Dear Sirs,

**Sport for Everyone: Call for Views, Phase 2. Response from the Observatory for Sport in Scotland**

As The Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS) noted in its submission to the Committee in February\(^1\) we are delighted that “Sport for Everyone” has been put on the Committee’s agenda and therefore given the attention and profile we firmly believe it deserves. OSS offered its support to the Committee then and we wish to reaffirm that offer now.

In this spirit we attach to this letter a detailed response to the Committee’s Interim Report (Appendix A) in which we have identified six areas where OSS might lend the Committee and Scottish Parliament practical and collaborative support. The overriding message of our response however is our agreement with the Report’s (Dr Clark’s/Glasgow Life’s) assertion that there is a large amount of information ‘out there’ and the priority is now for the collation of this data in order to put in place the foundations of an effective, evidence-based index; in short a map of current participation in sport across Scotland. We believe there are though still important gaps in existing data, specifically in community sports provision, club and some individual activity. ‘Casual activity’ such as going for a swim in a local authority pool will be recorded, but not for example, “boot camp” activity or going for a hill walk.

We believe OSS is well positioned to support (and lead on) the creation of this evidenced-based indexing and mapping. Our belief is that community sport is the underpinning infrastructure for growing participation, hence OSS has been established primarily to support the cause and development of community sport through independent research, based on robust academic and empirical evidence. OSS’ establishment, through philanthropic funding, has enabled it to be objective in purpose and therefore representative of all - from people on the frontline in sport to those aiming to transform policy. In addition we offer a pan-European understanding with the experience and skills to tailor this for the Scottish context. We are fortunate to have the Danish and Dutch Observatory Directors as Board Members of our new Scottish Observatory.

OSS works collaboratively with the university sector. We have a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of the West of Scotland (the Assistant Dean of the School of Science and Sport, Professor Richard Davison, is Chair of the OSS Research Advisory Group). Our relationship with the University of Stirling is driven by Dr Mathieu Winand (School of Health Sciences and Sport), with which OSS is a partner in a research bid on ‘Managing the ‘Wicked Problem’ of Declining Participation in Sport – A Comparative International Perspective’. Focussing on innovative practices, the research is to examine declining participation in sport and the role of organisations responsible for delivery. Countries involved are Canada, Germany, Sweden, USA, New Zealand.

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\(^1\) OSS letter (dated 20 February 2017) is attached to this letter as Appendix B for ease of reference.
Scotland and England. The Committee may also be interested that OSS is currently commissioning a suite of initial research papers some of which overlap with themes identified in the Committee’s interim report. Our intention is to hold a number of stakeholder seminars to discuss initial findings leading to a larger “academic meets stakeholder” conference in 2018. We would be happy to expand on this further.

We also concur with the Sport for Change agenda outlined in The Robertson Trust funded report and its recommendation to support organisations to develop their own way of measuring impact. This empowering approach would dovetail well with the above-mentioned indexing work, ensuring that a consistent, useful and sustainable model is created.

Volunteering is also a key topic but we believe it needs a deeper, evidence-based understanding, created in partnership with relevant universities and third sector agencies, before changes in policy and approach can be recommended. Understanding the motivations and best practice management for volunteers could underpin a Scottish Sports Volunteer Strategy. Perhaps important to mention here too, our Board and Research Advisory Group are all themselves volunteers spanning a wide variety of sports at many levels.

Other areas where we can offer a wider, pan-European, understanding and bring new insights are both the school estate and corporate sectors, which we would be keen to outline and elaborate on with you.

In conclusion, OSS’s overall approach is inspired by the theory of “Sporting Capital” a theory in its infancy but one analogous to “Human Capital”. Sporting Capital takes a 360-degree view of the social, psychological and physiological factors impacting engagement with sport for individuals in their communities. Geography, gender, age, ability, ethnicity and cost appear to be consistently impacting a decline in sports participation in Scotland. To understand and then reverse this trend we need to act now.

In all of this OSS is a willing and collaborative partner, serving to enrich and diversify our shared understanding and decision base for growing sport in Scotland. We look forward to working with you to take the vital next steps forward.

