



Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

In response to Sandesh Gulhane MSP's question regarding cardiac provisions in Scottish football, Mr Maxwell stated he would come back to us with more detail on the provisions in place as well as the technical term for the SPFL cardiograph.

Cardiac screening

The Scottish FA has provided funding for cardiac screening for SPFL players aged 16 years and over for almost 20 years at no cost to the club or player. The service, which was one of the first in Europe to be rolled-out, is carried out by medical staff in the Clinic at Hampden Park. The screening consists of:

- A detailed cardiac history questionnaire
- A resting electrocardiograph (ECG)
- A cardiac ultrasound (Echocardiogram)

This screening is more detailed than many screening programmes in world sport with all players getting an echocardiogram as standard rather than just those identified with an issue on medical history or ECG.

All cardiac screening results are reported by an experienced Consultant Cardiologist with results communicated to the club medical staff and any further investigations are arranged at Hampden Sports Clinic where appropriate or referred to Specialist Services.

Cardiac screening is not mandatory for SPFL players. It is well recognised that a 'positive' screening has implications for employment, life insurance, mortgages etc and is therefore voluntary.

Cardiac screening is now available to SWPL players who are due to play in UEFA competition.

Pre-signing medicals

Pre-signing medicals are the responsibility of individual clubs. The content will depend on the individual club's policy and the relative value of the player with formal medicals less common in the lower leagues.

In general, a medical will consist of a detailed medical and injury history together with a general clinical and musculoskeletal examination by the club physiotherapist and doctor. Cardiac screening, as detailed above, can be added together with any additional tests indicated e.g. MRI scanning, specialist consultant referrals etc. Some medicals will also include an assessment of fitness carried out by the club's sports scientist.

Medical examinations for UEFA Licence and competitions

All Clubs who apply for a UEFA License (all Premiership Clubs and SWPL Clubs who play in Champions League) must comply with the UEFA Medical Regulations – see attached.

Each player in the first team squad will undergo the following:

- Detailed personal medical and relevant family history updated annually.
- General physical examination annually
- Orthopaedic examination annually
- Annual electrocardiogram (ECG)
- Echocardiogram (cardiac ultrasound) to be carried out every 2 years
- Neurological baseline testing must also be carried out annually (for use in a concussion injury)
- Comprehensive laboratory screening (bloods) completed annually

The 2024 Medical Regulations will include a symptom limited exercise ECG for players over the age of 35.

National Teams

The UEFA Medical Regulations also apply for National Teams as well as clubs participating in UEFA competitions.

These include:

- Medical examination of players
 - Medical records
 - General medical examination
 - Cardiac screening
 - Laboratory/blood tests
 - Orthopaedic/musculoskeletal examination
- Medical examination of match officials
- Minimum medical requirements at stadia including:
 - Pitchside medical equipment
 - Ambulance requirements
 - Medical staff requirements
 - Emergency medical room provision and equipment
 - Pre-match medical information for visiting teams.

The Scottish FA working in collaboration with clubs collate this information for all players participating for a Scottish FA National Team competing in a UEFA competition at all age groups as per the required regulations.

These data are held securely in a protected secure environment accessible only to authorised Scottish FA medical staff.

Referees

The Medical Regulations for players in UEFA competitions are also mandatory for match officials and conducted under the responsibility of the match official's member association. All examinations and tests must be completed before the start of the season and registered in the match official's medical record. UEFA may at any time ask to be provided with the results of such medical examinations and/or tests.

These examinations have been carried out on UEFA/FIFA match officials by the Scottish FA for over 20 years. The 2024 regulations will include inclusion of symptom limited exercise ECG for officials over the age of 35 years – these have already been included in the Scottish FA medicals in advance of this change.

Medical Provision at matches

The Scottish FA has a comprehensive Club Licencing programme which includes comprehensive medical requirements. The programme requires certain levels of medical provision at each level of club licence. While some senior clubs have full-time medical staff all clubs must comply with minimum medical requirements at all training sessions and matches.

In particular there must be an individual trained in Sports First Aid including basic life support and the use of a defibrillator and have an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) in their possession at all training sessions.

In addition, all clubs at bronze level and above must have a club therapist and club doctor present at all home matches with higher standards of medical care at higher level of licencing.

Footnote

The Scottish FA has a long history of innovative medical support for National Teams and member clubs dating back to the early 1980s with the appointment of the renowned cardiologist and sports medicine physician Professor Stewart Hillis. As Scottish FA Medical Consultant he introduced medical regulations in advance of those put in place by UEFA and FIFA.

Both Professor Hillis and his successor have been members of UEFA's Medical Committee and central to the development of the Medical Regulations over the last 20 years.

