



SCOTTISH FA COMMUNITY FOOTBALL IN SCOTLAND

**INSIGHTS POST COVID
AND BEYOND**

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INTRODUCTION

Community football is a pastime and a passion for people of all ages and backgrounds in every corner of Scotland, providing a range of benefits from health, fitness, friendship, and camaraderie as well as a variety of benefits for local communities.

The Scottish Football Association commissioned the Diffley Partnership to undertake research, which was wide in scope, engaging with the general public, community football clubs and key individuals who work within those clubs. The central aim was to gain insight into how the grassroots football community is managing in the post Covid environment and assessing the challenges that they face to survive and exceed in the future.

This report sets out the findings from that research, setting out the insights that participants in all parts of the study shared with us. We would like to thank all those who took part in the research for being so generous with their time and open in talking about their attitudes and experiences.

METHODOLOGY

The research conducted for this study comprised a range of different audiences and used a variety of techniques, namely:

- A nationally representative survey of over 2,000 adults (16+) in Scotland,
- A survey of over 200 community football clubs in Scotland,
- Three focus groups with community football clubs, in a range of locations spanning the breadth of Scotland,
- In-depth interviews with representatives from ten community champion clubs across the country.

FOOTBALL'S IMAGE COMMUNITY ACTIVITY AND EQUALITIES



COMMUNITY ACTIVITY

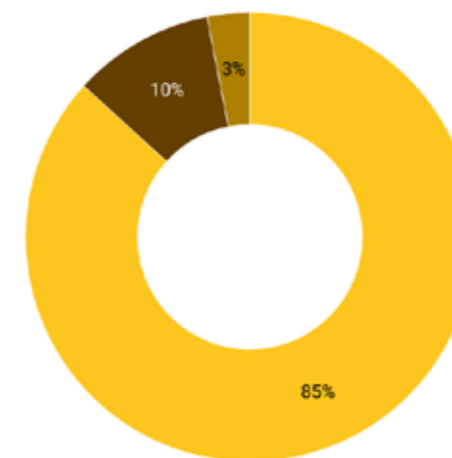
Football clubs play an essential role in the local communities in which they are based. The survey of club representatives, the qualitative interviews and focus groups reveal the nature and depth of the links between clubs and their communities.

The vast majority of club representatives (85%) agree that 'the football club helps to bring the local community together'.

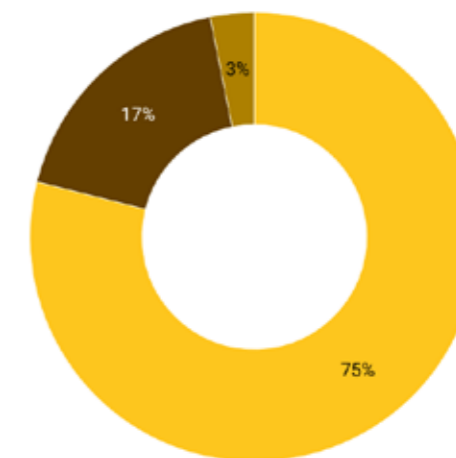
Three quarters (76%) of representatives agreed that 'playing football prevents players at this club from being involved in antisocial or criminal activity'.

Proportion of club respondents agreeing with the following statements:

Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree



The football club helps to bring the local community together



Playing football prevents players at this club from being involved in antisocial or criminal activity

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These broad views from clubs across the country are supported and enhanced by the range of activities that qualitative participants highlighted during the interviews and focus groups.

For many clubs it is clear that this is an emerging role, one which they take seriously and want to expand, with many emphasising the responsibility they feel to 'give back' to their communities. For professional clubs, this may involve specific Community Trusts to drive outreach into local areas.

“ A community club, to us, is someone who does a lot of internal and outreach groups, so we try to cover every aspect of our localities and engage with as many people and work in the community as much as possible, whether that's a supporter of the club or somebody who's got an affiliation or lives locally.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

For local clubs, the range of activity they undertake is significant and wide, underlining the desire most clubs have to play an active role beyond playing football itself. Case studies include:

- Charity sponsorships to raise funds; this includes events like the annual Kilt Walk where club players/staff will participate to raise funds for community projects as well as for the club itself
- Collecting for local foodbanks
- Running mental health awareness campaigns and providing mental health support
- Working with local criminal justice agencies to bring more players/staff/volunteers into football
- Offering facilities, where available, to other community groups to access and use

“ We’ve started working with the criminal justice department, so particularly with an aim of trying to bring females back into the community again and feeling part of the community, cos I think once they come out of prison that can be a really challenging time for them to be accepted back in.

Professional clubs play a positive role in community engagement, however, one issue raised was that, for some local clubs which operate in the same location as a full-time professional club, community engagement efforts can be swamped by what the professional club is doing through its grassroots activities.

“ I’m running a mental health awareness campaign at the moment through the club and it’s that sort of thing where we’ll do something at the club level because the club is so intrinsically linked through to the community, so we’ve got a great reputation within the community but it’s learning to do these things as a volunteer organisation – it’s a fairly new part of it and we’re learning as we go along but I think it’ll become bigger and I hope we never get to the stage where we say ‘no, forget all that, we just need to do football forget the rest.

INCLUSION AND EQUALITIES

It is clear that community clubs across Scotland are aware of issues around inclusion and equalities, take those issues seriously and are committed to the Football for All agenda.

However, it is also clear that public perceptions in terms of community football’s image and environment do not entirely reflect those efforts being made by clubs to promote a positive image of the game. While those differences in perceptions should not be overstated, they are nonetheless worth stating and reflecting upon.

