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Health, Social Care and Sport Committee  
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## **HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE AND SPORT COMMITTEE REPORT: INQUIRY INTO FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**

23 November 2023

Dear Convenor,

In line with your Committee's request for the Scottish Government's interim response prior to the debate on the inquiry on 28 November, I am writing to provide the Committee with the Scottish Government's initial view on your recent inquiry report.

I would like to take this opportunity to comment on key areas which will be of interest to the Committee ahead of the debate into the inquiry, prior to providing a full in-depth response to the recommendations in due course.

I would like to thank Committee members for this Report and to the individuals who came forward to share their experiences and knowledge.

Gender equality is at the heart of the Scottish Government's vision for a fairer Scotland. An ongoing priority is to support participation across all groups and tackle inequalities in participation. Work on greater participation by women and girls is crucial to this wider aim, and to improved long term health outcomes and life opportunities.

I want to finish by reiterating my commitment to this area of work and I look forward to further discussion at the debate next week.

Yours sincerely,



### **MAREE TODD MSP**

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# HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE - INQUIRY INTO FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

## Interim Scottish Government Response

### **The importance of sport and physical activity**

*There is extensive evidence of the benefits of regular participation in sport and physical activity for physical and mental health and wellbeing. In this context, the Committee is very concerned by evidence which shows a persistent gender gap in rates of participation in sport and physical activity that begins at the age of puberty and persists up to women in their early 40s.*

1. The Active Scotland Outcomes Framework describes our ambitions for sport and physical activity. Our aim is that Scotland meets the WHO global target set in 2018 of a 15% relative reduction in physical inactivity amongst adults by 2030.
2. We recognise that participation rates among women and girls are lower than among men. This gender gap is caused by many barriers, which can be categorised as 'practical,' 'personal' and 'social and cultural.' These play a significant role in women and girls' attitudes and behaviour and need different interventions to address.
3. In my evidence to the Committee on 6 June, I noted the positive progress that has been made in recent years around participation levels. Data from the Scottish Health Survey 2021 highlights that 73% of men and 65% of women met the moderate to vigorous intensity activity (MVPA) guidelines, providing a 2% narrowing of the gap between men and women since 2012, and an increase of 8% of women meeting the MVPA guidelines in that time.

### **Barriers faced by teenage girls**

#### Puberty

*The Committee welcomes progress to date in implementing the Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan and that this has included learning about menstrual health as part of the Scottish curriculum. The Committee hopes this will be beneficial in terms of normalising discussions about menstrual health, improving awareness and understanding about the impact menstruation can have on girls' participation in sport and physical activity and removing stigma around managing periods, particularly as this relates to girls' participation in P.E. classes.*

*The Committee calls on the Scottish Government, in responding to this report, to set out how it will evaluate the impact of improved learning about menstrual health as part of the school curriculum in addressing the significant decline in participation of girls in sport and physical activity connected with puberty.*

*The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to bring forward new statutory guidance on school uniforms that will increase the use of generic and unisex items of clothing, including for sports and P.E. clothing and equipment. It calls on the Scottish Government to provide further details of the expected timing for introduction of this new guidance and to set out how it will ensure that any new uniform requirements do not exacerbate existing concerns about body image or period leakage.*

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4. I will provide a more detailed response in due course on your recommendations relating to the Women's Health Plan and statutory guidance on school uniforms.

#### Gendered / restricted offerings

*The Committee is concerned by evidence submitted to the inquiry (and supported by the findings of UK-wide research) which suggests that many girls and women are given limited opportunities to participate in sports and physical activities that are stereotypically viewed as being male-dominated and therefore unlikely to be of interest to them or suitable for female participation.*

*The Committee welcomes anecdotal evidence submitted to the inquiry that the Active Schools programme has had a positive impact in broadening girls' access to a wider range of sports and physical activities, including those such as football or rugby that have historically been or continue to be viewed as primarily suitable for boys and men.*

*At the same time, the Committee notes that the most recent full evaluation of the Active Schools programme was completed in 2014. It therefore calls on the Scottish Government to commission an updated evaluation of the programme as a matter of urgency and suggests this should have a particular focus on evaluating its impact in supporting female participation and making recommendations to further improve the programme's performance against this metric in the future. The new evaluation should give specific consideration to whether girls are being given access to the same range and quality of sport and physical activity options as boys.*

5. The Committee report refers to Active Schools, one of sportscotland's flagship programmes, which aims to provide more and higher quality opportunities to take part in sport and physical activity before school, during lunchtime and after school, and to develop effective pathways between schools and sports clubs in the local community.

6. The programme has been evolving since 2004 and continues to be delivered each year by a network of over 400 professionals across all 32 local authorities, supporting the delivery of high quality sport and physical activity opportunities to all children and young people, taking an inclusive approach and providing targeted opportunities where there is a need.