Yours sincerely

The Board of the Observatory for Sport in Scotland

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[2] The theory of Sporting Capital is the creation of Nick Rowe, former Head of Research for Sport England, who is a Research Consultant to OSS and a member of our Research Advisory Group.
APPENDIX A

Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS) Response to Health and Sport Committee, Interim Report, 4th Report (Session 5)

In the following paper OSS has set out six areas where we think OSS can assist the Committee take forward areas identified in its Interim Report:

1. Identification and collation of existing relevant sporting data to create a meaningful and practical evidence base.
2. Further development of tools to enable sports’ organisations to self-evaluate their activities consistently across Scotland.
4. Develop better understanding and insights on the use, and potential use of the school and local authority estate.
5. Examining the potential for unlocking the potential of corporate sports facilities.
6. Developing the understanding of Sporting Capital in a Scottish context and how this learning can be used to improve Scottish sporting participation.

Additionally, OSS is in the process of commissioning a suite of initial research papers which may be of interest to the committee. By way of example, the first two paper outlines are:

1) Trends in sport participation in Scotland - challenges and prospects: reviews current data (sport, physical activity and health surveys); examines overall trends (sport, exercise and physical activity); explores inequities; examines international comparators; makes links to social, economic, health and cultural key drivers; looks at prospect for next 10 years; makes observations about method limitations/improvements.

2) Sport and social inequality - unloading the dice. How does poverty and social class interact with sporting opportunities? What are the extent of the differences in participation? What is the interaction of gender, ethnicity, disability and class and their impact on participation in sport in Scotland? How does Scotland compare with high participant Scandinavian and Nordic countries? What can be learnt from these countries that is transferable?

1. Report pages 17 and 18

The most important section of the Report from an OSS standpoint is on pages 17 and 18, sections 66-73. Like Dr Julie Clark, we believe there is a large “amount of information out there, with time and money and staff could be wrangled into something cogent”. Her comment is endorsed by Glasgow Life: “Dr Clark is exactly right, the issue is not necessarily that new data needs to be collected; it is that some resource needs to be expended on collating the data that has already been collected”.

OSS’ vision fits well with the needs that Dr Clark and Glasgow Life have identified:
Our belief is that OSS, as an independent charitable organisation, would be well placed to do the work that Dr Clark suggests. An initial scoping exercise requires to be done to identify the information that is “out there”, pulling together “the data that has already been collected”. OSS believes it may have some of the resources necessary for this. This initial phase would be followed by applications to seek funding for a second phase encompassing the full amount of work required.

2. Robertson Trust and Sport for Change

The Committee Report makes reference to the important work funded by the Robertson Trust on Sport for Change. OSS has identified areas, which we believe we could help in taking aspects of the Robertson Report forward. Two of these we believe are relevant to the work of the Health and Sport Committee and to the points made on Pages 17 and 18 above.

- **Helping organisations develop their own ways of measuring impact.** Working with them to develop templates that can feed into national level measurement.

  The Trust Report, said that there “*was agreement that wherever possible organisations should be evaluating their activities consistently across Scotland, to build a good collective evidence base – accompanied by lots of positive stories about change brought through sport and physical activity*”

- **Evidence-based longitudinal work.**

  The Trust Report makes several references to this, including how it is needed in specific areas. OSS believes that there is considerable need for longitudinal work in Scotland on participation and outcomes, and that this is consistent with the work of the Health and Sport Committee. OSS is aware of the excellent work carried out by Sported and would be delighted to support them with the further development and implementation of tools which would support on the ground management as well as more central data collection. OSS has the potential through a Stakeholders Forum to reach across the sporting community.

3. Report pages 3, 4 and 11-13 on Volunteering

The thrust of these pages in the Interim Report in terms of volunteering is about:

- **Lack of recognition of volunteers** – “*Much of this work is unheralded. The Committee considers that, as a nation, we need to be better at recognising the vital work that goes on in our communities.*”

- **Disappointment that the Commonwealth Games have not produced a legacy of increased volunteering.** The Committee rightly recognises the work done in existing programmes like Active Schools and Young Leaders, but its conclusion is that “*it is disappointed to hear that the support for volunteering at the Games has not been converted into increased volunteering*”.