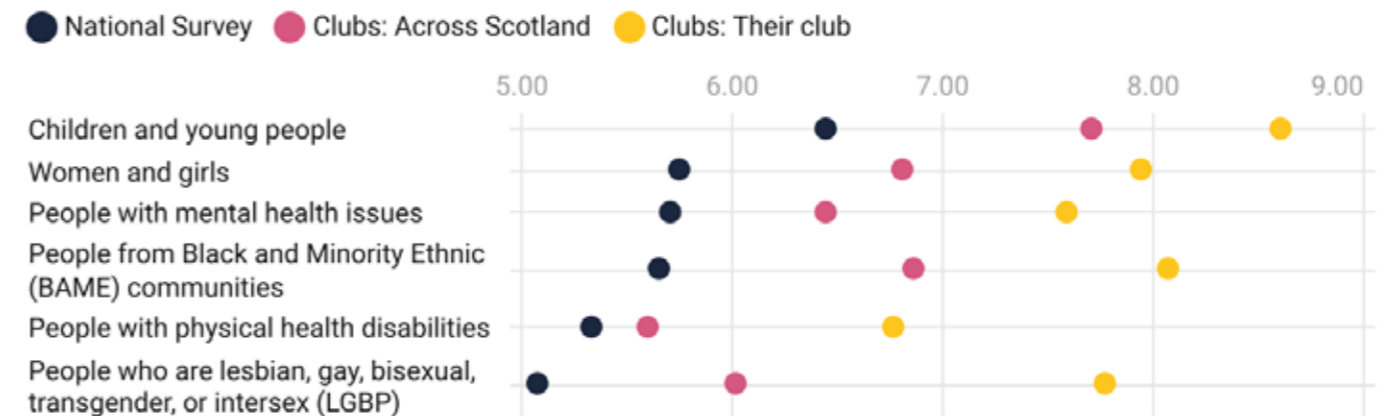
We were interested in perceptions of community football in the following groups:

- Children and young people
- Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups
- LGBT groups
- Those with physical disabilities
- Those with mental health issues
- Women and girls

The general public and community club representatives were asked questions about the environment of community football. Community club respondents were asked to rate community football as a whole and their club specifically on these issues. These questions were asked on a scale of 0-10 where 0 was the most negative and 10 the most positive environment.

When exploring the averages from each group, there was commonality to be found in that the environment for children and young people was viewed most positively by the public and clubs. However, there were some stark differences in perceptions, including:

- Public perceptions of the community football environment lagged behind the views expressed by club representatives,
- Clubs were more positive about their own club than they were about community football as a whole,
- The public give scores of only just above average for all groups, excluding children and young people,
- Club representatives have a significantly more positive outlook



Thinking broadly about local football across Scotland (often called ‘grassroots’ football)/And thinking specifically about your club, to what extent do you think it is a negative or positive environment for the following people in society? Please use a scale of 0-10 where 0 is extremely negative and 10 is extremely positive

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INCLUSION AND EQUALITIES

Given that the qualitative research was conducted with club representatives, it is unsurprising that feedback tends towards the more positive outlook as far as the footballing environment is concerned. All participants, in focus groups and interviews, were both positive about the need for inclusion and keen to stress the openness and positive environment that they attempt to foster.

With all this in mind, it would appear that public perceptions may be somewhat outdated in terms of progress actually being made. However, it is worth pointing out that no clubs we spoke with in interviews or focus groups collect robust or systematic information on these issues, for example number of players from BAME backgrounds, as they tend to see this as unnecessary and something they would struggle to find time to do amongst the range of other commitments they have. Clubs have different philosophies which will impact on their recruitment processes.

10 years back it was a very white male orientated organisation with no girls within it. We are a housing estate, high deprivation, we have a massive influx of refugees within our area. The club is probably the first place after school they come, it is where kids meet friends but also for the parents in terms of some kind of support network. Generally English is not their first language, so lots of kids translate for us as coaches back to the parents. It has been an education for us in how we do stuff as well....

I think each club have a different philosophy in what they're wanting to achieve from football. So the ones that want to win trophies and boast about it and attract better players are less likely to be open for whoever wants to come to the club – it's very much a selection process.

They won't be getting quality mark certificates or accreditation because they will not be inclusive or running disability teams or suchlike. But mainly the other clubs are trying to do both, they're trying to be competitive but still be open for whoever wants to come and play. So most are pretty open, just some are more open the better you are.

SUMMARY

- The absence of football would be very damaging for communities across Scotland; their resilience through the pandemic and support that was offered to the community was significant
- Nearly 50% of clubs state they are having to increase players fees to cover increased costs.
- Many clubs are instrumental in providing a range of community activities, for example food bank drop offs are common
- Many clubs make use of professional qualifications from within their staff/volunteers, for example providing mental health check ins for players and coaches during the Covid lockdowns
- The vast majority of club representatives (85%) believe their football club helps to bring the local community together
- Three quarters (75%) say playing football prevents players at this club from being involved in antisocial or criminal activity
- Clubs feel they have made progress with equalities issues but there is still work to be done – the administrative burden means that most/some clubs do not know their demographic profile of players
- Only by knowing this demographic profile can clubs measure engagement