In addition, Scottish FA medical staff have developed the National Sports First Aid course which is mandatory for club staff and as part of coach education programmes. At a more advanced level Scottish FA medical staff are the provider on an advanced pitch care medical course to both UEFA and FIFA teaching to National team doctors across the world.

Scottish FA medical staff have been core members in the development of the Scottish Concussion Guidelines since 2015 and are about to launch the latest version in collaboration with sportscotland and Scottish Rugby.

In response to Tess White MSP's questions regarding child wellbeing and mental health, Mr Maxwell stated he could come back to us with exactly what provisions are in place. Also, he stated he could give more detail on the SPFL Trust mental health training programme – specifically in relation to how many people a year go through this mental health training.

Performance Schools

Our Participation and Engagement Officer visits all our JD Performance Schools to carry out consultations with all the year groups on an annual basis. The consultations include a survey where we cover physical and mental health of the pupils in the programme, the role of trusted adults and confidence in sharing any concerns, feeling in the school, and overall experience, to name a few topics. These surveys are then followed by a discussion with the Participation Officer and pupils to understand more the positive aspects and challenges the pupils face.

All results are anonymously fed back to the coaches to improve the overall experience. The Wellbeing and Protection Team work closely with the coaches, and in particular the Child Wellbeing and Protection Officer takes responsibility for providing support should any pupil need it.

Additionally, the Participation Officer attends induction sessions to introduce themselves and the Wellbeing and Protection Team to the pupils' parents, so they are aware that any concerns or requests for support can be raised directly with the team

SPFL Mental Health Training Courses

In season 2022/23 – which is representative of a typical year -

- 77 attendees on the MHA Training
- Representing 27 clubs who had staff/volunteers at the training
- Delivered across 4 or 5 deliveries per season (Season 23/24 will include the first delivery solely for those involved in the SWPL)

These are not just SPFL clubs, the training is free for anyone in Scotland involved in football.

Of SPFL clubs – 40 of the 42 have the staff/volunteers who have completed the training, and are effectively Mental Health First Aiders

Since inception in 2016

- 836 people who have been through the training, from 247 organisations

Alongside this, in 2020 the Scottish FA have added a compulsory Mental Health Course to those undertaking our coaching courses. 34,768 individuals have completed the course to date.

In addition, and if relevant the new First Aid course launched through the Sports Medicine Clinic has been a popular new addition as per below figures.

In response to the Convener, Mr Maxwell stated he would come back to the Committee with detail regarding whether SYFA members had completed child protection training.

All Scottish FA Executive Board members have undertaken Child Wellbeing Training, including our new INED, who joined the Board in December 2023.

The SYFA confirmed that all of their Board members have completed or are in the process of completing CWB training

The following questions are taken together –

In response to the Convener's question regarding the number of female referees, particularly female VAR officials, Mr Maxwell stated he would double check and get back to us with those figures

The Convener also requested further information on the number of category 2 female referees in Scotland.

The Convener had commented on the representation for female referees on the SFA website and Mr Maxwell stated he would feedback. What action has, or is being planned to be, taken regarding this?

Mr Maxwell also stated he would give more detail to the Committee regarding programmes in place to increase the diversity of Scottish referees.

As of December 2023, we have 145 registered female referees which is an increase of just over 10% from the end of the 2022/23 season.

We have three FIFA listed female officials in Scotland (Lorraine Clark is FIFA elite referee) and Vikki Allan and Vikki Robertson our two FIFA listed Assistant referees.

All three are fully trained to use VAR. To officiate in SPFL Premiership matches they require to achieve Category 1 status, which they have not as yet. They are available for UEFA matches as VAR in the UEFA Women's Champions League but have not been selected to date.

This compares to 7 male FIFA referees and 10 male FIFA Assistant referees.

Scottish FA website

The attached link takes you to our Become a Referee section of the Scottish FA website. As you will see the two main videos in the first link heavily promote female refereeing with female representation prominent.

[Become A Football Referee | Scottish Referees | Scottish FA](#)

The second link takes you to our female only referee page (again with a short video):

[Become a Female Referee | Referees | Scottish FA](#)

Female referee strategy: In relation to our strategy for female refereeing we have a female only recruitment & retention strategy document which will be updated again in 2024. Lorraine Clark (our Scottish elite FIFA female referee is on the cover).

Female only recruitment classes: In Autumn 2023 we ran a female only online referee recruitment class which was free to attend (via sponsorship the SWF had organised).

[Scottish Women's football launches female referee drive \(s1jobs.com\)](https://www.s1jobs.com)

We then provided free kit to those that qualified.

Unfortunately, there was a very low take up rate (we had 50 enquiries but only 7 ended up completing the course). We are reviewing the processes around this course to ensure engagement is increased in future.