OSS wonders whether the Committee called for evidence outside the sporting network from major volunteering organisations like Volunteering Matters (formerly CSV) [https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/category/scotland/](https://volunteeringmatters.org.uk/category/scotland/).
In addition OSS has been made aware of the work being undertaken by the University of Southern Denmark, in particular in The Centre for Sport, Health and Civil Society. The Centre is engaged in research on:

- ‘Physical movements’ (sport, play and other kinds of movement),
- ‘Social movements’ (voluntary associations and voluntary work) with special focus on sports clubs and volunteering in sport.

Recently, the Centre has undertaken large survey studies on volunteering in sports clubs in Denmark and the development and challenges of civil society organisations and volunteering generally. It has also studied social integration and social capital among members of sports clubs and sports participation in deprived residential areas and among vulnerable groups. Through the evaluation of numerous sport development projects in Denmark, the Centre also has experience in developing proposals for evidence-based policies, sports activities and management practices.

OSS would be happy to share any information it holds or signpost the Committee to various organisations or sources which it may find useful.

4. Report page 14, school and local authorities and their sporting estate

For OSS this is an important issue. We have learned considerably from our contacts in Denmark and the Netherlands. As mentioned in our covering letter we have two Board Members from those two countries: the Director of the Danish Institute of Sports Studies and the Director of the Mulier Institute in Utrecht.

**OSS would recommend that the sportscotland audit be updated, broadening it to include the sporting estate managed by local authorities.** For example, the Edinburgh Evening News, June 5th, carried a story citing the loss of 70 football parks due to Council closures, housing developments and re-designations since 2000.

OSS has developed a research project to examine **Innovative Practice in Sports Development in Scotland**. The objectives are:

- To examine and review evidence-based innovative practice in local authority and third sector agency projects in Scotland aimed at increasing participation and delivering social, economic, educational, and health benefits.
- To encourage the profiling, sharing and promotion of innovative effective practice - the ingredients for success - on what works, why and in what context amongst delivery agencies for sport in Scotland and more widely across the UK.
- To promote improved evidence-based research and evaluation in local community sports projects.


In summary OSS believes we can offer a wider, pan-European, understanding and bring a focus and new insights on the use of the school and local authority estate, which we would be keen to outline and elaborate on with the Committee.
5. Company sports facilities

The Committee Report does not touch on this area. OSS believes it is an important one that could do with an audit and recommendations on how companies can be encouraged to provide more subsidised sports facilities for their employees, and how the existing tax provision for this might be extended. Provision of gyms, sporting and recreational facilities onsite has tax benefits for companies. The on-site part of this is important. If a company paid for membership of a local sports club or gym that would be a taxable benefit.

OSS would like to suggest an audit of corporate facilities might be useful as would the encouraging of companies to do as Scottish Widows have done (with gyms at its Port Hamilton and Dalkeith Road Offices). It may also be worth looking at how tax provision could be amended so that smaller businesses could provide subsidised sport in gyms and clubs for employees.

6. Sporting Capital

Lastly, OSS would like to highlight to the Committee that as part of a suite of research papers OSS will be commissioning a paper to test the theory of Sporting Capital in a Scottish context, a theory that is still in its infancy, but is analogous to Human Capital and can be defined as: “The stock of physical and psychological attributes and competencies that support and motivate an individual to participate in sport and to sustain that participation over time”

Street Games, the sports charity focussing on disadvantaged communities, commissioned a research study to explore the concept of ‘Sporting Capital’ and the role it can play in terms of influencing the likelihood of sustained participation in sport. This work was undertaken by Nick Rowe former Head of Research for Sport England, our research consultant and member of our Research Advisory Group.

OSS believes there is room to further develop the understanding of the concept of Sporting Capital and how this learning can be used in terms of “on the ground delivery” to build Sporting Capital, including that of young people in disadvantaged areas and thus ultimately develop a sporting habit for life. The nub of this is that OSS believes it is dangerous to consider sport as only an extension of the physical activity agenda as very frequently sport policies and practices would better align with social cohesion.

We raise the distinctive idea of Sporting Capital for the Committee’s interest and for it to consider as an area to explore in the future.