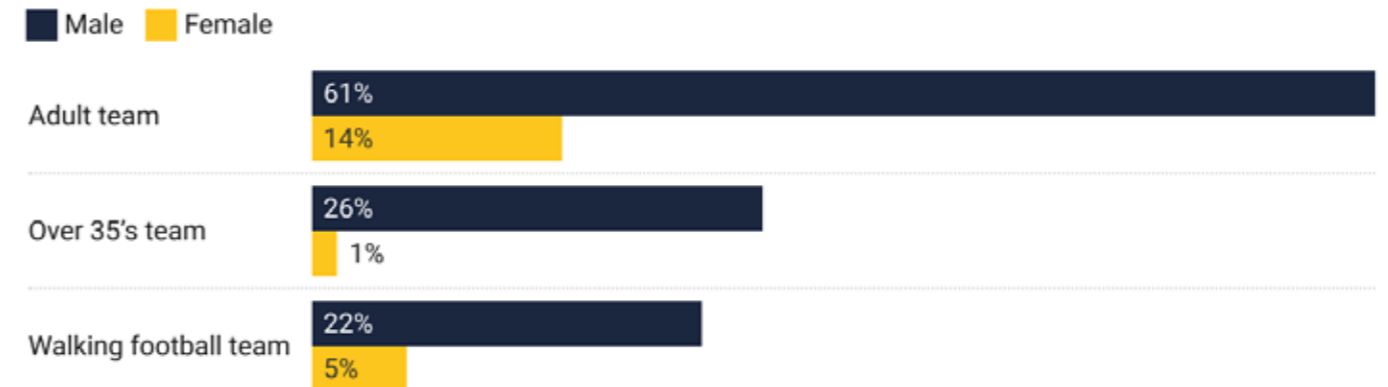
GIRLS' AND WOMEN'S' FOOTBALL



PREVALENCE OF TEAMS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

From the survey of club representatives, it is clear that there are a significant number of clubs operating teams for women and girls but there remain more teams available for boys and men of all ages.

The chart below highlights that more clubs have teams for men than for women.



And looking at the list below, which types of activity does your club run? (Select all that apply)

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The same is true for boys and girls' football, as far as comparisons allow, which is explored in detail within the main report.

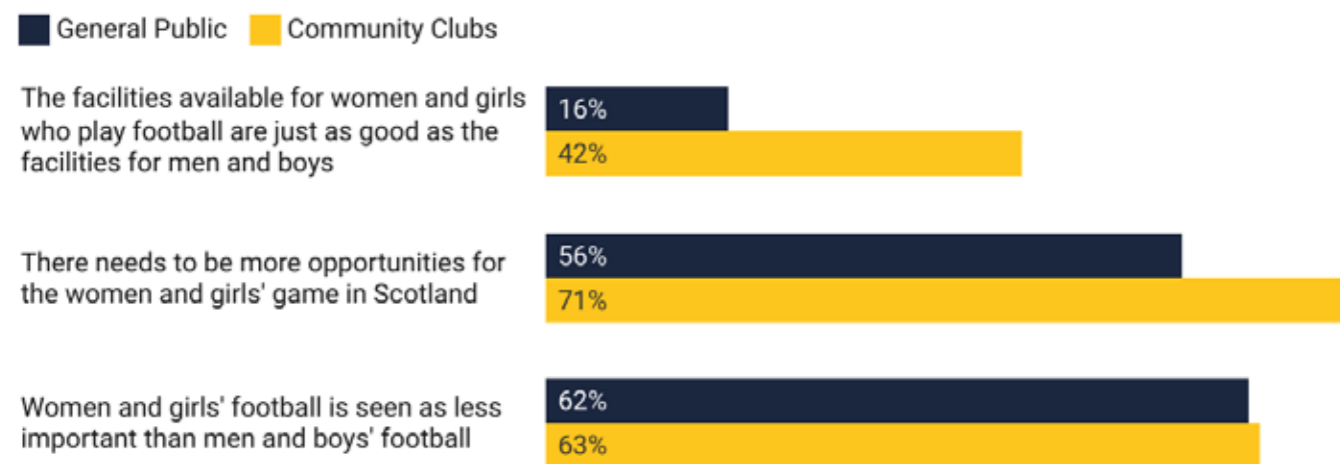
EXPERIENCE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Only 42% of club representatives think facilities are as good for women and girls as for men and boys, and public perceptions on this are very negative with only 16% thinking that facilities are equally good.

Club representatives are much more likely to see the need for more opportunities for women and girls and for more investment in that part of the game. This is likely to reflect their close hand experience of community football.

On other metrics public and club perceptions are more in line; in both groups just under two-thirds agree that 'women and girls' football is seen as less important than men and boys' football'

Proportion agreeing or strongly agreeing with the following statements:



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The qualitative interviews and focus groups reinforce the findings from the surveys but also reveal a range of additional important issues that require attention. It is clear that clubs are committed to 'Football for All', have made significant strides to develop the game for women and girls in recent years and are enthusiastic for more change.

Girls' football has been a big one for us, and it's probably the same across the country, the push on that. Obviously, with working with the Scottish FA and whatnot, more funding opportunities become available and the push for women'/ girls' football at grassroots level as well [is stronger].

However, there is clearly more to be done and more barriers to overcome, including:

WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES

We have a para-disabilities team and have done for a good number of years now, and the majority of those are males. I think we have two females that play in that group and when I've been to the festivals there's not a lot of females with disabilities who play in them. And I don't know if any other club has a specific female disability group but that might be something that needs worked on and looked at cos it's not...although the girls' game is growing I think, in the disability side of it, it's not.