7. It is successfully engaging girls in sport and physical activity, offering a range of fun activities in schools across the country. In the 2022-23 academic year, over 124,000 girls and young women made over two million visits to Active Schools sport and physical activity sessions. Females made up 46% of participants in the Active Schools programme. The highest participation activities among female participants in Active Schools are netball, football, multisports, dance and movement, and basketball.

8. I'd like to highlight the research commissioned by sportscotland and undertaken by Research Scotland to evaluate its blend of support within the schools and education environment (including the Active Schools programme). The report was published in May 2018 (later than the 2014 evaluation of Active Schools mentioned in the Committee report) and the findings of this research included:

- "Teachers also largely felt that Active Schools work responded to the needs of schools and pupils, taking targeted approaches as required – for example for girls or young people with additional support needs."

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- “Active Schools teams have worked hard to engage girls and young women, people with additional support needs and young people from areas of socio-economic disadvantage.”

### Focus on competition rather than having fun

*The Committee recognises that, while some girls and women may actively welcome a strong element of competition to their participation in sport and physical activity, many will want to focus on enjoyment. Girls and women who wish to engage in sport and physical activity primarily for fun should be offered ample opportunities to do so with like-minded participants.*

*The Committee has heard about good examples of organisations engaging with participants in an informal and relaxed environment, away from sports facilities, to discuss their expectations and preferences as well as the health and wellbeing benefits of regular participation in sport and physical activity.*

*The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to set out how it ensures the sport and physical activity programmes it supports strike an appropriate balance between supporting the aims of those women and girls who want to focus on competing in their sports and those who want to focus on enjoyment.*

9. The Committee report notes that girls should be provided the same range and quality of sport and physical options as boys, and that there should be activities with a focus on enjoyment as well as competition.

10. As well as the offering Active Schools provide, as described above, the sporting system creates sporting opportunities which are delivered across schools and education, clubs and communities and performance sport environments. This enables women and girls to take part in sport at the level they choose.

### Negative attitudes by boys

*The Committee has been concerned to hear extensive evidence that negative attitudes by boys continue to create a major barrier to girls' participation in sport and physical activity, particularly during adolescence. The Committee commends the "Don't Be That Guy" campaign to tackle sexual harassment, run by Police Scotland, and the positive impact this has had in addressing negative attitudes by boys which in turn helps to foster an environment of mutual respect between boys and girls when participating in sport and physical activity.*

*The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to consider what more it could do to learn lessons for future policy development from the implementation of the "Don't Be That Guy" campaign so far. The Committee further calls on the Scottish Government to consider how it can support wider roll-out of this campaign and other education programmes across all schools in Scotland aimed at tackling misogynistic attitudes and behaviours that discourage female participation in sport and physical activity.*

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11. You may be aware that Scottish football have recently joined Scottish Rugby in backing Police Scotland's That Guy sexual crime prevention campaign. I'll provide further information around the campaign in my full response to the Committee.

### Boys' domination of playground spaces

*To address boys' domination of playground spaces and provide improved opportunities for girls to take part in physical activities in those spaces, the Committee calls on the Scottish Government, local authorities and schools to work together to develop support and guidance for teachers and playground supervision staff to help them supervise playgrounds effectively and ensure all pupils, girls and boys alike, have an equal opportunity to use playground spaces for physical activity during the school day.*

12. I will respond to this recommendation in due course.

### **Barriers faced by women of all ages**

#### Women's health

*Beyond school settings and the teenage years, the Committee is concerned by evidence that women face persistent barriers to their participation in sport and physical activity as a result of a lack of understanding and education about the impacts of pregnancy, menopause and other women's health conditions on willingness and ability to participate in sport and physical activity.*

*The Committee believes that women themselves need to receive more and better information and advice about remaining physically active throughout their lives. Beyond this, there is an onus on health providers to provide more advice and information about how certain types of physical activity can actively help women to manage and alleviate the symptoms associated with conditions such as menopause and urinary incontinence.*

*The Committee also believes that sports organisations should be encouraged to offer a broader and more inclusive range of physical activities that are suitable for women experiencing specific women's health conditions and to actively promote activities that are suitable for women with a range of health conditions with a view to increasing rates of female participation.*

*The Committee calls on the Scottish Government, in responding to this report, to set out precisely what steps it will take as part of the implementation of its Women's Health Plan to address these issues and increase rates of participation in sport and physical activity by women affected by a range of women's health conditions including pregnancy, menopause, urinary incontinence and endometriosis.*

13. As previously mentioned, I will provide a more detailed response on your recommendations relating to the Women's Health Plan in due course.

14. sportscotland is considering the issue of menopause on physical activity levels and other associated impacts related to mental health both for regularly active women, a little bit active and the inactive. sportscotland will consider the best way to address this issue within

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sportscotland and the wider sporting system. There is already good work going on in this area such as Jog Scotland working to help their joggers learn about menopause and help their jogging groups to become as welcoming as possible to those going through menopause, with the jogscotland #MenopauseFriendly campaign.

