] The premise of positive action, ensures that all bodies, such as venues, sporting centres, clubs and associations, charities and local authorities administering sporting programs bound by the Equality Act, foster an environment to encourage disabled persons participation.

This also includes those where people watch sport - whether that is in stadiums, pubs, clubhouses or on TV and online. From ensuring pubs are accessible for all, to providing accessible commentary at big games, much

more needs to be done to ensure that the rights and protections of disabled people to equality of access are upheld.

Encompassed within the Equality Act, the reasonable adjustments protocol requires another to ensure that a disabled person is able to access employment, services and education through the adjustment of typical methods ergo avoiding 'substantial disadvantage' to disabled people[36]. When we talk about improving access to sport - we are not just talking about participation and engagement, but also someone's opportunity to be employed, volunteer or progress into playing sport professionally.

Disabled people, and people with long term health conditions have the right, equally to those who are not disabled, to access the same services, barriers to participation and access must be removed. The Equality Act 2010 is legally compulsory in its stipulations for the binding rights and entitlements of disabled people and those with long term health conditions. Sports associations and clubs must proactively seek solutions, as reasonableness requires, to remove barriers to participation and engagement for disabled people[37]. If an individual believes that reasonable adjustments have failed to be provided or there is a violation of the Equality Act, an individual is entitled to legal action against an organisation if discrimination has occurred[38]. Under the Equality Act disabled participation and the accessibility of sport is theoretically protected.

A further enhancement of the 2010 Equality Act is the 2011. Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)[39]. The PSED stipulates that public authorities' bodies must operate in a manner that actively prevents discrimination, enhances opportunities and encourages relationships between communities[40]. The PSED is stipulated as a compulsory requirement within the Equality Act[41]. Many grassroots organisations and community will fall under this category, if they are contracted by local councils to run sports activities. Publicly run gyms and sports centres will also be bound by these regulations.

The National Governing Bodies of clubs, associations, competitions and sporting bodies have a responsibility to ensure they are accessible in their provisions[42]. This is achieved through three compulsory duties of; 'removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their characteristics, meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people, and encouraging people from protected

groups to participate in public life or other activities where their participation is disproportionately low[43].' Once again, stipulated within legally binding legislation is the requirement for sporting service providers, whether for participants or spectators to ensure the accessibility and equal opportunity to participate for disabled people.

The Human Rights Act 1998 (HRA) is applicable to all members of the United Kingdom and echoes the sentiments of the Equality Act, incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights into domestic law[44]. These two legislative structures ensure that public bodies are both domestically and internationally accountable and responsible to ensure the inclusion of disabled people and promotion of accessibility. Notably Article 14 of the HRA 'protection from discrimination' ensures the prevention of both direct and indirect discrimination, and the preservation that all Articles of the Act's rights and freedoms are to be enforced with due consideration of disabled people and people with long term health conditions[45]. Bodies failing to adhere to the consideration of human rights for disabled people are legally liable[46].

The European Convention on Human Rights is not the only piece of international policy relevant to this study. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was ratified by the UK in 2009[47], a ratification which was a commitment by the United Kingdom[48]. Specifically related to sports, Article 30 of the UNCRPD references 'Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure and Sport'. The UNCRPD is legally binding and sets forward the 'minimum standards for rights of people with disabilities', for the improvement of accessibility, discrimination and equality of participation opportunity[49]. Once again, this Convention clearly stipulates the requirements of accessibility and participation, applicable to disabled sport and spectatorship[50].

Building Regulations set out the minimum expectations for designing, building, extension and amendment of any new or existing buildings within the UK, these expectations are compulsory in compliance. Any development or construction of new property must adhere to the minus standards of accessibility, with designs to be approved by planning before commencement of permanent erection, theoretically securing basic standards of accessibility in the built environment for disabled people; Approved Document M: Access and Facilities for Disabled People[53]. Provisions for Document M to be overridden may be granted over buildings of a

particular nature such as listed buildings, where temporary solutions may be permitted to be erected. It is to be noted however that building regulations only stipulate the minimum requirements expected of construction for accessibility, and sports facilities are not explicitly mentioned in Document M due to their specificity of use and nature[54].

British Standards, particularly BS 8300 'Design of an accessible and inclusive built environment. Buildings - code of practice', provide an enhancement to the Building Regulations stipulated above. 8300 provides detailed stipulations and recommendations for ensuring the correct and necessary use of accessibility measures, working in parallel to Document M. While its requirements are not compulsory and are recommendations of suggested accessibility measures to ensure compliance with the Equality Act, public venues and large governing bodies are held accountable to their adherence to its provisions[55].

As demonstrated above, there exists an extensive, legally binding and authoritative network of legal protection for disabled people, cementing their rights to access and participate in sport across the United Kingdom[56]. Despite these legislative protective factors, including reasonable adjustments and positive action, it is clear that we are falling short, and much more needs to be done to enforce current legal requirements and ensure that disabled people are provided with a fair and equal experience of participation and spectatorship, amongst other factors. This paper's recommendations provide the necessary action to be undertaken by Government, individuals, sports clubs and organisations - either at a grassroots or professional level, as well as venues - from stadiums to public houses.

The Power of Sport: A Lifetime of Opportunity

Ignition Of Interest

There are many opportunities for an individual's interest in sport to be ignited. For some the interest may come from shared activities with family members, especially those who themselves have a passion for sport. For others, it may come through engagement with peers, whether at school or in the community, and for others it may come from formal programmes to generate interest.

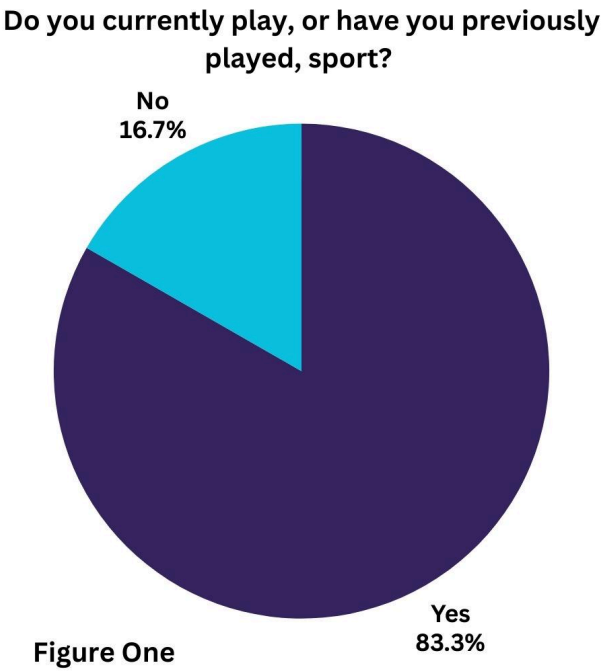


Figure One

The factors are varied - but of course, most professional sports players are encouraged from a young age. Novak Djokovic was given a mini-racket and ball aged four from his tennis coach[83]. His parents then made huge sacrifices, taking out high-interest loans to support his development, in the hope that he might one day repay them. David Beckham was encouraged by his father, and played for a youth team coached by him.[84]

Although we are not all destined to be sports stars - this shows the importance of spectatorship and representation. Visible representation, through events such as the London 2012 Paralympic games, and the accessibility of communications, and physical spaces - from pubs to stadiums, all create opportunities at every stage to change the course of someone's journey through a lifetime of sport.