COACHING FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

We find it easier to get volunteers or people coming forward on the boy's side than the girls' side of things. I don't know if there's a stigma or anything. But if we start a boys' team we can get volunteers pretty much straight away, they're like 'where do you want us, when do you want us in to help which is great, but with the girls section it takes a bit more time to get those volunteers in.

Relationships with the Scottish FA

As with other issues, it is clear that clubs have very different views on the performance of the Scottish FA in promoting and investing in football for women and girls. Some clubs have positive links with the Scottish FA in this regard and are appreciative if the support they have been given.

We're lucky we've got strong links with the Scottish FA and particularly the North Regional Department, so they've put in two relatively significant pots to help us with a girls' league which has got big participation numbers and our primary schools football league which again is one of our bigger participation projects. That helped us keep affordability down so that's been good.

However, others point to doubts over how well the Scottish FA is performing on this and think that investment and structural changes may help.

'My impression overall is that they try hard.....I think they're very much prompted by external organisations such as UEFA and football campaigns, people very much go to the Scottish FA and say 'we need you to help us get this message out, how can you help us' and I think by and large they're usually helpful, I know they've got ScotRail messages, they do the racism stuff. But to me, it appears very much as tokenism.

They are doing it because someone is coming and asking, they believe it to be the right thing to do which is great, but that's where it stops – take the message, put it out there, end of..... There are things they could really embrace, like violence against women, domestic violence, LGBT issues – I would like to see that as 'ah yes, that's what the Scottish FA do, that's part of the Scottish FA', instead of just something that they do on behalf of somebody else. It should be part of their own DNA'.

EXPERIENCE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

SUMMARY

- Community clubs have done much in recent years to improve opportunities, facilities and pathways for women and girls,
- However, improvement is needed in the women and girls game in Scotland on a range of issues,
- A significant number of community clubs are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain local girls to join. This is due to facility access and volunteer capacity.
- Significant proportions of the general public and club representatives think that women and girls face discrimination from those running Scottish football.

COACHES, VOLUNTEERS AND PARENTS

COACHES AND VOLUNTEERS

Coaches and volunteers are the lifeblood of the community game in Scotland. Often unpaid, they give up significant amounts of time and resource to helping their clubs and the wider community.

The survey of the general public reveals that just over 2% of adults in Scotland volunteer in football, as a coach, referee or other official, over 80% of whom are men in their 30s to 50s and around half of whom do so each week.

Interestingly the survey of club representatives highlighted both the value of coaches and volunteers and the challenges facing clubs at present in terms of recruitment and development.

When asked about their club's immediate priorities, the development of players is the most salient issues for clubs, mentioned by 53% of club representatives. The recruitment of coaches was seen as the fourth most salient issue, mentioned by 39% of club representatives.

The qualitative interviews highlight why these issues are so important. Many clubs are dealing with a range of issues, especially post Covid, that make the issue of coaches and volunteers more pressing for their survival.

|| The issue I've got is parents are asking me what are you doing about that, expecting me to be able to jump in as a volunteer to takeover simply because a couple coaches have taken the huff. There's only so many hours in the day that we can work.

Coaching and volunteering can be time consuming and stressful

Many of those who took part in the research could speak from either personal experience or from knowing what others have been through in terms of the stress involved in coaching or other forms of volunteering. For most, this activity comes on top of a day job and puts a considerable strain on them.

|| This is where the problem lies. Its time consuming. Guys here are volunteers and I've got a job on top of this and I am still trying to run the club as well.

Some clubs feel that there are unnecessary administrative burdens placed on coaches and on clubs more generally

A number of participants in the qualitative research mentioned a range of administrative issues which some felt were a 'burden'. This included issues such as PVG forms and the 3-yearly renewal of coaching licences. While clubs appreciate the need for these processes, some would like to see more flexibility in the face of what they view as growing administration.

|| For a lot of the football stuff we're having to build back up from scratch because we've lost a lot of the sessional coaches and volunteers.

There is evidence of a shortage of volunteers and coaches, particularly after Covid

As well as recruitment being tough because of the time and stress elements reported above, Covid has led to negative impacts on recruitment. Nearly two-thirds (62%) of clubs said that Covid had a negative impact on their ability to recruit coaches and staff (more than 52% who said the same about its impact on player recruitment), while only 4% said it had had a positive impact. This is reaffirmed by many of the qualitative participants.

|| We need extra facilities and more volunteers to get more players in cos every age group has got a waiting list.

|| 'If we don't have the volunteers we can't start the groups or the projects that we want to. And for me that is becoming a bigger and bigger issue cos I can't get the volunteers.

COACHES AND VOLUNTEERS

The Scottish FA has done some positive work in this area but could do more. The Scottish FA can play a role in helping community clubs in recruitment. Clubs are appreciative of the work the Scottish FA has done in this regard, particularly during Covid, but feel there is more that could be done to help.

“During Covid they put all their coach education online, which was fantastic. Even now having it online for people who can't travel or who at work and can do it at night. I can see the benefits but getting on the pitch in person and getting to practice what they're getting taught would help them to gain confidence..

“I think more visibility from people from the Scottish FA, mainly people on coaching quality and coming around. They're not coming out to do things as much now so a bigger visibility [would be good].

Clubs need to ensure that new volunteers fit in and meet the ethos and standards that they promote

“I think volunteers has been a massive problem for us. We lost a good few over the pandemic as well and getting our numbers back up again has been really tricky. And then you're having to watch their touchline behaviour, how are they being around the kids or around your club, are they adopting your ethos to positive coaching etc, it's really really difficult and I think it's trying to get those volunteers back into the club to keep it going. Like that, the Scottish FA will offer you loads of projects and everything but I have no-one to run them.