15. The Female Athlete Performance Group is a sportscotland internal working group, pulling together multi-disciplinary expertise from across the Institute of Sport. The group, which was established in 2010, aims to develop understanding of female athletes and the related support being delivered.

16. sportscotland's plan is for the Female Athlete Performance Group to continue to develop resources to include topics such as the menstrual cycle, breast health and bra fitting, pregnancy, post-partum support, and menopause, alongside the connection to research and the engagement of female athletes to listen to their experiences and recommendations for our future planning.

17. The Working with Female Athletes online learning platform was launched in November 2022. This has been developed as part of pilot programmes with Institute supported athletes and is now available to a wider audience to help increase awareness, understanding and support. It includes access to a free e-learning module which will help coaches, parents, practitioners, and athletes themselves to understand female athlete health and how it relates to sport. The most recent e-learning module, Bras and Breast Health, was released in June.

18. Going forward, the ambition for the working group is that all athletes, coaches, and staff are comfortable having conversations about female athlete health and understand the approaches to take to positively impact on training/performance. The Group's forward plans include, developing 'the how'. How to enable a culture and environment where everyone feels they can talk about female athlete health. This includes collaborating and engaging with partners in applied research and resource development in pregnancy, post-partum support, relative energy deficiency in sport (RED-S), stress incontinence, and peri menopause/menopause.

#### Negative body image and a lack of self confidence

*The Committee recognises that many people, men and women, may be deterred from participating in sport and physical activity because they lack self-confidence or experience negative body image. The Committee believes that sporting venues need to do more to show themselves as welcoming and inclusive to participants of all abilities and to offer tailored advice and support to those who may be initially reluctant to participate due to a lack of self-confidence or experiencing a negative body image.*

19. The Committee will be aware that local authorities, and often arms-length leisure trusts, are responsible for the provision of public local sports facilities. Other sport and physical activity facilities are owned and operated by a wide range of private and third sector organisations. sportscotland endorse Quest, the UK Quality Scheme for Sport and Leisure.

20. When investing in facilities through their Sports Facilities Fund, sportscotland prioritise projects that have a strong, clear and embedded focus on the promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion in sport and physical activity.

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### Lack of positive role models

*The Committee has been encouraged to hear examples of good practice in encouraging more girls and women to put themselves forward for coaching and leadership roles in sport and physical activity, such as the Active Schools programme, leadership and coaching programmes run by sportscotland and the young women in sport leadership programme provided by SAMH. The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to set out what it is doing to build on the positive experience of programmes such as these to try to attract even more girls and women into leadership roles in sport and physical activity in the future.*

*The Committee highlights the important role men in leadership roles have to play in demonstrating a real commitment to promoting and encouraging female participation in sport and physical activity. The Committee believes sporting organisations have a critical role to play in educating male coaches and leaders within their sport about the important role and responsibilities they have in this regard and to encourage them to demonstrate positive and inclusive behaviours.*

*The Committee also calls on the Scottish Government to set out what it is doing to gain a better understanding of what currently prevents girls and women putting themselves forward for coaching, leadership and volunteering roles in sport and physical activity and how those barriers can be overcome.*

21. There is a significant amount of work being undertaken by sportscotland to attract more girls and women into leadership roles in sport and physical activity. Each year two pupils from every secondary school in Scotland have the opportunity to be selected as sportscotland Young Ambassadors to promote sport and motivate and inspire other young people to get involved in sport in their schools, clubs and local communities. As role models and leaders for other young people, Young Ambassadors can have a pivotal role within their school and wider community. There have been over 7,000 Young Ambassadors in Scotland since the programme started in 2012 and young women have consistently made-up over 50% of Young Ambassadors each year.

22. The sportscotland Young People's Sport Panel provides a national platform to represent the voice of young people across Scotland. The role of the panel is to help influence and shape the future of sport in Scotland and to raise the profile of sport. The programme's principle is that young people's views are heard and valued, and they have the opportunity to influence decision making and drive change. Fourteen of the current cohort of twenty panel members are female.

23. sportscotland have also recently announced a new partnership with the Leadership Skills Foundation. Both organisations will be working together to identify and simplify opportunities and pathways between coaching and sports leadership to benefit the Scottish sports system. Working together, both organisations intend to amplify the opportunities available to young people across Scotland to support their learning and development.

24. Sports need to ensure they are truly inclusive of the communities that they take place in. From the playing field to the boardroom.

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25. That's also why we are supporting SSA through their On Board for Sport programme. This is a SGB specific support service to help improve the diversity and skill-base of SGB Boards.