Observatory for Sport in Scotland

29 June 2017
To the Health and Sport Committee of the Scottish Parliament

Edinburgh, February 20th 2017

Topic: Sport for Everyone

Tomorrow, Tuesday February 21st, the Health and Sport Committee will convene to discuss Sport for Everyone, the progress that has been made since the 2014 Commonwealth Games and the challenges that still lie ahead of us.

The Observatory for Sport in Scotland (www.oss.scot) is pleased with the fact that the Health and Sport Committee has put ‘Sport for Everyone’ on its agenda. There is an overwhelming body of evidence that taking part in sport and being physically active in general, can greatly benefit people’s health and can considerably improve wellbeing and help reduce health costs. In addition, participating in sports can yield tremendous social benefits. Joining sport-clubs and becoming active as a volunteer, can greatly enhances people’s social resources. It gives people chances to develop new skills and draw social support in times of hardship. This is of significant value not only to the Scottish people themselves, but also to the Scottish social policies, health-system and to the economy.

The documents prepared for the meeting provide evidence that the 2014 Commonwealth Games have positively influenced the Scottish sport-infrastructure. Several of the Sport governing bodies have flourished, several clubs have been able to attract new members, public leisure facilities are said to have welcomed more customers, and 99% of the schools now offer at least 2 hours of Physical Education per week.

And yet, the documents also make clear that if everyone is to benefit from sports, much is still to be desired. As the Scottish Sport Association rightfully points out, cuts in budget of local authorities and schools place a serious threat over the ambition to make sports accessible to everyone. People that are interested in sports are taken back because of a lack of knowledge on sport-opportunities, and because of a shortage of (suitable and affordable) facilities (see the SPICe study). The energy that volunteers bring to clubs appears to get killed in the process by unnecessary bureaucratic requirements. And even though much seems to have been achieved already, and some clubs do report growth in memberships, the outcomes of the Scottish Household Survey point out that growth in sport-participation amongst adults has been limited or absent even these last five years (if we restrain from consideration of walking). Major differences in participation in sports still exist, and Scotland does not as yet harvest the full health and social benefits of sport for everyone.

In its first year’s of existence, the Observatory for Sport in Scotland (OSS) has learned from its contacts in countries that hold a successful track-record in establishing a sport-for-everyone system, Denmark and the Netherlands, what tremendous efforts it takes to achieve such a goal. The experiences in both countries tell us that we will only achieve sport-for-everyone if all players involved, local authorities, schools, clubs, and any other sport-provider, join forces and develop active policies. For this, it needs to be crystal-clear to everyone what good may come from being active in sport. This message needs to be put forward with much greater strength, as the SSA rightfully points out.
For this message to be believable though, it needs to be documented much better than currently is the case. If Scotland wants to move ahead in its policy for sport for everyone, there is tremendous need for more evidence based policy-making. If our aim is to convince citizens and stakeholders to invest in sports, it is not acceptable that our data tell us that participation rates are somewhere between 52% and 80%. We need to build research-databases that documents the benefits from sports, whether that be health-wise, social or economic. We lack easy-to-use websites and apps that will guide citizens to the clubs and facilities that are on offer, as there already available in Denmark, the Netherlands and in other countries. There is urgent need to help and support clubs, facility-owners and local authorities and leisure trusts in learning from existing proven best practices, in how to they can reach out to complex target-groups such as ethnic minorities, low income groups, elderly and adolescents in secondary education, and those that live with disability.

The OSS was established in 2016 by a group of Scottish citizens that firmly believe in the potential power of sports and that are, at the same time, concerned with the progress Scotland makes in using that power to the full. The OSS believes that the main road forward in this is by developing a solid evidence base for sport-policies, as countries that are currently ahead of Scotland, like Denmark and the Netherlands, have already put in place. Our agenda is to learn from those experiences, and share that knowledge through establishing an network of researchers, policy-makers and practitioners.

We believe that while we are committed to working closely together with all stakeholders involved, it is important that such knowledge is collected and debated from an objective viewpoint. As such we gladly offer our support to the Health and Sport Committee’s goal to achieve sport for every Scottish citizen.

The Observatory for Sport in Scotland