The attitude of a minority of coaches needs to be improved

Although in the minority, it is clear from the research that, despite campaigns and efforts to promote positive methods, some coaches display negative attitudes, especially towards junior players, that still require addressing.

“The challenge comes down to it can be, I guess, unique to each individual's experience in what mentality of the particular coach or club they're associated with. As an organisation, we try to train our staff to make everyone feel welcome and feel part of whatever group they're taking part.

PARENTS

The issue of parental roles in community football was raised throughout the qualitative research. It is clear that parents are often not just touchline supporters but often help to support clubs, financially and through time commitments, in a variety of other ways.

However, some examples of poor parental behaviour was raised. Although seen largely as a small minority and a legacy issue, there are still issues that require attention.

“There has been a few instances of racial abuse on the pitch but it's normally ill-advised comments, but I dare say that's endemic of the state of the country. Parents say stuff like that and the kids will pick it up and kids will regurgitate it out whether they understand it or not and that's a social thing, not a school or football thing but it's not nice to see.

SUMMARY

- The time commitment from volunteers is significant and often underestimated,
- Some clubs see a number of the regulations, such as renewal of coaching badges and Disclosure certification, as too bureaucratic,
- Some coaches can be overly negative towards some players and this needs to be addressed and eliminated from the game,
- A minority of parents behave poorly either in terms of touchline behaviour or by pressurising clubs and coaches; although this is seen as a legacy issue which is improving, it still concerns many within the game.

PROVISION AND OWNERSHIP OF FOOTBALL FACILITIES

Community football clubs are more positive about the accessibility and availability of the facilities which they operate themselves than they are about the facilities in their wider local area.

The average rating clubs awarded the availability of local footballing facilities in their area on a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 is poor and 10 excellent) the average score is a little under the halfway mark at 4.82. This rises over the halfway mark, to 5.45, when they rate the accessibility and availability of the facilities which their own club own, rent operate or lease.

It is clear from the research that issues around the provision of facilities, covering cost and quality as well as provision) are of paramount importance to community football clubs.

Provision and ownership are often headaches and speak to a number of key issues that featured in the qualitative research, including:

Clubs who rent pitches feel frustrated and more clubs want to own their own facilities

The ownership of football facilities is one of the key themes from this research, with significant findings emerging from the qualitative interviews and focus groups. In broad terms, clubs who rent or lease pitches, generally from local councils or arms-length providers, are frustrated on a range of levels, from quality, cost, provision and administrative burden. Clubs who already own their own facilities secure a range of advantages including the ability to rent out to others and ownership brings a sense of pride and long-term financial security.

“ I think that’s the only way that teams and clubs are gonna still be here in 15 years’ time (if they own their own facilities). If we are still relying on council buildings we’ll no be here. The only way we can grow and be sustainable in the long term is grow and have our own facility.

“ We effectively just hire facilities..... if you don’t have your own facility you’re fighting every day and it becomes more difficult..... it’s hard to grow because you don’t know if you’ll have a pitch or how much you can charge or what’s the cost point. We should be looking at our own facility in the next few years.

Getting to a place where a club can buy its own facility is not always straightforward, especially in financial terms, and often requires persistence and vision. Motivations for securing facilities are varied but are often driven by financial considerations.

Provision of facilities is very frustrating for many and lacks joined-up approaches, particularly in regard to schools

Linked to the ownership issue, clubs who rely on renting or leasing pitches typically find the situation frustrating and unsatisfactory. Getting hold of pitches can be unreliable, subject to change at short notice and difficult to arrange. In particular, many clubs feel that the use of, often brand new, school facilities is limited without good reason.

“ Our growth as a club is restricted by the lack of facilities.

“ Clubs who rent or lease pitches, generally from local councils or arms-length providers, are frustrated on a range of levels, from quality, cost, provision and administrative burden.

PROVISION AND OWNERSHIP OF FOOTBALL FACILITIES

When the school holidays come along and the schools close, the pitches close. They can open, and we've looked into it, but you have to pay £50 an hour for the janitor alone. So the Scottish FA have got a huge issue when they say 'yes, we'll make football and the facilities available to all' but in Glasgow, it's really difficult to negotiate get access to football pitches at schools over holidays.

Not to be completely negative I'll say that Glasgow has got better over the last 10/15 years in that there are a lot more football pitches than ever before, but there still are not enough for the demand.

The Scottish FA is helping clubs with facilities but clubs feel they could help more on provision

Scottish FA assistance for clubs hoping to buy their own facility is seen as helpful particularly in obtaining grants. However, a number of participants thought that the Scottish FA could do more to help improve the situation in terms of facilities provision.

They've basically been guiding us onto upcoming grants and what to keep an eye out for. I think there's a big government grant that's going to be coming out over the next year or so, so it's keeping an eye out for that and getting your business plan right.

Facilities should be accessible, so that's one area where I think the Scottish FA should start to come in and start a national discussion with education establishments and ministers to make facilities more accessible. Not just community centres, sport and leisure trust facilities, but more schools.

Provision of facilities for women and girls is seen by many as sub standard

In the survey of clubs, respondents were asked to rate facilities available for women and girls both in their local area and specifically for their club. On a scale of 0-10 where 0 is poor and 10 excellent, clubs gave an average score of 4.15 for local facilities for women and girls. Facilities for women and girls at club level were viewed a little more favourably though only to an average score of 4.97. This was mentioned in the qualitative research in terms of the progress required.