[Image Alt-Text: The first picture, on the right, is a pie chart, in turquoise and purple, with the question reading 'Do you currently play, or have you previously played, sport?'. 'No', in turquoise, is 16.7%, whilst 'Yes', in purple, is 83.3%. To the left is a doughnut chart, in the colours blue, turquoise and purple. The question reads 'If you answered 'No', do you wish to play sport, and take part in physical activity more regularly?' 'Yes', in purple, is 69.2%, 'No', in turquoise, is 3.8%, and 'Maybe' in purple 's 26.9%.]

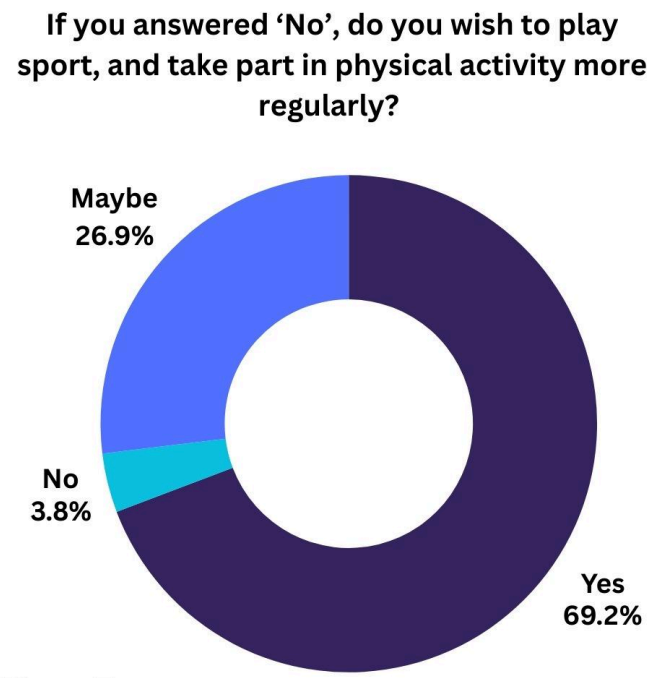


Figure Two

Looking at the issue from a different perspective, the presentation of disability sport in the media can actually be harmful to mass grassroots participation amongst disabled people. This is as the result of "excessive exaltation of the superior capacity of a minority, which can bring a divide fostering general expectations about abilities of disabled people, raising hopes regarding their abilities of adaptation and social inclusion, while downsizing the importance of barriers and everyday issues that the vast majority of disabled people face in their life experience"[65]. In the words of one of our interviewees "people either expect us to be Paralympians, or they talk about us like we add no contribution to society - there is no in between."

And whilst coverage of the Paralympic games can be positive and wide reaching, non-Paralympic sports can have a far less positive portrayal, for instance people with "learning disabilities depicted para-athletes as "largely 'sympathetic', normatively passive, dependent people who deal bravely with their impairments and rely profoundly on the assistance of others"[66]. It is interesting that "the key drivers of increased visibility of the competition, the strong visual impact of racing wheelchairs and advanced technologies for limb impairment, contributed to 69 percent of the total direct coverage, while the coverage of competitions performed by athletes with other severe disabilities was omitted"[67].

It is noteworthy that some disabilities are better supported at a grassroots level than other disabilities, depending on the engagement and activity rates of particular charities tailored to different disabilities; causing an inequality of access. The offer is also varied across the country - with the opportunity for disabled people varying depending on where someone lives. This was clear in our research that we conducted as part of this report. Only 12.1% of our survey

respondents did not think that opportunities were dependent upon where you lived.

Continuing with this theme, there is no central resource that provides detailed access to opportunities or guidance on participation. This could be provided at a regional or a local level, to improve participation rates. It would also encourage all grassroots, community clubs, as well as professional sports, to tailor their offer.[59] For instance, it is easy through an internet search to find links to Active Partnerships, Disability Sport charities or the National Disability Sports Organisations (NDSOs), and excellent resources, such as those by Activity Alliance[100], providing the benefits of an active lifestyle, are available, but it is not easy to find information on which sports are suitable for which disabilities, or what is available in someone's area for them to engage with - whether as a volunteer, spectator or participant, or as an employee.

And therein lies one of the issues; who is actually responsible and held accountable for providing information on disability sports to disabled people? Is it the NDSOs, Active Partnerships, the National Governing Bodies or the Home Sports Councils? And what role does the Government play in this, through the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, or through Local Authorities?

This also ties into the importance of inclusive education and the understanding of disability by teachers, mentors and coaches. Many of our research participants spoke about their sports coaches being 'nervous' through not having an adequate understanding of disability, and how experiences had therefore differed from individual to individual. An understanding of what goes on in both specialist and mainstream schools is required, to ensure that we have real equality of opportunity for all of our children and young people to gain an interest in sport.

Not all of us are going to become superstars, but we may find a passion that increases our confidence, connects us to our community, and brings a sense of belonging. It is important that this experience does not continue to be hindered for disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions.

Not every disabled person is going to be a Paralympian - but whatever someone's path in the journey of sports - it is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that the playing field is level.

Participation and Engagement

Engagement refers to a person's attention, stimulus and mindfulness of sport and its correlating current affairs. Participation refers to a person's contribution, association and involvement with sporting and leisurely activities. Engagement creates participation. Outdated attitudes, following the medical model, may draw conclusions that a disabled person's participation in sport may be due to health related reasons. Following the Social Model of Disability reinforces that it is upon all of us to remove these barriers, to ensure that we have equality of opportunity at all levels - from grassroots clubs to professional athletes.

Through our research, we spoke to disabled people who participated in sport at all levels, as well as people who ran these sporting activities at a local and national level. All of the barriers that we found were ones which are able to be removed, through a shift in societal attitudes, political will and the proper enforcement of the law.

Selection of Qualitative Comments from our 'Power of Sport' research survey

Question: What are the barriers to you taking part in sport and physical activity?

Person One: *"I struggle to join new groups or access facilities due to anxiety and body image challenges."*

Person Two: *"My depression and feeling on the outside of things."*

Person Three: *"I have multiple health conditions which can present challenges when being active, however, I would say the greatest barriers I have faced aren't specific to my conditions, rather they are about finding inclusive, welcoming environments for all abilities and backgrounds. There have been a number of specific situations where my conditions have created issues, but these have been more down to the behaviour/attitudes of certain individuals. The most significant cultural issue I have faced is around application of rules in specific sports.*

There are a lot of people who believe that the rules of sport are gospel and cannot be applied flexibly, even where doing so would simply mean inclusion with no appreciable competitive advantage. For example, in one situation, I played netball outdoors in a social league for several seasons and wore gloves in winter due to circulatory issues. One new umpire decided this was outside of 'the rules' and wouldn't let me play with them. Weeks of back and forth ensued with the league and England Netball before the rules were finally 'changed'. Most people would have given up and just not played again."

Person Four: *"Prevalence and availability of more accessible sports."*

Person Five: *"The inconsistent nature of epilepsy means that I can't always know when I'll be available to take part in an activity plus having, usually, to pay in advance for gym sessions makes that form of exercise impractical."*

Person Six: *"I have an energy limiting condition and the more active I am, the more painful, to the point of agony, it becomes. Whilst I continue to garden, anything more active is out of the question. I am currently waiting for surgery, which I hope will improve the situation, but have been trying to get this since 2020."*

Even through the variety in these responses - it is clear that the right attitudes and will can ensure that these through following the social model of disability. The ambition to provide a wider range of accessible sports - whether inclusive or separate to 'mainstream' sports, must be realised across the country, whether small or larger clubs. Leisure facilities and gyms can tailor their offer to be more accessible - whether that is offering discounted sessions for those who can only access a limited offer, or reducing costs - such as through offering free carers passes.