#### Mixed versus single sex provision

*Amongst the evidence submitted to the inquiry, the Committee recognises a wide range of different views and experiences related to single sex versus mixed participation in sport and physical activity. With this in mind, the Committee concludes that there should be no "one size fits all" approach to provision across different categories of sport and physical activity. However, where there is demand and clear evidence that this would help to encourage participation, the Committee believes that girls and women should be offered greater opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity in a single sex environment.*

*At the same time, with particular reference to PE in schools, the Committee believes more work is needed to make mixed PE classes inclusive and enjoyable for all participants. This can partly be achieved by addressing potentially negative attitudes and behaviours of boys through better training and education of teachers and pupils. The Committee calls on the Scottish Government, in responding to this report, to set out how it will work with local authorities to take forward this recommendation across all schools in Scotland.*

26. We recognise that offering single sex sports opportunities can help build confidence in sports participation. It can also be essential to ensure that some women, especially those from ethnically diverse communities and a range of religions, can participate in sport and physical activity.

27. We are aware there is no one size fits all approach to provision and all sports organisations and providers can play a role, with local deliverers best placed to identify the needs of their communities including for women and girls. Through sportscotland funded programmes, including Active Schools, Community Sport Hubs, and Scottish Governing Bodies of sport clubs, events and performance programmes, we see a wide range of single sex provision of sport.

28. Many partners across the sector, including Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport, are offering a variety of opportunities alongside traditional competitive pathways. I will provide some more detailed information about these when I respond fully to the inquiry.

29. I will respond to your recommendation around making mixed PE classes inclusive and enjoyable for all participants in due course.

#### Caring responsibilities

*The Committee recognises the significant barrier childcare and other caring responsibilities presents to female participation in sport and physical activity.*

*In this context, the Committee believes that sports centres and other community facilities should be actively encouraged to offer opportunities for women to access childcare while participating in sport and physical activity or to be able to participate in this activity at the same time as their children.*

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*The Committee would also support employers becoming "wellbeing employers" to allow employees time to be physically active or to engage in volunteering as sports leaders or coaches. The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to set out how it can contribute to supporting employers to take this approach and to learning from existing examples of good practice.*

*For the sake of their own health and wellbeing, the Committee firmly believes that unpaid carers, the majority of whom are women, must be given the time they need to participate regularly in sport and physical activity. To enable this to happen, the Committee calls on the Scottish Government to redouble its efforts to ensure all unpaid carers are able to access the rights, including regular breaks, to which they are entitled under the Carers Rights Scotland Act.*

30. I will respond to this recommendation in due course.

#### Harassment and safety concerns

*The Committee has been concerned to hear extensive evidence of the harassment and abuse girls and women can be subjected to while exercising and believes there needs to be a zero tolerance approach towards tackling such unacceptable behaviour.*

*In particular, the Committee calls on the Scottish Government to set out what guidance it is providing to sport organisations and governing bodies to ensure they have robust policies in place to tackle instances of harassment and abuse of all kinds, including those which are directed towards female participants. Above all, the Committee concludes that the governing bodies responsible for all types of sport and physical activity must be required to have in place clear, transparent and easy-to-navigate processes for receiving, handling and dealing with complaints about harassment or abuse.*

*The Committee also calls on the Scottish Government to set out what guidance it has in place, or any plans for the development of future guidance, to ensure considerations around personal safety are properly integrated into decision making around the design, construction and maintenance of infrastructure and facilities that support physical activity including active travel such as walking, running and cycling.*

*The Committee further recognises the potential for feminist town planning to make a positive contribution towards improving the safety of basic infrastructure for public transport and active travel and making it better suited to the needs of female participants. It calls on the Scottish Government to set out what steps it will take to encourage the systematic use of feminist town planning in the design of future active travel and transport infrastructure.*

31. Gender equality is at the heart of the Scottish Government's vision for a fairer Scotland, one where women and girls have, and are empowered to exercise, equal rights and opportunities, have equitable access to economic resources and decision making, and live their lives free from all forms of violence, abuse and harassment.

32. We know that behaviours we see in a sporting context are reflective of wider society. However, I believe sport has the power to lead the way on some of the challenges facing wider society.

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33. Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport (SGBs) are responsible for the development and management of their policies and procedures relating to complaints. Sport organisations will have their own disciplinary processes that would normally allow them to take action against individuals directing misogynistic harassment at a women or girl in a sporting context.

34. In 2023, sportscotland awarded a contract for a new Case Management Support Service (CMSS) to embed additional safeguarding and investigations resource in partners.

35. This service will provide a new expert resource service for SGBs to effectively manage wellbeing and protection concerns for all who participate in sport, covering the following areas:

- Investigations and concerns
- Disciplinary matters
- Dispute management Development of resources
- Building of knowledge, skills and competence

36. Central to the service will be the development of resources that include guidance, tools and templates to support SGBs. The service will also seek to build knowledge, skills and competence of SGB staff and Child Wellbeing and Protection Officers (CWPOs) through training, mentoring, and self-directed learning. This approach will help SGBs managing complaints in relation wellbeing and protect in a consistent manner. In more complex cases the service will play a lead role in the investigation process.

37. The service is focused on providing support to SGBs in order that they have an effective system in place to manage wellbeing and protection concerns. The beneficiaries will be all who participate in sport and especially those children, young people, protected adults and vulnerable others who may be at risk of harm whilst participating in sport and physical activity.