AFFORDABILITY

The affordability of footballing facilities is a significant issue for community clubs, motivating many to pursue different ownership options. The survey of clubs highlights the issue clearly.

Asked on a scale of 0-10 about the cost of hiring football facilities/ pitches in their local area, 25% of clubs give a rating between 0-2 with the average score of 4.09. This speaks to deep concerns that many clubs have about the cost of facilities hire and their reluctance to increase subscription fees to players at a time of significant financial worries for many people.

Every April the pitches go up about 6% and for the last 9 years our fees haven't reflected that. Now we are looking at a real situation where disposable income is looking at an all-time low. Any football or sports club the price point is crucial, we can't charge too much.

STANDARDS AND QUALITY

The survey of the public highlights a range of views about the standard of local football, and wider sporting facilities.

- People tend to view leisure/sports centres run by their local council more favourably than those run by private companies or directly by the local community (33% view council run facilities as excellent or good versus 26% for local community run facilities and 23% for privately run facilities),
- Local footballing facilities are generally viewed poorly; 25% think their local outdoor grass pitches are excellent or good versus 13% who think the same about indoor football pitches available to be hired and 14% about outdoor 3G pitches available to be hired.
- Over 70% of clubs states that improved access to quality community football spaces is a key immediate future priority for their club.

The research among clubs dug deeper into aspects of the quality of facilities.

Social spaces and facilities at pitches

On scale of 0-10, when asked to rate the social spaces available at their club, such as watching the game or grabbing a coffee, respondents gave an average score of 4.51.

Disabled access

Attitudes towards the facilities for people with disabilities who want to take part in football are similar. Respondents from clubs gave an average score of 5.06.

Changing and showering facilities

Ratings of changing and showering facilities at clubs were a little higher though with an average score of only 5.16.

For the last 7 months (council) have been installing a boiler and it's gonna be another month. We don't have shower facilities, initially we just had a portoloo, we didnae have toilets, we didnae have changing rooms, we didnae have somebody to sit in the building and turn the lights on. Talk about catching covid. We had sometimes 400 people coming up to the centre and we only had one portoloo. And (council) allowed that.

SUMMARY

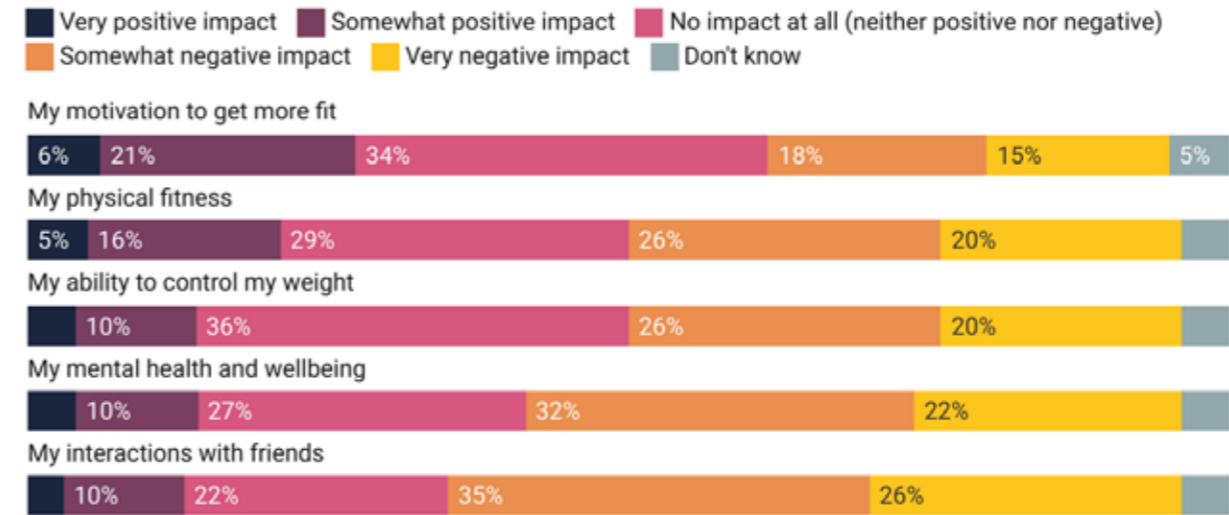
- Access to facilities is often restricted and poorly organised with many clubs frustrated that it is an issue which could be resolved,
- The time required to book facilities is often long and could be managed better,
- Many clubs see the possible purchase of a facility as key priority but negotiating asset transfer with local authority can be difficult,
- Around half of community clubs say their current priorities are the access to and availability of football facilities/pitches,
- Some facilities are not running back to full capacity so changing rooms and facilities are out of bounds,
- A third of clubs say the single biggest improvement that could be made to help their club is a new or improved 3G pitch, a further 20% say this would be achieved through improved access to and availability of football facilities or pitches.
- Over 70% of clubs say that improved access to quality community football spaces is a key future priority for their club.

THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY FOOTBALL



EMERGING FROM COVID

The general public survey highlighted what has been evidenced in other survey research, that the Covid pandemic has had a range of negative impacts on the public's physical and mental health, including the motivation to gain fitness, and specifically in an interest in taking up and playing football. The chart below summarises those findings.