And as highlighted in our analysis[115] on NHS waiting lists - long waiting lists are primarily a disability-related problem. In February 2023, 41% of disabled people were on NHS waiting lists in the UK, compared to 12% of non-disabled people.

Private and public sporting bodies are bound to adhere to The Equality Act (2010)[31]. The Equality Act ensures the prevention of individuals being denied or receiving a lesser service as a direct result of their disability, under no circumstance is an individual to be placed at a disadvantage, treated

unfavourably or discriminated against due to actions with reason relating to their disability either directly, indirectly or through the failure to implement reasonable adjustments.

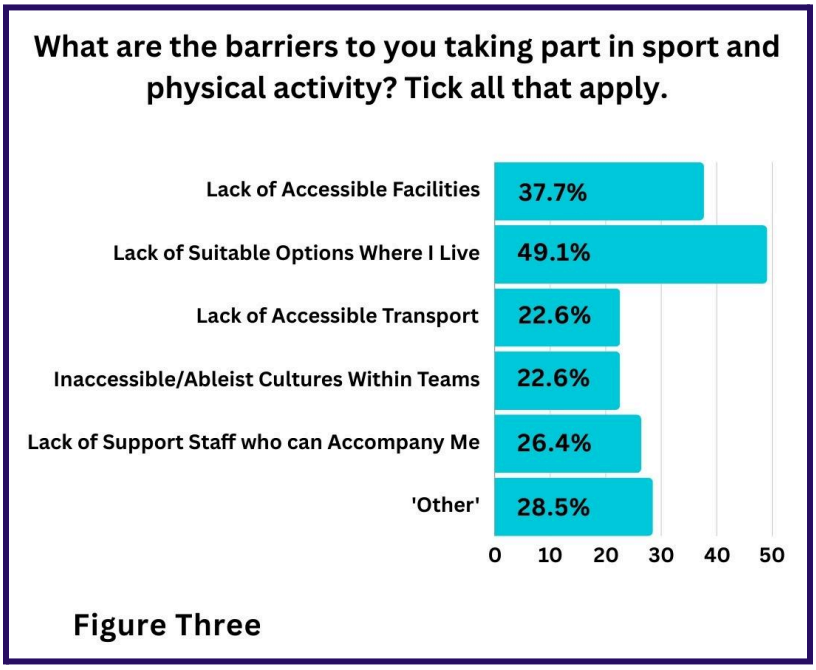


Figure Three

Public Sector Bodies, including Local Authorities - most of whom will run leisure centres in their communities, and provide the contracts for a number of smaller, grassroots clubs, are also bound by the Public Sector Equality Duty[41], which stipulates that public authorities' bodies must operate in a manner that actively prevents discrimination, enhancing opportunity and encouraging participation development.

[Image Alt-Text: A row chart, in turquoise. The question reads 'What are the barriers to you taking part in sport and physical activity? Tick all that apply. 37.7% clicked 'Lack of Accessible Facilities'. 49.1% of people ticked, 'Lack of Suitable Options where I live'. 22.6% ticked both 'Inaccessible/Ableist cultures within teams' and 'Lack of Accessible Transport'. 26.4% clicked 'Lack of Support Staff who can accompany me'. 28.5% clicked 'Other'.]

The burden of responsibility is not to lie with disabled people. Positive action dictates that action must be preemptive and proactive as opposed to reactive in line with anticipatory duty. Anyone that provides sports facilities and activities has a responsibility to ensure they are accessible in their provisions by 'removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their characteristics, meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people, and encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or other activities where their participation is disproportionately low'.

Case Study One: Transforming Lives through the Power of Sport - Isaac Harvey, President, Wheels and Wheelchairs

Isaac Harvey was born with limb pelvic hypoplasia, a condition resulting in the absence of arms and short legs, along with scoliosis and acid reflux. Initially, Isaac's primary focus was video editing and content creation. He was reluctant to become an advocate for disability awareness, until a public speaking engagement changed his perspective.

A participant, inspired by Isaac's story, shared how it transformed their outlook on life. This moment marked the beginning of Isaac's advocacy journey, highlighting that barriers do not define one's ability to live a fulfilling life.

Isaac's engagement with sports began during his school years through the Panathlon Challenge, where he participated in wheelchair relay races and other competitions. These early experiences ignited a passion that grew over time. Later, advancements in technology enabled him to independently navigate ski slopes, revealing new possibilities.

In 2018, Isaac joined Wheels and Wheelchairs[124], a London-based group where roller skaters push wheelchair users. His involvement quickly deepened, and by the end of the year, he became the President of the organisation. Under his leadership, the group expanded its reach, participated in international marathons, and collaborated with organisations like The Dream Factory to provide enriching experiences for disabled individuals. Wheels and Wheelchairs are running a Brighton to Paris fundraiser in August with around forty skaters and five wheelchair users ahead of the Paralympics in the French capital.

Despite the progress, significant barriers to accessibility in sports remain. Financial constraints, due to the cost of specialised equipment and travel, often limit participation. Additionally, physical discomfort and pain present ongoing challenges. Isaac underscores the need for better support systems, including rest periods and adaptive equipment, to enhance inclusivity.

Isaac's advocacy extends beyond sports. As a Purple Tuesday[125] ambassador, he works to improve customer experiences for disabled people. His modelling

for adaptive clothing emphasises the importance of accessible fashion, and Isaac has appeared in Vogue magazine for his work. while his commitment to web accessibility ensures digital inclusivity. These roles highlight the importance of representation and accessibility in all aspects of life. Isaac has also appeared on the Shaw Trust Disability Power 100[125]. Issac has become a prominent disability activist, and his story showcases the Power of Sport to transform people's lives.

Impact and Future Directions

Isaac's story illustrates the profound impact of sport on personal and community wellbeing. His advocacy has broadened access to sports for disabled individuals and challenged societal perceptions of disability. He emphasises that sports provide health benefits, community engagement, and fulfilment and that everyone, regardless of ability, should have the opportunity to participate.

"*For sport to be accessible for disabled people you need a real sense of community, where everyone can feel included. We need people to assume disabled people can play sport and enjoy it as much as anyone else, otherwise negative assumptions can become true.*

"There are some practical steps venues can take to ensure they're fully accessible. Firstly, they need to work with local authorities to make sure there is suitable travel to stadiums; there's no point having a highly accessible stadium if you have to get three buses and four trains to get there (slight exaggeration but sometimes can be true)!"

"Secondly, they must make sure the ticketing process is clear. I went to watch wrestling at a large London stadium where instead of buying online tickets like everybody else, I had to ring and receive paper ones. I wasn't guaranteed when I would be receiving them so I ended up having to buy additional tickets just in case."

"I have a very fulfilling, creative and fun life and am the best version of myself thanks to the support around me - and sport's a huge part of that. We need sports venues and wider society to recognise this passion that people with disabilities have and make sure they're supported to enjoy themselves fully as well."

Case Study Two: Transforming Lives through the Power of Sport - Mary FitzMeilton, Director of Access2Climb

Mary, 26 from Wiltshire, has been a climber since her teens but found many climbing centres to be inaccessible to disabled people. As a result, she set up Access to Climb[127], a central hub to find accessibility information for 65 climbing walls and centres across the country currently.