38. I am aware of concerns emerging from a number of reviews and from stakeholders, that current processes may not provide sufficiently independent and robust mechanisms for addressing complaints. This has particularly been highlighted where a governing body is acting both as promoter and regulator. I have asked sportscotland to undertake work to provide an overview of the issues and the potential challenges that that exist in this area, and to consider potential solutions to these challenges, identifying any that may be addressed within the current sports governance frameworks, as well as any that may require alternative solutions.

39. I will respond in due course around the Committee's recommendations on design guidance for active travel as well as feminist town planning in the design of future active travel and transport infrastructure.

#### Facilities, including changing rooms

*The Committee recognises widespread concerns that facilities and infrastructure for sport and physical activity tend to be catered primarily to the needs of male participants and opportunities for female participation are more restricted as a consequence. While acknowledging the commitment of many organisations to take greater account of female requirements in the future design of facilities and infrastructure, the Committee would advocate much more consistent use of equality impact assessments to ensure this commitment is effectively delivered in practice.*

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*The Committee is concerned that, since its predecessor considered the issue as part of its inquiry into Sport for Everyone, little progress seems to have been made towards improving access to the school estate for sport and physical activity at a community level. It is firmly of the view that improving this access would make an important contribution to increasing female participation in sport and physical activity. It would therefore encourage the Scottish Government and local authorities, as a matter of urgency, to revisit the issue and to develop a targeted action plan to improve the accessibility of the school estate as a valuable community resource.*

*The Committee acknowledges concerns that the more recent shift in design of changing facilities towards the creation of "changing villages" has prompted concerns from many women that these lack adequate levels of privacy. The Committee calls on sportscotland and the Scottish Government to investigate opportunities to update guidance on changing facilities in a way that maintains the goal of improved inclusivity while providing enhanced privacy for those women who desire it.*

40. As previously highlighted, local authorities, and often arms-length leisure trusts, are responsible for the provision of public local sports facilities. Other sport and physical activity facilities are owned and operated by a wide range of private and third sector organisations. sportscotland does not provide detailed guidance for the design of changing facilities within sport and leisure facilities.

41. You will be aware that we have committed through Programme for Government 2023-24 to convene a working group, including representatives from COSLA, sportscotland and sporting and community organisations, to explore how community access to facilities, such as schools, can be maximised and enhanced, and identify areas of best practice across the country.

### Funding

*The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to double investment in sport and active living to £100 million per year over the current term of the Scottish Parliament. At the same time, the Scottish Government must recognise that there will be many competing demands for this increased funding. In this context, the Scottish Government should set out how funding will be suitably targeted to ensure the goal of increased participation and visibility of women and girls in sport and physical activity is made a key priority.*

*Given responsibility for the overwhelming majority of public funding for sport and physical activity lies with local authorities, the Committee acknowledges the significant financial pressures they and the Scottish Government currently face. Nonetheless, it is concerned by the extent to which local authority funding for sport and physical activity has been cut over recent years and the particular negative impact this will have had on female participation.*

*The Committee calls on the Scottish Government, in responding to this report, to address the possibility of introducing multi-year funding for sportscotland with a view to improving certainty for the sector. In particular, it calls on the Scottish Government to address to what extent a multi-year approach to funding of sport and physical activity might improve rates of, and break down barriers to, female participation.*

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*The Committee believes more work needs to be done to measure the broader impact investment in sport and physical activity can have as a preventative measure that improves health and wellbeing while reducing the societal costs of poor health and wellbeing. The Committee would also be interested to see more sporting bodies being encouraged to undertake analysis of the social return on investment in their sport, including the wider benefits to female health and wellbeing.*

*Drawing on best practice examples from other countries, the Committee would support an element of conditionality being introduced to the allocation of public funding for sport and physical activity, whereby recipients would need to demonstrate that an appropriate proportion of that funding is being directed towards increasing female participation.*

*In the context of statistical evidence showing a comparatively high proportion of those regularly participating in swimming are women, the Committee is concerned to hear evidence of the particularly intense financial pressures community swimming pools are currently under. Before reaching future spending decisions in this area, the Committee would urge central and local government to give careful consideration to the disproportionate negative impact any decision to close community swimming facilities is likely to have on rates of female participation in physical activity.*

42. sportscotland already provides Scottish Government Bodies of sport and local authorities with multi-year in principal investment commitment. These decisions vary in length depending on the context of each partner, but where a partner has demonstrated a long-term plan and good governance, sportscotland will look to provide a four-year in principal funding commitment.

43. Any increase in investment will be used to ensure we support participation across all groups and address inequalities in access to physical activity and sport.

44. Earlier this year sportscotland announced record annual investment figures to support the delivery of sport and physical activity. Across 2023/2024 sportscotland will invest up to £36.7million in Scottish Governing Bodies of Sport (SGBs), local authorities and wider national partners – an 8.6% increase on the previous year and a record high for investment in core activities. Additional projects that prioritise inclusion are also being funded as part of the investment.