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These findings are somewhat echoed by the survey of community clubs and the subsequent qualitative research. The chart highlights the 'net' (positive minus negative) impacts expressed by clubs on a range of issues.

The chart highlights the wide range of negative impacts caused by Covid. Interestingly, while the physical and mental wellbeing of players was the most significant impact during the pandemic, the most significant ongoing impact, as reported by clubs during the qualitative research, concerns the loss of coaches and volunteers during the lockdown periods caused by the pandemic, and the challenge of recruiting to replace them.

Covid has also had a significantly negative impact on the financial health of community football clubs; nearly 6 in 10 clubs (58%) reported that the pandemic had had either a very negative (27%) or somewhat negative (31%) impact while only 10% reported a positive impact.

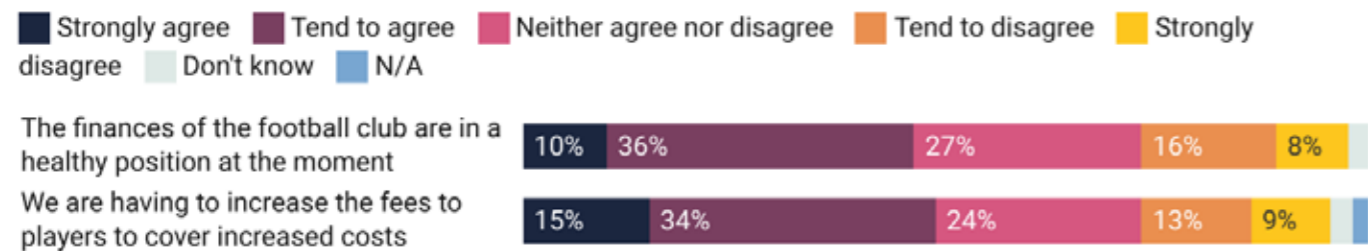
As mentioned in the qualitative research, this was clearly caused by clubs suspending subscription payments during lockdowns while still having a range of fixed costs to pay over this period. Despite this, the majority of clubs remain bullish on financial issues (see section below)

“ We lost five teams over the summer and some of the coaches decided they didn't want to come back so that gap in not having football leagues etc for around two years was really unfortunate, players, especially young players, decided they didn't miss it or they lost their fitness or whatever. There was an element of not enough coaches to keep the teams going but also an element where a large number of players just decided they weren't going to come back and trying to keep them amused or engaged was very difficult.

CLUB FINANCES

Although the majority of clubs reported a negative impact of Covid on their finances, nearly half of clubs (46%) agreed with the statement that the finances of the football club are in a healthy position at the moment' (10% strongly agree and 36% tend to agree). A quarter of clubs (24%) disagreed, highlighting that there are nonetheless a significant cohort of clubs which are struggling financially.

In the midst of rising costs, half of clubs (49%) reported that they are having to increase subscription fees to players, while 23% are not intending to increase fees.



Thinking about the statements below, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each?

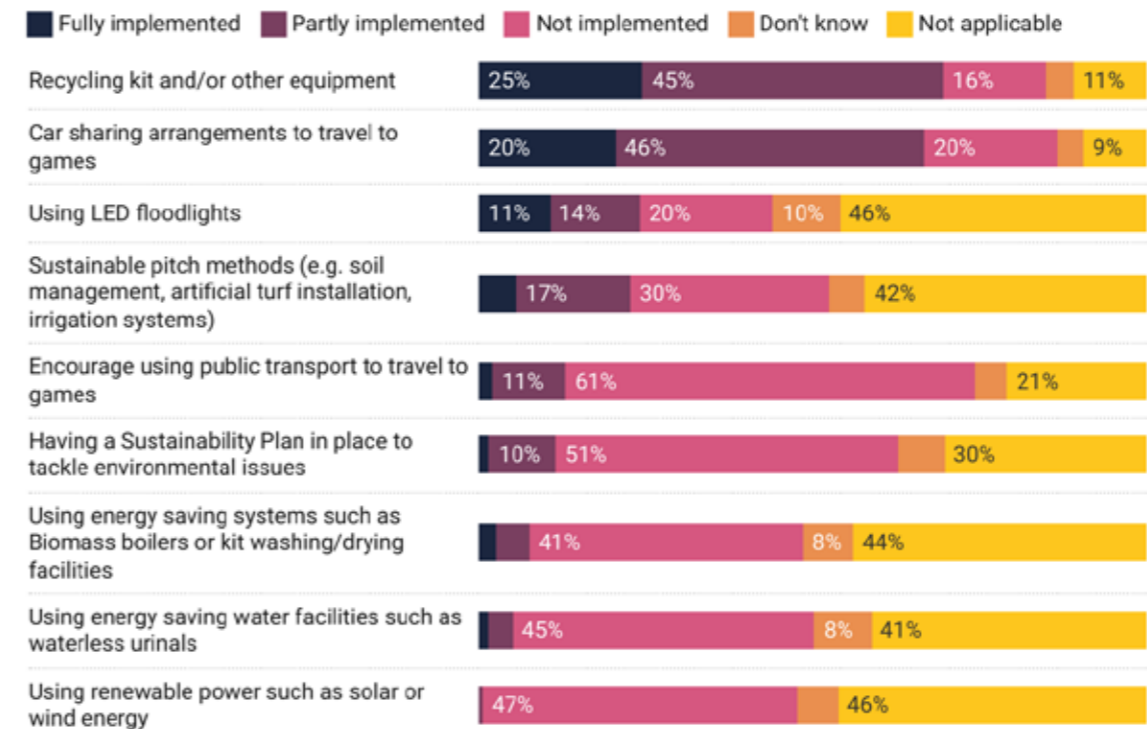
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For those who do have to increase fees, it is clearly going to be as a last resort and a measure taken reluctantly.