"*The difference in going to a climbing wall when I was not disabled to being disabled is very striking. For many places there's just no natural thought process around disabled people - it's not front of mind at all. I would go to centres and not even be able to get through the front door, let alone up a wall! The impact on me emotionally was that I didn't feel like I belonged in climbing centres anymore.*"

"But I really love climbing - so none of this was enough to deter me. This is why I set up Access to Climb, in 2022, to help disabled climbers like me know which centres were accessible before having to find out for themselves. What this is really about is creating spaces where people belong. Being part of a community."

"To change things we need a cultural shift so people's understanding of disability improves and they can communicate better. People aren't deliberately putting up barriers to disabled people, they just don't know enough. And when they do, things change."

"I've been to some football matches in bigger stadiums, for example, where accessibility for disabled people is more thought through and considered."

"Or take another climbing centre which opened a few years ago. In the original building plans for the centre, there wasn't a lift to the second floor of the climbing wall. I was really disappointed by this and explained to them how this was blocking many passionate climbers like me. They went away, took action and installed a lift. This was a costly thing to do but they just hadn't fully appreciated the importance of accessibility when they first planned the centre - and credit to them, they changed this when they were challenged."

“This is why legislation is just one angle or route to change. We need to build from the community up. This includes staff training and the whole of society so people are better educated - everyone has a role to play. We can then make sure that best practice is passed on between centres and create a positive ripple effect across the country - this is the power of working as a collective.”

These case studies highlight that inclusion is possible when the will is there from sports organisations to adapt and improve.

There is no reason why both Isaac and Mary’s story cannot be replicated up and down the country, in a variety of both grassroots and competitive sports.

The barriers faced by disabled people and people with long term health conditions to be able to fully engage and participate in sport and leisure, must be broken down to ensure the potential lifetime of possibilities are made available.

Accessibility, inclusion and participation is a right and not a privilege for all.

Spectatorship

In the second consideration of the narrative of sports, spectatorship and observance in all available forms, physically, in person, and virtually retains its standpoint as crucial. As we have explored previously, being a spectator to sport is not only important to initially engage someone's interest in participation, but these ties can bind us through our collective experiences as communities and nations. They can be vital to fostering a sense of community, purpose and social inclusion.

Spectatorship is definable as the act of being a spectator, the observer of events, both individually and as part of a collegiate group. Spectatorship signals at the forefront of one's narrative with sporting engagement, the starting point of involvement, a principal element. Through the advancement of technology, media and technology, spectatorship is not limited to personal physical attendance but stems across multi-faceted streams of engagement such as social media, broadcasting at home or at a venue such as a public house or leisure facility, and live streaming through the internet. Responsibility falls upon the individuals, groups and organisers providing these services to ensure that every means of modern spectatorship is accessible to all current and potential viewers.

Spectatorship and the ability to be an observer is an irremovable vital component of the narrative of 'The Power of Sport: A Lifetime of Opportunity'. Observance ignites interest, and encourages participation and engagement. As explored previously, the women's Lionesses winning the Euros in 2022 saw a 53% increase in the participation of women and girls in football.[79]

Spectatorship is a fundamental component for sporting participation and engagement for disabled people and people with long term health conditions. The decline of spectatorship due to the existence of disability barriers is to cause the consequential fall of an individual's entire narrative and potential journey through sport.

Survey Data - Spectatorship

The following statistics highlight the data obtained from our online survey, answered by 60 people in total.

Question: If you watch sports, do you watch sports online, in person, on TV or in another format. Tick all that apply.

As is displayed in this graph, the majority of the people that we spoke to watch sport on television, or online - with fewer people watching in person. Further analysis would be needed to find out whether this was because of the kinds of barriers found in this research, such as inaccessible costs, ableist cultures or a lack of accessibility in stadiums, or whether this is just because it is more convenient, and watching sports on TV or online is preferable. It would also prove beneficial to carry out further analysis and compare and contrast these results between both disabled and non-disabled people.

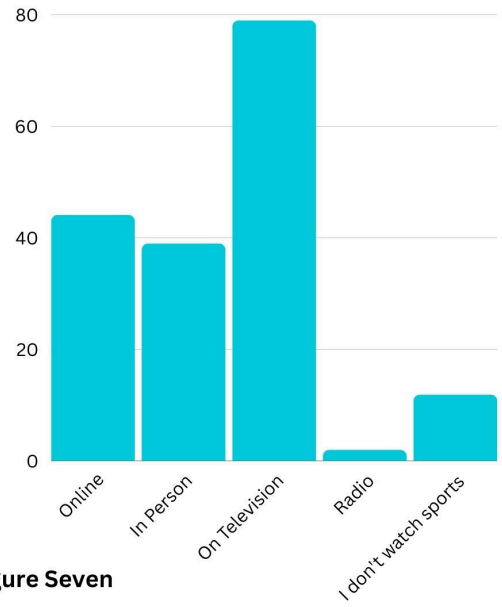
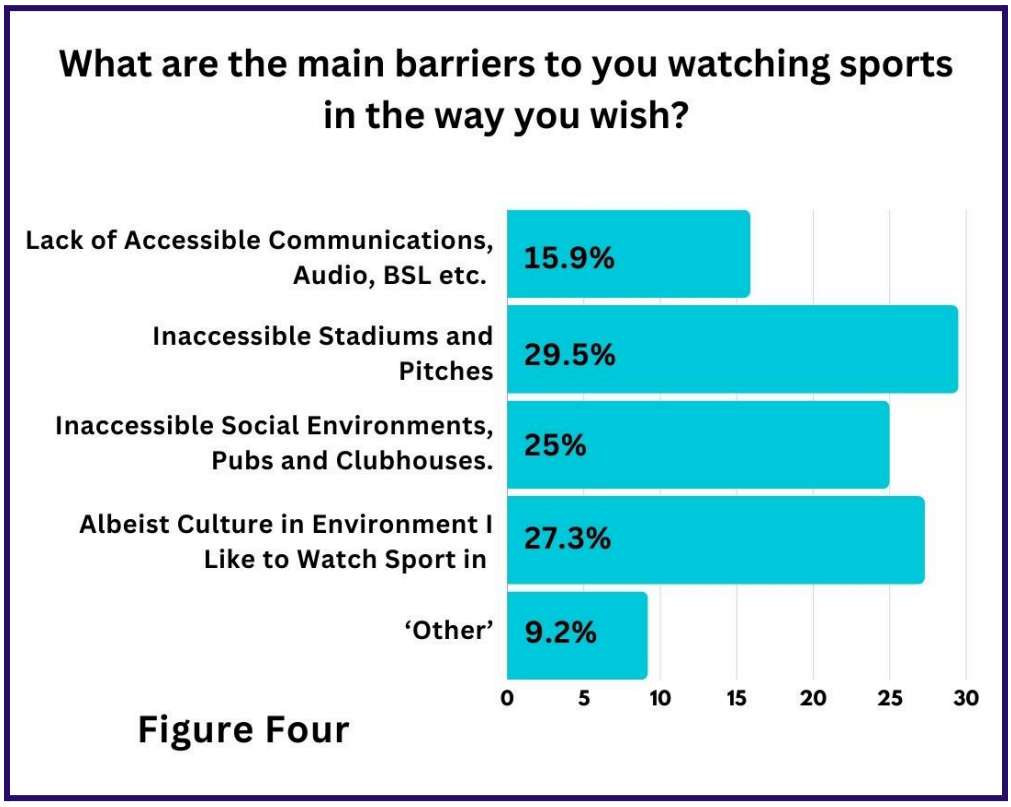


Figure Seven

[Image Alt-Text: A turquoise bar chart, with the responses being: 'Online' 44.1%, 'In person' 39%, 'On Television' 79%, 'Radio' 2%, and 'I don't watch sports' at 11.9%.]