45. There is a significant body of evidence highlighting the benefits of physical activity. Physical inactivity is identified by WHO as one of the four main modifiable behaviours which increase the risk of Non-Communicable Disease alongside tobacco, unhealthy diet and the harmful use of alcohol.

46. It helps to prevent heart disease, strokes, diabetes, and a number of cancers; it plays an important part in helping us maintain a healthy weight; and reduces the risk of developing depression.

47. Some analysis of the direct cost of physical inactivity is available. The most recent in 2015 estimated that the cost to the NHS in Scotland as more than £77 million per year or around £14.60 per person living in the country. Public Health Scotland have commissioned

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new analysis of the cost of inactivity linked to the Burden of Disease which is expected to be available in spring 2024.

### **Addressing intersecting barriers to participation**

*The Committee acknowledges that girls facing intersecting barriers to participation in sport and physical activity will encounter these barriers from an early age. Just as it has recommended improved education in schools around menstrual health, the Committee believes work is needed to improve equalities education related to participation in sport and physical activity. This should improve understanding amongst teachers and fellow pupils of the importance of creating a friendly and inclusive environment for all participants, about any additional support girls facing intersecting barriers to participation may need to enable them to participate and to actively tackle stigma and discrimination, be that conscious or unconscious.*

*The Committee recognises the importance of positive role models to encourage more girls and women facing intersecting barriers to participation in sport and physical activity and to give them the confidence to aspire to progress into elite sport in the future. The Committee strongly encourages the Scottish Government, local authorities, sports governing bodies and schools to work together to identify and promote positive role models who properly reflect diversity and inclusion. Recruitment policies and strategies should encourage and support diverse applicants for coaching and leadership roles.*

*Similarly, imagery and messaging used to encourage participation in sport and physical activity should reflect a culture that is as welcoming and inclusive of diversity as possible.*

*The Committee recognises the particular barriers to participation in sport and physical activity faced by disabled girls and women, related to a lack of accessible and suitably adapted facilities and infrastructure. The more systematic use of equality impact assessments will help to ensure the design of facilities and infrastructure meets the particular needs of disabled participants.*

*The Committee has been encouraged to hear evidence of the success initiatives such as the culture, heritage and sport stream of the Welsh Government's Anti-racist Wales Action Plan have had in encouraging greater participation in sport and physical activity by girls and women from minority ethnic backgrounds. The Scottish Government should explore what lessons it can learn from such initiatives and the potential for similar initiatives to be rolled out in Scotland in the future.*

*The Committee welcomes suggestions made by contributors to the inquiry of ways in which community sport venues can be made more welcoming and inclusive of a diversity of participants, including those from the LGBTQ+ community. In particular, as advocated elsewhere in this report, it recognises the opportunity for changing villages to cater to a diverse range of participants by being family friendly while at the same time offering single sex spaces and options for individual privacy for those who desire it.*

*Related to the Scottish Government's commitment to double funding for sport and physical activity over the course of the current parliamentary term, the Committee notes the Minister's subsequent commitment to this inquiry that she would seek to target this additional funding towards tackling inequality. The Committee highlights evidence submitted to this and other recent inquiries which demonstrates that women tend to be disproportionately impacted by socio economic inequality. In light of this evidence, it would urge the Scottish Government to*

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*make increasing participation in sport and physical activity by those women and girls experiencing intersecting inequalities an overriding priority for investment of this additional funding.*

48. I will respond in more detail around the recommendation around equalities education related to participation in sport and physical activity in due course.

49. Fit for Girls is a national programme developed in partnership between sportscotland and the Youth Sport Trust. Since 2008, it has continually developed to meet the needs of girls and the sport and physical activity workforce in Scotland. The key principles of the Fit for Girls principles are:

- Valuing girls' voices
- Promoting peer role models
- Co-creating projects
- Celebrating 'Unstoppable Girls'

50. Through this programme sportscotland are offering support to local authorities, governing bodies and other national partners who have identified a need to improve the provision for girls and young women and are committed to empowering girls as part of that process. This support takes the form of two workshops delivered to an identified group of girls aged between 11 and 18.

51. sportscotland also offer a workshop for the sector workforce (e.g. Active Schools Coordinators, coaches, volunteers, teachers etc) led by girls who have participated in the above workshops and supported by the Fit for Girls Tutors. This workshop equips the network with the knowledge and tools needed to improve opportunities for girls by understanding their specific needs and strengthening the connections between schools, clubs and communities.

52. In relation to identifying and promoting positive role models, sportscotland is involved in a range of activities to identify and promote positive role models who reflect diversity and inclusion.

53. Active Girls Day is an annual initiative delivered by sportscotland which celebrates the amazing work going into girls' sport, the progress around girls' participation, and the incredible role models making it happen. A promotional toolkit is available to support partners to get involved.