Table showing split of female referees as at December 2023@

Current Officials - Female	Totals
Category 1 Referee	
Video Assistant Referee	
Category 2 Referee	
Category 3 Specialist Assistant Referee	
Assistant Video Assistant Referee	
Category 3 Referee	1
Category 3 Development Referee	3
Category 4 Referee	1
Category 4 Development Referee	4
Category 5 Referee	24
Category 6 Referee	44
Category 7 Referee	23
Category 7A Referee: Education Pathway	11
Category 7B Referee: Referee Class Pathway	23
Category 7C Referee: Online Pathway	8
Category 8 Referee: Quality Mark Awareness	
Referee Observer	
Development Advisor	
Senior Associate	3
Total	145

Adidas have confirmed there is women's referee kit available for season 2024 /25. They do provide it internationally – as the volume of female referees is large enough.

The number of female referees in Scotland means we do not meet Adidas minimum order quantities for female cut kit. We do offer a range of women's training kit, including warm up tops , trousers, t/shirts, and base layer.

[SFA Referee - RJM Sports](#)

Broadly, the Committee would also be grateful for an update on whether their Female Participation in Sport Report has been reviewed by the SFA and what action they are planning to take based on the various recommendations within the report.

I can confirm the report noted has been reviewed and was in fact contributed to by the Scottish FA.

At the Scottish FA, we've placed significant emphasis on tackling barriers that prevent girls' and women's participation in football. Consequently, we've expanded our playing opportunities for girls aged 5 and above, prioritising fun, friendship, and fitness through football. Additionally, we've highlighted role models across various areas of our sport, ranging from national team players, premier league players, female coaches and volunteers. Despite these efforts, inadequate facilities, particularly insufficient changing rooms, remain the primary barrier for female involvement in football.

Other initiatives to grow the G&W game are -

- Scottish FA Regional staff provide guidance and expertise to our grassroots clubs ensure they can grow and expand opportunities in the Girls and Women's game.
- New School based model for UEFA Disney Playmakers, aimed at girls age 5-8 to give a positive first experience of football through play and storytelling:
<https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/football-development/participation/girls-womens-football/uefa-disney-playmakers/>
- KDM Soccer Centres across the country, aimed at girls age 5-12 who have an interest in football and want to play in a fun environment with friends:
<https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/football-development/participation/girls-womens-football/kdm-group-soccer-centres/>
- Women Recreational football proved very popular in 2023 and something we will continue to grow in 2024, these sessions provide women the opportunity to play football for the first time or provide a route back into the game for former players. The number of these sessions have increased across the country with more and more clubs offering this opportunity for women in their community: <https://www.scottishfa.co.uk/news/ee-surprise-carnoustie-panmure-fc-with-dream-hampden-trip/>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=doTNWjAM3b4>
- Kick About is a new initiative we introduced in late 2023 which offers teenage girls the opportunity to play with friends in a fun environment based within their community club. This model will be upscaled across the country in 2024 and beyond.
- Future Stars School Cup is a national schools competition for girls age 12-16, this has grown year on year since its inception in 2019
- All of the above is in addition to a robust competition pathway for age 7+ delivered in partnership with Scottish Women's Football

Increasing the Female Workforce

- Female only Coach Education Level 1 courses available both regionally and nationally with Female Coach Educators
- Targeted funding for 50 female coaches to attend and complete the Level 2 Coach Education Course
- Targeted funding for 20 female coaches to attend and complete the Level 3 Coach Education Course
- Female Coach Educator opportunities – we are in the process of identifying and training new and existing female coach educators. We have increased the number of female coach educators by 50% in the last two years
- Specific Female Game Educational Study visits to observe best practice – these trips are for specific coaches and staff working in various areas of the Girls and Women’s game, for example, club development, youth performance academies, community leaders etc..

Performance

- All SWNT matches on Free to Air TV, with more annually on BBC Scotland and others on BBC Alba.
- Group offers for all SWNT home matches
- All SWNT matches are at Hampden Park, Ticket prices start at £5 and we also provide a group offer for local groups and clubs (£75 for 25 tickets). We also give away around 2000 tickets to each match, this includes a targeted approach to underrepresented groups, low SIMD areas and some learning through football schools.
- The Scottish FA now administer the Women’s Scottish Cup with semi-final and final played at Hampden Park, the final televised live.
- In 2019 we became the first international stadium in the world to stock and offer free period products in all our women’s and accessible bathrooms. We have maintained that commitment and in February 2024, we will be investing significantly in upgrading our dispensing units across the stadium. In addition to this, through our partnership with Hey Girls, we have donated period products to the grassroots girl’s game in the past and will be donating a further 19,000 products to the grassroots girl’s game in March 2024, via SWF, as part of our shared ambition to remove barriers to girls playing and loving the game throughout their teenage years.
- The Scottish FA, from summer 2024, will manage the Girls National Academy Programme activity
- Introduction of U23 National team to provide opportunities to younger elite players.
- All Soccer Centres named after SWNT players to increase the profile of our Role Models

In addition, we also have specific Girls and Women’s communication and marketing plans

Mr Maxwell stated he could write to the Committee with detail regarding the Merky Programme.