Referencing the graphs in Figure Seven highlights that there are indeed barriers to watching sports in person, or on television at a social venue such as a pub or clubhouse, with 29.5% citing 'Inaccessible stadiums and pitches' and 25% citing 'inaccessible social environments, such as pubs and clubhouses' as the main barriers to them watching sports in the way that they wish.

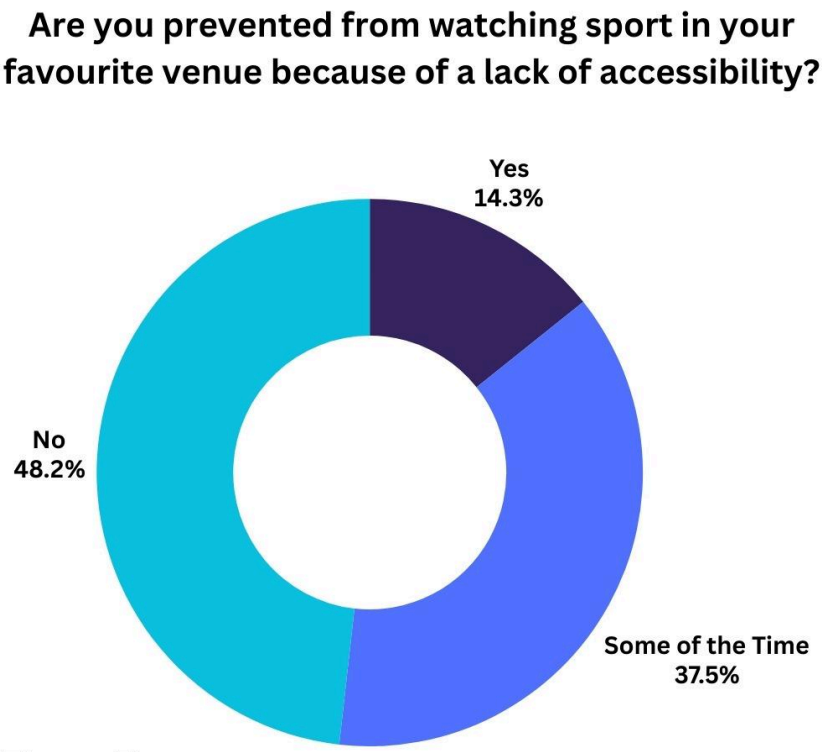
The context of ableism has again arisen, with 27.3% of people stating that an 'Ableist culture in the environment I like to watch sport in' is a barrier for 27.3% of survey respondents. This highlights a prevalent problem that unfortunately will not be fixed by policy change alone - but is a societal issue that is incumbent upon all of us to fix.



[Image Alt-Text: A turquoise row chart, with the answers to the question 'What are the main barriers to you watching sports in the way that you wish', with 15.9% citing 'Lack of accessible communications, audio, BSL etc.' 29.5% of people cited 'Inaccessible stadiums and pitches' and 25% of people 'Inaccessible social environments, pubs and clubhouses'. 27.3% of people said 'Ableist culture in the environment I like to watch sport in'. 9.2% of people said 'Other'.]

In reference to prior speculation as to whether the results between non-disabled and disabled people would vary in their answers to where they watch sports, and whether they are hindered by disability barriers, the below chart in Figure Five suggests that this is true, and accessibility challenges play a key influence in where someone watches sport.

The following graph shows that over half of disabled people surveyed are prevented from watching sport in their 'favourite venue' due to a lack of accessibility. This demonstrates that there is still serious work to do by civil society to drive necessary through change, and close this gap.



[Image Alt-Text: A doughnut chart, in the colours turquoise, blue and purple. The question reads 'Are you prevented from watching sports in your favourite venue because of a lack of accessibility?' 'Yes', in dark purple, is 14.3%, 'No', in turquoise, is 48.2%, and 'Some of the time' in blue is 37.5%.]

Figure Five

Qualitative Responses: What are the main barriers to you watching sport in the way that you wish? Can you please explain this further?

Person One: *"No understanding of my Neurological disability. e.g. Access to RADAR toilets."*

Person Two: *"I have a long term condition, but not a Blue Badge or outward signs of a disability, but when I need a specific seat, it's difficult to get people to understand why."*

Person Three: *"I have ADHD / sensory processing issues and struggle to define sounds - subtitles aren't always available."*

Person Four: *"There is a perception that wheelchair users only bring a carer. I miss out sitting with my group of friends and feel very 'othered' by the separation."*

A 2023 report by Level Playing Field[76], based on their annual fan survey, identified the ten biggest barriers to Physical access at stadiums as follows:

1) Physical access at stadiums
2) Attitudes of others
3) Difficulty purchasing tickets
4) Anxiety or lack of confidence
5) Inaccessible public transport
6) "I don't think stadiums are inclusive for disabled people"
7) Unable to travel to stadium
8) Cost of attending
9) Lack of information
10) Lack of support from club staff

Level Playing Field, formerly the National Association of Disabled Supporters, established in 1998 by disabled football fans, have gone on to deliver leading campaigns such as 'Unite for Access'[77] encouraging large stadiums to improve on their accessibility, and highlighting best practice - such as Tottenham Hotspur - who have made real progress on the accessibility of their stadium facilities, ticketing, parking and transport options[78]. Level Playing Field's record in driving up accessibility in large stadiums, including providing 'match buddies' for games' and delivering Access Audits for stadiums, further showcase the importance of those with lived experience driving change in each sector - and also the importance of changed attitudes and the Social Model of Disability.

Whilst their report was focused on mainstream sports played outside such as football, rugby and cricket, the barriers identified can overlap to those who wish to watch sport remotely, such as the attitudes of others and the lack of accessible information. During our roundtables, ableism and the culture within environments where sports are watched, as well as inaccessible clubhouses, pubs and other sports venues, were frequently cited. The work of organisations such as 'Level Playing Field', and other campaigners in this field is vital and should be celebrated and applauded.

However, it is vital to recognise that much more work needs to be done to improve the experience of disabled fans, both in the UK and worldwide. Our next case study further encapsulates this.

Case Study Three: Barriers to a Lifetime of Opportunity - Dave Rogers - Ableism within Sports Clubs

Dave Rogers, CEO of a disability charity, has been attending football games at a large football club for many years, where he is a season ticket holder. His experiences highlight the need for much more to be done to tackle ableism, and the culture within sports clubs that our survey respondents have highlighted create a real barrier for them.

Whilst attending a game, Dave heard ableist, derogatory terms being used by the fans throughout their chants to the players. As the FA has attempted to combat this kind of discrimination, on the back of all chairs are signs that encourage fans to report this behaviour. Taking that cue, and assuming that something would be done, Dave reported the behaviour to the stewards, expecting it to be dealt with immediately. However, he was told that no immediate action was going to be taken, and that they would simply report it to their management afterwards.

Dave was shocked, as not only were the chants able to continue - he felt they would have been taken more seriously if they were any other type of discrimination, where action would have been taken immediately - from the stewards, if not the police. This further highlights the feeling that disability is the 'last of the protected characteristics to be taken seriously'. Through the charity that Dave runs, they provide match day buddies, and do what they can to support disabled children and young people to attend sports games. If they are met with this overt ableism and discrimination, then it is only going to further separate and discriminate against disabled people in sport. Once Dave even heard charts of 'Run Forest Run' from fans to disabled children who were parading on the pitch with the players before the game.