54. As noted above, sportscotland's Young Ambassadors programme has been successful in attracting large numbers of young women into leadership roles in sport and physical activity. As role models and leaders for other young people, Young Ambassadors can have a pivotal role within their school and wider community.

55. Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Week is an annual Scottish Government campaign which shines a light on the ways in which women and girls are participating in sport and physical activity, and the many health benefits it can bring to their lives whilst addressing inequalities.

56. In 2023 we celebrated the Week with the theme 'Celebrating Inclusion for Women and Girls in Sport and Physical Activity' supported by sportscotland, Scottish Governing Bodies,

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Active Schools, and wider key partners, engaging and building content. Partners were encouraged to celebrate inclusion, highlight role models, and share how they provide opportunities for women and girls to be more physically active.

57. sportscotland published design guidance for sports facilities. This design guidance includes guidance on developing inclusive and accessible facilities. The guidance is published and openly accessible on the sportscotland website.

58. I will respond with more detail on our anti-racism work and making sports venues more welcoming in due course.

59. As I set out above, any increase in investment will be used to ensure we support participation across all groups and address inequalities in access to physical activity and sport.

### **Key barriers to female participation at an elite level**

#### Funding and pay

*The Committee welcomes evidence of significant progress in terms of pay and prize money for women in elite sport over recent years but acknowledges there is still much more to be done to achieve anything approaching parity with elite men in sport.*

*The Committee calls on the Scottish Government to explore whether the creation of an independent Women's Sport Trust for Scotland, comparable to the existing body in England, could support the growth in women's sport in Scotland, including growing the revenue generated by women's sports and reducing reliance for funding on the men's game.*

*The Scottish Government should also commission research to explore options for the development of sustainable career pathways for women in elite sport that enable them to pursue their sport at an elite level while earning a sustainable income.*

60. sportscotland's role in performance sport relates to providing investment, expertise and support services to athletes and governing bodies of Commonwealth, Olympic and Paralympic sports. Individual athletes on World Class Performance programmes receive funding from UK Sport. The level of funding is equal for a male or female athlete. This is also the case for the sportscotland Athlete Personal Awards that have been awarded to athletes preparing for major games.

61. The Scottish Government previously provided one-off financial support to allow the Scotland's Women's National Team to train full-time in the lead up to the 2019 FIFA World Cup.

62. In June 2022, the Scottish Government also provided one-off financial support for Scottish Rugby ahead of the Scotland Women competing in the Rugby World Cup. This funding supported Scottish Rugby in their transition to greater financial support to their women's national team from their own funds and to deliver a long-term impact.

#### Clothing and equipment

*The Committee calls on all sporting organisations and governing bodies to ensure that any guidance they produce regarding clothing and equipment for women's sport and physical*

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*activity adheres to the principles of practicality, functionality and freedom of choice. The Committee believes there is an urgent need for further research to gain a better understanding of the impact of menstruation and women's health conditions on training and performance of women in elite sport. It calls on sports governing bodies to prioritise investment in this type of research and on the Scottish Government to explore what more it can do to support and encourage research in this area.*

*The Committee similarly calls for the development and implementation of a targeted programme of education across all sports to give coaches a better understanding of how women's health conditions can affect performance and training and to foster a culture of greater openness between female athletes and their coaches about how certain conditions may affect them and how these can be effectively managed. The Committee is concerned by evidence that many women in elite sport are forced to make a choice between starting a family and continuing their career with a general expectation that women in elite sport will have to end their sporting career when they choose to become pregnant. The Committee believes that, with better support, women in many sports should be able to continue their sporting career post-partum. It has been encouraged by examples of good practice in a number of different sports and different countries where women receive appropriate support to be able to continue their sporting career after becoming a mother. We would urge action by sporting bodies to disseminate best practice in this area more widely across all fields of sport and physical activity at an elite level.*

63. I refer to the information above on the Female Athlete Performance Group which is relevant to this recommendation.

#### Sexism and abuse

*The Committee has been saddened to hear substantial evidence of women in elite sport and female sports journalists being subjected to sexism and abuse and reiterates its view that there needs to be a zero tolerance approach to tackling such unacceptable behaviour.*

*The Scottish Government, in responding to this report, must provide an update on progress towards implementing the recommendations of the 2019 "Levelling the Playing Field" report and in particular, what impact it expects these measures to have in tackling instances of sexism and abuse towards women in elite sport.*

*The Scottish Government should consider whether an independent body should be set up to tackle misconduct and abuse in sport and, if not, what alternative strategy it has to tackle instances of sexism and abuse towards women in elite sport.*

64. Sexism, misogyny and abuse of any kind is unacceptable, and we must all condemn and challenge this behaviour. You will be aware that we are consulting on draft laws to implement the recommendations of the Working Group on misogyny and the criminal law chaired by Baroness Kennedy. I will provide further information on this in due course.