MERKY FC is a partnership between adidas and the musician Stormzy, created to impact change in the football industry.

#Merky FC Football Careers is the first initiative to come from the newly created #Merky FC programme between adidas and Stormzy - that seeks to create opportunities in leadership positions in the football industry, for the Black community. Created in response to the fact that currently only 6.7% of leadership positions in football are held by those with Black Heritage - this partnership creates a multi-year career programme, and opportunities for those who do not currently have fair access and representation within the industry.

The partnership - spearheaded by these two change-makers sees them using their influence and network to create an incredible line up of roles that cover the full spectrum of experiences in delivering the nation's favourite sport and make them more readily accessible. This is the latest initiative from both adidas and Stormzy who both share the same values and a commitment to help make sport equal.

Season 1 launched November 2022, forming the Starting XI brands who helped change the game providing placement opportunities that started in 2023. Season 2 launched October 2023 with an even bigger line up of brands and 50 placement opportunities that go live 2023/24.

We are in the process of recruiting via the Merky programme detailed above.

The Association is constantly reviewing our recruitment and appointment processes to ensure we are as inclusive as possible.

Recent changes include -

- Revised and updated Job Descriptions to ensure neutral in language;
- Started publishing the remuneration band for each role, which has been seen as a barrier to applications from ethnic minorities.
- Introduced anonymised recruitment processes, so hiring managers do not get personal info at all (not just names), until the applicant is invited for interview;
- Introduced an Ethnic Minority scheme, which ensures that when EM applicants meet the minimum criteria for the role, they are guaranteed an interview. This is also in place for Disabled applicants.
- Widened advertising channels to increase our reach, with the intention to include diversity specific job boards;
- Continued training of managers to ensure their selection practices are as inclusive as possible.
- Where possible, use a diverse interview panel.
- Introduced a new Applicant Tracking System which allows automated equality monitoring and reporting.
- Updated our careers website in line with best practice to ensure it is attractive for ethnic minorities to engage and apply.
- Updated our staff benefits programme area to reflect and respect a more diverse workforce, including fully flexible holidays/public hols, enhanced in paternity leave/pay.
- A prayer room will soon be established within the stadium.

Other information relevant to the discussion

Tackling discrimination in grassroots football

We are all aware of a number of cultural issues which manifest at and during football matches and in line with guidance from our fully independent Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Board, we are working hard to tackle a number of areas.

In terms homophobic abuse, we work in partnership with LEAP Sport Scotland to jointly run the Football vs Homophobia Scotland Strategy, the strategy is available here: [Resources | Football v Homophobia Scotland \(fvhscotland.org\)](#).

In order to inform both that strategy and how we achieve its aims we run an FvH Scotland Steering Group, made up of representatives of LGBTQI+ fan groups, clubs, referees and players, with the aim of having lived experience voices included in our decision making.

In 2023 we supported the nationwide Month of Action in February, coinciding with LGBT history month. Working alongside LEAP and partners we supported the organisation of taster football events for the LGBTQI+ community, dedicated games, such as the SWPL clash between Hearts and Hibs, or the SPFL match between Celtic and Livingston. The Scottish FA East region also organised a women's recreational event in Dundee with over 100 attendees supporting the campaign.

The pinnacle of activity was the dedication of the SWNT game vs the FAW, at the Pinatar Cup, players wore awareness raising t-shirts in advance of the game, and both squads unveiled banners in support of the campaign before the match. The match was live on BBC Alba and highly publicised across our social media. <https://twitter.com/ScotlandNT/status/1628802674794823680>.

In addition to the month of action, the Scottish FA has via the FvH Scotland Steering Group supported the creation of the Proud Tartan Army – an LGBTQI+ supporters' group, which launched and had its first physical meeting, (for the Men's UEFA Qualifier against Norway) in 2023, organised with the support of LEAP Sport and the Scottish FA.

Ahead of season 2022/23, the Scottish FA introduced disciplinary rule 81, to tackle discrimination on the field of play in a more robust fashion than previously. Our review of the first year of this rule has shown that homophobia is the most prevalent form of discrimination on the field of play. As a result, we have been working with external partners, the steering group and member clubs on an effect method to tackle homophobia in the game and will be rolling out additional education and club resources across 2024. This work will be informed by lived experience and expert guidance.