If large stadiums and teams, with the money and resources, do not stamp out ableism, and hold people accountable for it, then our culture and society are never going to change. Dave says that the police have been excellent, but the clubs themselves have never taken him up on the disability awareness training that he has offered through the charity he runs, and they have even threatened to take away his season ticket if he continues to highlight this issue publicly.

Volunteering

Unfortunately, whilst there is a lot of literature on volunteers and sport, most research that encompasses disabled people involves them as recipients of volunteering services rather than delivering the services. As with the broader volunteer literature, the research on volunteers who have disabilities and/or access needs as providers of service is lacking. This further stresses how much more we need to do to tackle negative and outdated stereotypes about disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions.

Many of us who have volunteered are familiar with its benefits. The Royal Voluntary Service identifies them as follows[70]; new skills and valuable work experience, making new friends, better physical and mental health and wellbeing, giving something back, improving your confidence, and a sense of connection to others in the community.

There are significant benefits to someone undertaking voluntary work in community activities, and given the interest in sport, it is clear that volunteering to support sports activities should be an attractive proposition for both the community and the disabled person.

In 2012 not everybody involved in the Olympic and Paralympic games was an athlete, 70,000 people volunteered as "Games Makers"[1] - people without whom the London Games could not have occurred.

The literature on disability and volunteering, however, is mixed, and scarce, particularly in relation to sport.

Further, Fitzgerald and Lang's comprehensive literature review of volunteering, disability, and sport indicated that "*no specific data could be found in relation to the motivations of disabled people to volunteer*"[69].

ONS data from 2018, however, found that disabled people are just as likely to take part in volunteering as non-disabled people. This encompassed both 'formal' and 'unformal' volunteering. In the year ending March 2018, 37.7% of disabled people had taken part in formal volunteering in the previous 12 months, compared with 41.9% of non-disabled people.[114]

For informal volunteering, 56.9% of disabled people participated, compared with 53.5% of non-disabled people.[114] For this data, 'formal volunteering' was 'providing unpaid help through groups, clubs and organisations', whilst 'informal volunteering' was 'providing unpaid help as an individual to people who are not a relative'.

The same analysis found that for formal volunteering, disability was a 'barrier' for those who are 'limited a lot' by their condition. In the 50 to 64 years, and 65 to 74 year age groups - the proportion of disabled people who took part in formal volunteering was significantly less than that of non-disabled people.

Referring back to the Social vs Medical Model of Disability, it could be easy to suggest using the Medical Model that the lack of activity is a result of someone's disability alone. However, the Social Model analysis highlights again, the problem being the environment. The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) have identified that disabled people have a different experience of volunteering to non-disabled people, and on average they report lower levels of satisfaction and significant barriers.[71] These include practical barriers, as well as cultural and attitudinal barriers. Barriers come from the public, organisations, paid staff, and other volunteers.

The NCVO's 2023 'Time Well Spent' report,[117] their national survey into volunteer experience, found that 'many disabled volunteers don't feel their knowledge and skills are utilised' - pointing to potential problems with misconceptions, stereotypes, and perhaps ableism and discrimination too. It is possible that outdated attitudes about someone's ability to contribute exist.

The same piece of research also identified the different motivations for someone to volunteer, including boosting social connections, enhancing knowledge of a particular interest, or increasing skills for employment. Therein may lie the problem. As the Activity Alliance report 'The Activity Trap' found that almost half of disabled people (47%) fear losing their benefits if they are seen to be being too active.[118] The same could be said for volunteering - even though volunteering could boost someone's skills and employability, therefore potentially reducing the Disability Employment Gap.

Further highlighting that we have a welfare system that can often do the opposite of what it is supposed to do - and that fear around claiming benefits

can stop people from doing something that could make them more employable in the long run.

Another area that is worth noting is the lack of disabled people involved at Board level at sports organisations. The Code for Sports Governance requires funded sports organisations to ensure diverse viewpoints are considered and that its decision-making groups have the skills and diversity needed to operate effectively, however there is little visible evidence as to how many disabled people are on the Boards of national sports bodies.

This is a problem that is not limited to sporting organisations. The representation of disabled people on boards - both corporate and public appointments - is an under-researched topic that requires much more exploration.

Case Study Four - Transforming Lives through the Power of Sport - Kush Kanodia - Accessibility in the Premier League

The Power of Sport and Personal Transformation

Dr. Kush Kanodia's journey is one of personal transformation and systemic change, rooted in his passion for sport. Growing up near Stamford Bridge, home of Chelsea Football Club, Kush found the environment of sport is what ignited his confidence and set the stage for his lifelong mission to improve accessibility for disabled people.

"I remember going to a Premier League football game as a child,". "It was one of the most aggressive and lively environments. It gave me the confidence and belief that if I could survive there, I could survive anywhere. This experience empowered me to navigate other areas of life, like nightclubs and festivals, and live fully."

Work with the Premier League

After being selected as Torch Bearer for the London 2012 Olympic games, Kush's journey to become an active disability rights champion took off. Kush joined Level Playing Field, the organisation previously referenced in the 'Spectatorship' section. At the time, Premier League clubs were notorious for their lack of proper accommodations for disabled fans.

Kush's advocacy led to significant policy changes, starting with Chelsea Football Club. By forging a relationship with the director of the redevelopment of Stamford Bridge, Kush persuaded Chelsea to commit to the Accessible Stadia Guide Pledge. This breakthrough set a precedent that led Manchester United and eventually the entire Premier League to follow suit.[119]

Despite initial resistance and a failure to meet the pledge by the August 2017 deadline, sustained pressure from the Minister for Disabled People and the threat of legal action by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission resulted in compliance. Today, the Premier League serves as a global benchmark for accessible stadiums, significantly improving the match-day experience for disabled fans and fostering a more inclusive sports culture.

Broader Impacts and Continued Advocacy

The success with the Premier League gave Kush the confidence to tackle other systemic issues. He launched the 'No Wheelchair Tax' campaign, successfully abolishing parking fees for disabled people at over 200 NHS Trust hospitals in England[120], and led efforts to improve accessibility in Greater London through adjustments to the Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) policies to ensure equity for disabled drivers[121].

Reflecting on the journey from being a Chelsea fan to a globally recognised disability rights advocate, Kush emphasises the transformative Power of Sport.

"If you look at where the confidence and belief stemmed from, it actually all started from sports".

Kush's story is a testament to the profound impact of sport on personal and societal transformation. His unwavering advocacy has not only changed policies but also inspired a movement towards greater accessibility and inclusion. The journey from Stamford Bridge to global platforms underscores the power of individual action in driving systemic change and the potential of sport to inspire and empower real-world change.

Progression

The innate, competitive nature of sports and leisure drives someone towards progression - an advancement across a checklist of achievements, towards an advanced state of play; the transition from playing at a grassroots level to playing at an elite level.

Progression is dependent on a number of factors. First and foremost is an individual's potential to participate at a higher level. This is the same for all sports, regardless of whether or not an individual has a disability, that at a basic level an individual can only progress as far as their potential will allow them. However, in order to ensure equality of opportunity for disabled people, who are much more likely to face hurdles - there must be access to suitable opportunities, coaching, facilities and support.

On this basis an individual has no control of what opportunities are available, it is down fundamentally to location as to whether someone has the opportunities to progress. This was again highlighted through our survey data, where 63.8% of survey respondents think that the opportunity to play sport and take part in physical activity is dependent on where you live.