65. As I set out above, I have asked sportscotland to undertake work to provide an overview of the issues and the potential challenges that exist around complaints processes, and to consider potential solutions to these challenges, identifying any that may be addressed within the current sports governance frameworks, as well as any that may require alternative solutions.

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66. The recommendations of “Levelling the Playing Field” are not connected to addressing sexism and abuse towards women in elite sport.

#### Media coverage and reporting

*The Committee is firmly of the view that improved media coverage of women's elite sport is vital to encouraging greater female participation in sport and physical activity. It is therefore encouraging that the level of media coverage of women's elite sport has increased substantially in recent years. Nonetheless, a great deal more remains to be done. There should be a particular focus on increasing routine coverage of women's elite sport outside the window of major international tournaments and on broadening coverage to include a wider range of different sports and a greater diversity of women in elite sport, including those with disabilities or from minority ethnic backgrounds.*

*The Committee notes evidence suggesting a need for increased Government investment to enable media coverage of women's elite sport to be further expanded in the future. The Scottish Government should consider whether further investment is required and how this might be targeted cost-effectively to maximise the return in terms of expanded media coverage of women's elite sport.*

*The media themselves must also take proactive steps to encourage greater diversity and inclusion within sports journalism, particularly as this relates to organisational culture and recruitment practices.*

*The Committee welcomes the Scottish Government's commitment to organise a Scottish Sport Media Summit during the course of 2023. It should update the Committee by December 2023 on the outcome of the Summit and any particular conclusions or recommendations likely to have a bearing on future media coverage of women's elite sport and how it intends to take these forward.*

67. I note the recommendation to consider whether there is a need for increased Government investment to enable media coverage of women's elite sport to be further expanded in the future.

68. I will also undertake to update the Committee on the outcome of the planned Scottish Sport Media Summit.

#### Impact of social media on female participation at all levels

*The Committee recognises the huge influence social media can exert - both positive and negative - on girls and women and their attitudes to and engagement with sport and physical activity. The Committee would encourage sports organisations and governing bodies to consider the development and implementation of proactive social media strategies that seek to amplify the voice of positive role models and to disseminate positive messaging around the health benefits of regular participation in sport and physical activity as well as challenging misogynistic behaviour and attitudes.*

*The Scottish Government should set out what support and guidance it can provide to sports organisations and governing bodies with the development and implementation of their social media strategies.*

*The Scottish Government should work closely with the UK Government to ensure that, through implementation of the UK Online Safety Bill, social media companies can be issued*

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*with suitably comprehensive guidance and codes of practice that address the harmful impact of negative body image content on social media. This should include strong sanctions against those companies that persistently fail to regulate such content on their platforms.*

69. Female athletes have delivered some of the most high-profile Scottish performances at recent Olympics, Paralympics and Commonwealth Games. sportsotland is committed to giving these female athletes the same coverage and prominence as their male counterparts across their social media channels.

70. sportsotland facilitates a Scottish Governing Bodies of sport (SGBs) communications group to provide SGBs with a platform to share, collaborate and learn. This group has covered all areas of communications, including social media.

71. I will respond to your recommendation around the UK Online Safety Bill in due course.

### Research and evaluation

*The Committee acknowledges the existence of data on participation in sport and physical activity by people from different ethnic backgrounds through the Scottish Government's Active Schools and Active Scotland programmes. Nonetheless, it has been concerned to receive evidence of an overall lack of sufficient research and data to inform policy-making in this area, whether that is aimed at understanding the impact of certain women's health conditions on sporting performance at an elite level or capturing an accurate picture of current rates of participation in different sports by women and girls, including those facing a range of intersecting inequalities.*

*The Committee highlights the critical importance of creating an accurate and comprehensive benchmark to measure the effectiveness of future policy interventions aimed at increasing female participation in sport and physical activity. It therefore urges the Scottish Government, as a matter of priority and as recommended by the OSS, to commission a population-level survey to measure current rates of participation in sport and physical activity, broken down by age, gender, socio-economic backgrounds, disability, sexuality, ethnic and religious background and other inequalities.*

*The Scottish Government should also explore ways of incentivising research organisations in receipt of public funding to direct more of their resources towards sports science research specifically focused on women.*

*While accepting there is already an existing focus within the National Performance Framework on being active and healthy, the Committee would welcome a debate, as part of the forthcoming five-year review, as to whether a more specific National Outcome on rates of participation in sport and physical activity could act as a positive driver of future policy to increase rates of female participation.*

72. The Scottish Government publishes data derived from the Scottish Household survey on participation in physical activity and sport. These data include participation by age, gender, socio-economic status, health condition and educational qualification. We publish data derived from the Scottish Health Survey on the percentage of the population who met

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the Chief Medical Officer's recommended levels of physical activity. These data can be broken down by age, gender, long term illness and equivalised income.

73. We are working to identify ways we can report on ethnicity, sexual orientation, pregnancy/maternity and religion.

74. See [SHS Data Explorer \(shinyapps.io\)](#) [Scottish Health Survey \(shinyapps.io\)](#)

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