[Image Alt-Text: A pie chart, in the colours blue, turquoise and purple. The question reads 'Do you think that the opportunities to play and watch sport are dependent upon where you live?' 'Yes', in purple, is 63.8.%, 'No', in turquoise, is 12.1%, and 'Maybe' in blue is 24.1%.]

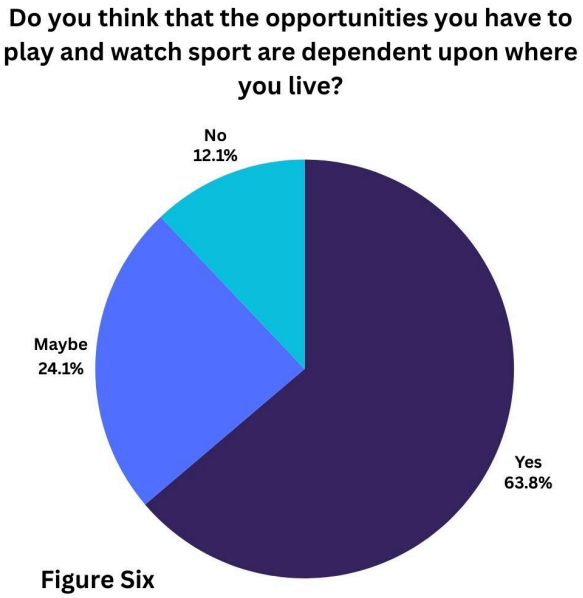


Figure Six

For instance, it is only possible to play ice hockey if you live within an area that has an ice hockey rink and is that rink is suitable for ice hockey to be played and has a programme which supports individuals playing ice hockey. In England and Wales there are 36 ice rinks, of which only 31 are suitable for ice hockey to be played. However, when considering ice hockey for disabled people there are only two rinks with ice hockey programmes

aimed at people with a learning disability and four rinks with ice hockey programmes aimed at people with a physical disability. This is despite ice hockey being a Paralympic Sport. Therefore it is almost impossible for a disabled person to enter the sport of ice hockey and progress unless they are lucky enough to live near one of the six rinks that have suitable programmes.[126] An example of someone whose life has been transformed through Para Ice Hockey has been referenced in the case study at the end of this section.

Although, opportunities are not simply restricted by geography. For instance, many towns and cities have Parkruns, and it is possible for wheelchairs users to participate in these but there appears to be no formal mechanism or support that is standardised. Parkrun have published the following in regarding wheelchairs users and park run:

"We pride ourselves in being accessible to as many people as possible and we, therefore, welcome wheelchair users. Specifically, however, we do not determine the suitability or otherwise of our courses for wheelchairs, as this varies greatly depending on the skill, experience, and confidence of the wheelchair user".[73]

This means that even in grassroots events, aimed at mass participation, there is a lack of opportunity for disabled people. So this means that if a wheelchair user who has been using their everyday wheelchair to take up the wheelchair equivalent of jogging, they are then presented with a restricted opportunity if they wish to take part in a mass participation event, something that may constitute the first rung on a progression ladder.

In fact one wheelchair user who participates in Parkruns, Claudia, made the following observation on her website[74]; "I am almost always the only wheelchair user when I go to a parkrun event which could be a little daunting". Claudia has also blogged on the official Parkrun website, where she has highlighted the immense power of sports writing, "My wheelchair parkruns have had other brilliant 'side-effects'. I know so many more people and love seeing everyone every week and have really benefited from the community side of parkrun, one which I previously dreaded. I have even been to the cafe after parkrun which I never thought I would[75]".

Equally if a mass participation event or a club is suitable for a disabled person to participate in, there is no guarantee that suitable coaching will be provided to enable disabled person to progress, and it is important that to recognise that suitable coaching may not relate to the biomechanics of a sport or it's tactics, it may be as simple as being able to communicate with an individual in terms that they can understand.

We heard in our roundtables frequently that many coaches, whether school PE teachers, or gym instructors, gave off a 'nervousness' and many did not understand disability. This, again led to a lottery of opportunity, with some disabled people being given the opportunity to progress, and others left behind due to a lack of suitable coaching.

Case Study Five - Transforming Lives through the Power of Sport - Paralympian Simon Berry

As an active demonstration of the importance of participation and engagement, former Paralympian Simon Berry divulged his story.

"From the age of 12 I was heavily engaged in sport, sport for me was my life, it was extremely easy to access. However, at the age of 18 I had a life changing motorbike accident leaving me a T2/3 paraplegic, that put a stop to all my engagement with mainstream sports.

As a young person I was devastated, I spent a year in Pinderfields Roger physio with resident sports coordinators stressing to me the importance of exercise, at the time disability sports and the equipment that I needed was very unavailable. I became acutely aware of the barriers and exclusions disabled people faced in being able to access sport. Leaving hospital and returning to my home, there were no provisions for any form of sport.

As a young person, I was only offered free transport on the minibus to a local community hall for pensioners that met once a week for bingo and other games, coffee, social interaction and so forth.

As I left for university, I was approached by Coach Kevin Whitemen to play sledge hockey (Para Ice Hockey) and my passion for sport became a

possibility again. In 2000 I made Team GB, and decided to organise a sledge hockey weekend, inviting fellow GB players past and present, plus individuals I had heard were interviewing to open a new GB program. I was victorious and the GB program began again.

Because of that initial opportunity I was given, I became a GB assistant coach and player in 2004 and we went to our last Paralympics in 2006. I took over my local club and ran teams for other individuals like myself. 'David Lloyd's' Hull noticed the success of the self-funded programs I was running and awarded me funds to develop access to disabled sports in my area, I was also offered free membership and personal training sessions which helped me further advance my skills and assisted in the financial burdens., this support facilitated me to play at international level.

What I did encouraged others and built confidence on and off the ice, whilst providing an opportunity for disabled people to become more active and join a community. The support I received built the infrastructure and provided the equipment for inclusion and opportunity for disabled people to take part in sports, something that changed my life and rediscovered my passions."

Simon Berry's story shows what is possible when someone is given the right opportunity to progress through sport and physical activity, and in particular the role that we all play to foster an environment that empowers all of us.

Progression encompasses all of the factors that we have spoken about through this report. Someone's ability to progress in sport as a disabled person depends on a myriad of factors. Whether they were encouraged or inspired to take part in a sport, through visible representation of disabled athletes, accessible facilities, or an inclusive environment that ignited their interest in the sport. Good, confident coaching, with an understanding of disability, and a will to tackle ableism and discrimination are all key.

Progression in sport is rare for anyone. For disabled people, and people with long-term health conditions, if we want to create opportunity, and empower each and every one of our citizens to be the best that they can be, we must do what is in our power to break down barriers at each level of progression.

Recommendations

Our report highlights key policy recommendations for Local and National Government, small and large stadiums, leisure facilities and community clubs, as well as hospitality venues that play an equally important role in the Power of Sport.

1. **Leisure facilities, including gyms and sports centres, should standardise their offer and ensure that carers are allowed to accompany disabled adults for free. Those carers should also be allowed to use the facilities and take part in activities, provided that this does not prevent them from accompanying those that they are caring for.**

2. **Each sports club or leisure facility should have a legal duty to offer reasonable adjustments and a modified service to disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions. Prices should reflect services - for example, a reduced service offered should be reflected in price.**

   If a facility is unable to offer certain activities due to health and safety concerns, this should be in writing as part of their policies. If someone is unhappy with this, and wants to appeal, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport should provide a formal, cost-free mechanism for people to do so.

3. **The Department of Health, working with DCMS, the voluntary sector and disability experts, should create an overview of the suitability of each sport for disabled people - what precautions to take and how each sport can be adapted for those with different disabilities. This should be written in partnership with medical experts, as well as experts in each sport.**

   It is important to note that this may vary, depending on someone's condition - and each individual should seek medical advice from their GP before making a decision as to whether to take the potential risk to try a certain sport.

4. **There is lots of literature out there for sports facilities to improve their accessibility, both at a local and national level. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport should collate these all in one place online, so that they are easy to find. They should produce an official standard set of guidelines for leisure facilities, sports centres, gyms and community clubs for how they can improve their accessibility and their offer for disabled people.**

5. **Regional and local authorities should work together to create lists of what accessible sports are available in each community - whether someone wants to be a participant, volunteer, employee or spectator. They should encompass 'disability-specific' sport, as well as the offer and adaptations that mainstream clubs have. This should simplify the process for disabled people to find out what is available to them in their community.**

   It should be used as a catalyst to encourage all clubs in the area, whether premiership clubs or grassroots groups, to share best practice and aim to have the best offer possible for disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions.

6. **There should be a standard set for both professional and grassroots clubs, including their stadiums and venues, as to what their accessibility offer is. 'Best practice' should be identified and shared. A legal timeframe should be set as to when this new 'best practice' becomes the mandatory requirement by providers - whether national sports bodies or commissioning local authorities.**

   By 2030, it should no longer be acceptable for any sports club to fall below these new set standards. Individual local authorities should take responsibility for enforcing this, overseen by The Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

7. **Understanding disability awareness should be a core and mandatory component required of any training for those teaching sport and physical activity. From PE teachers to personal trainers and fitness coaches, each person undertaking a new qualification or training should have a core component on understanding disability**

and how to adapt your services to disabled people.

Those who are currently qualified should undertake new mandatory training by 2030.

8. **Hospitality venues, such as bars, pubs and clubhouses, should all be ensuring that they are following the Equality Act, Section 20: Duty to make adjustments. All venues have a legal obligation on them to be accessible for disabled people, and this should be upheld. The Government should explore how to make it easier to report when businesses do not meet their legal obligations, and how to ensure accountability when the law is not enforced.**

9. **The Government should set aside a pot of funding to both leisure facilities who wish to upgrade their services, as well as businesses such as hospitality venues, who need to make necessary upgrades to make their buildings accessible. This should be prioritised to small and medium sized businesses, who have limited funds for capital spending. Large businesses should be incentivised first through the tax system.**

   A target should be set that by 2030, no business should be able to avoid these legal requirements without appropriate action taken.

10. **Building on the 'Inclusive Transport strategy[123]' published in 2020, the new Government must design a new Accessible Transport strategy, with the primary aim of this strategy to not only close the disability employment gap, but to put reducing social isolation at the heart of the aims of measures taken.**

    This strategy should prioritise an emphasis on community transport, and work in partnership with Disabled Persons Organisations and the rest of the voluntary sector to develop this new vision.

Conclusion

As demonstrated in this report, the 'Power of Sport' has the opportunity to create a 'Lifetime of Opportunity' for all who pursue it. From those shared experiences with our communities and nations watching tournaments, to transforming your own confidence and self-esteem.

The journey that we have demonstrated through the narrative of a Lifetime of Opportunity through the Power of Sport is impactful and far-reaching. Whether that is through taking part at a grassroots level - from roller skating, to rock climbing, or finding your passion and sparking your future ambitions through volunteering; right through to progressing as a Paralympian - sport can do so much for so many of us. The journeys of Isaac, Mary, Kush and Simon have demonstrated that evidently.

However, huge barriers still exist for disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions, that are a result of the environment, rather than someone's disability themselves. These can range from physical accessibility of stadiums and venues, or pubs and clubhouses, to the extra costs for support from carers, or the inaccessibility of public transport that still exists.

With huge drivers in people's decision to take part in sport being to make friends and take part in their community, these barriers do much to embed the social isolation that so many disabled people face.

What is notable, is how much ableism, and discriminatory attitudes still play a part, as this was a factor for holding back both participants and spectators of sport. It is clear therefore, that policy change is only one part of the solution, and societal shift must follow if we are to achieve meaningful change. As Dave's story highlights, this is still a major problem. It is unknown the negative impact, and the wasted opportunity, that this ableism may have had on people - even if other barriers to sporting engagement are removed.

Our recommendations, for both Government and civil society, are practical suggestions that can be easily implemented, but have the power to make a huge difference to the lives of disabled people in each community. From improving the understanding of disability in teacher training, to providing

centralised resource hubs in each local community, these measures taken can be a catalyst for driving positive change across civil society, and to encourage the elevation of best practice - whether by community clubs or Premiership football teams.

Government has an important role to play, and tax incentives for large businesses, as well as specific pots of funding for small businesses, can speed up the process to drive through the capital upgrades needed for leisure centres, sports facilities and hospitality venues to become truly accessible.

This paper has outlined that at present, financial incentives and the sharing of best practice should act as drivers to increase accessibility. However, by 2030, there should no longer be any organisations not meeting their legal requirements, through both the Equality Act, and the Public Sector Equality Duty, without appropriate legal ramifications. Instead of relying on individual disabled people, who are already disproportionately in the lowest income brackets, to take legal action, by 2030 the Government should set out ways in which someone can report an organisation that is not adhering to its legal obligations, and what appropriate action is going to be taken in these cases.

These policy recommendations do not, therefore, propose many new laws that need to be created, but rather the will and ability to enforce the current law, when it is broken by businesses not living up to their legal responsibilities to create accessible facilities. It is incumbent upon all of us to create a society that allows disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions, to thrive.

Thank you to all of those who took the time to take part in our research, whether answering our survey, submitting storytelling videos, or taking part in our interviews and roundtables. Thanks to your help, we are able to bring to life the scale of the problem which can help us to drive tangible solutions in both Government and civil society.

The Power of Sport has the ability to change lives, bring together nations and shape our local communities. It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure that we are all able to be a part of that, and that disabled people, and those with long-term health conditions, are not held back. The time for talking about this has passed - now is the time for action.

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Appendices

Questions from the Disability Policy Centre's online survey

1. Do you identify as being disabled or having a long term health condition?

2. Do you currently play, or have you previously played sport?

3. If you answered 'Yes' to Question 2, are the sports aimed at disabled people, and people with long-term health conditions, or are they open to all?

4. If you answered 'No' to Question 2, do you wish to play sport and take part in physical activity more regularly?

5. What are the barriers to you taking part in sport and physical activity? Tick all that apply.

6. If you ticked 'Other', please expand.

7. How satisfied are you with your opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity?

8. If you watch sports, do you watch sports online, in person, on TV or in another format? Tick all that apply.

9. Where do you prefer to watch sport?

10. How would you rank the accessibility of the venue that you prefer to watch sport?

11. Are you prevented from watching sports in your favourite venue because of a lack of accessibility?

12. What are the main barriers to you watching sports in the way you wish?

13. Can you please explain this further?

14. Do you think that the opportunities you have to play and watch sport are dependent upon where you live?

15. Have you experience of working in, or applying to work in sports and physical activity?

16. If yes, are you able to tell us more about your experiences?

17. Have you experience of volunteering in sports and physical activity?

18. If yes, are you able to tell us more about your experiences?

19. Which area of the UK do you live in?

20. Thank you for taking the time to answer this survey. Are there any additional comments that you would like to make?


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