“ Every April the pitches in (area) go up about 6% and for the last 9 years our fees haven't reflected that. Now we are looking at a real situation where disposable income is looking at an all-time low. Any football or sports club the price point is crucial, we can't charge too much.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Scottish FA has made considerable effort to promote good practice for clubs to follow in terms of being environmentally sustainable. Data from the survey of clubs highlights that some progress has been made in terms of car sharing arrangements and recycling of kit and other equipment, but limited progress has been made on other issues.



Some clubs have plans in place to be more 'environmentally sustainable' and be more environmentally friendly while others do not. To what extent, if at all, have you implemented the following?

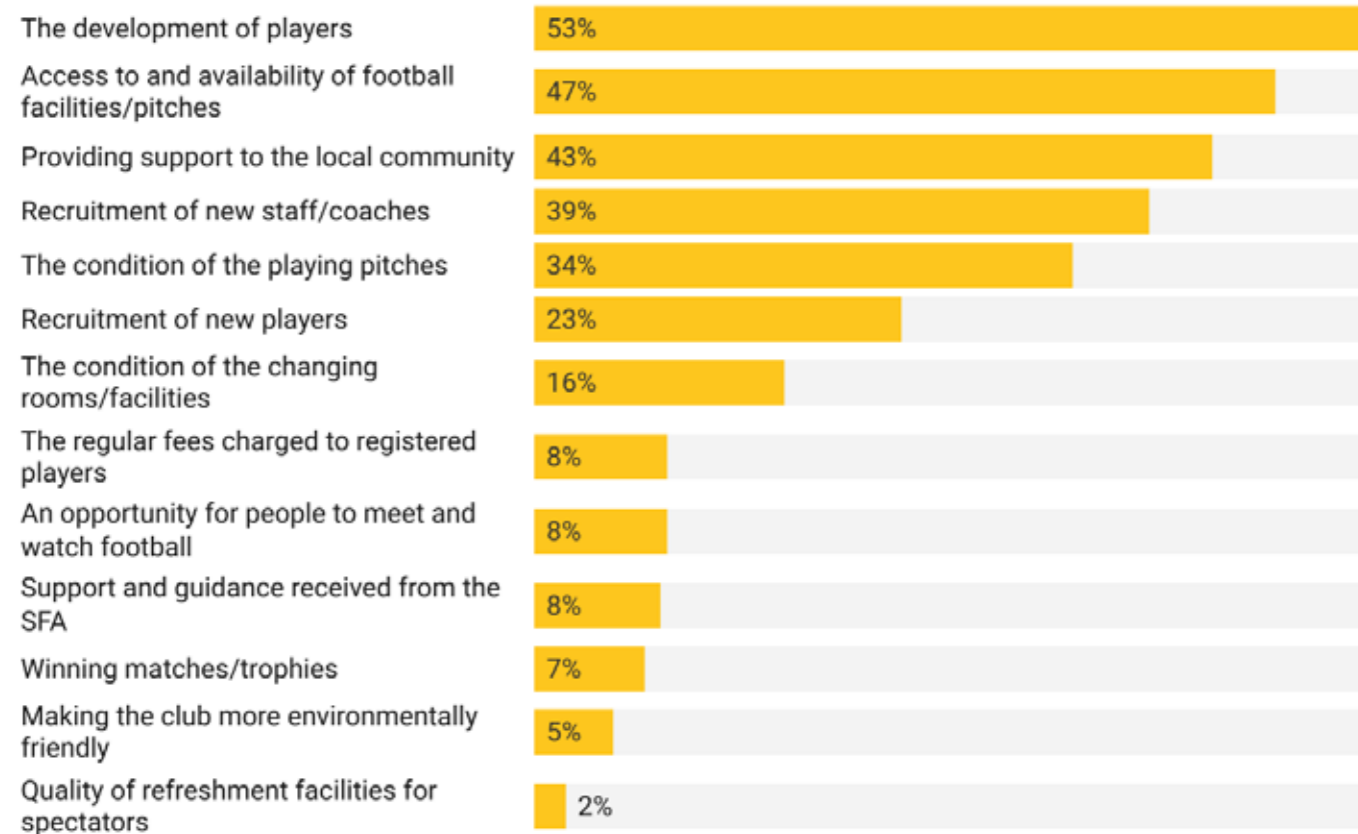
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The qualitative research highlighted that recovery from covid, issues with facilities and recruitment were higher priorities than plans for greater sustainability, although some clubs highlighted that it is possible to have made significant progress.

“ It's the big thing now, I've recently found sustainability funding streams easier to tap into than the mental health ones for example. The mental health funding streams were relatively easy to access during Covid etc but it seems to be stopping now. The building that we have is electric heated, we're looking at air source heat pumps to reduce our energy consumption. The new pitch has got LED lighting on it and there's areas around it where we're going to plant some trees with the Scottish Woodland Trust to our bit for the environment. There are also areas we can return to meadow and plant wildflowers.

PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

The survey of clubs and the subsequent qualitative research covered issues relating to current and priorities. In terms of current priorities, as highlighted in the chart below, club priorities include many of the themes covered in this report. The key priority, mentioned by over half of clubs (53%) is the development of players, while facilities and community support were the other key priorities for clubs.



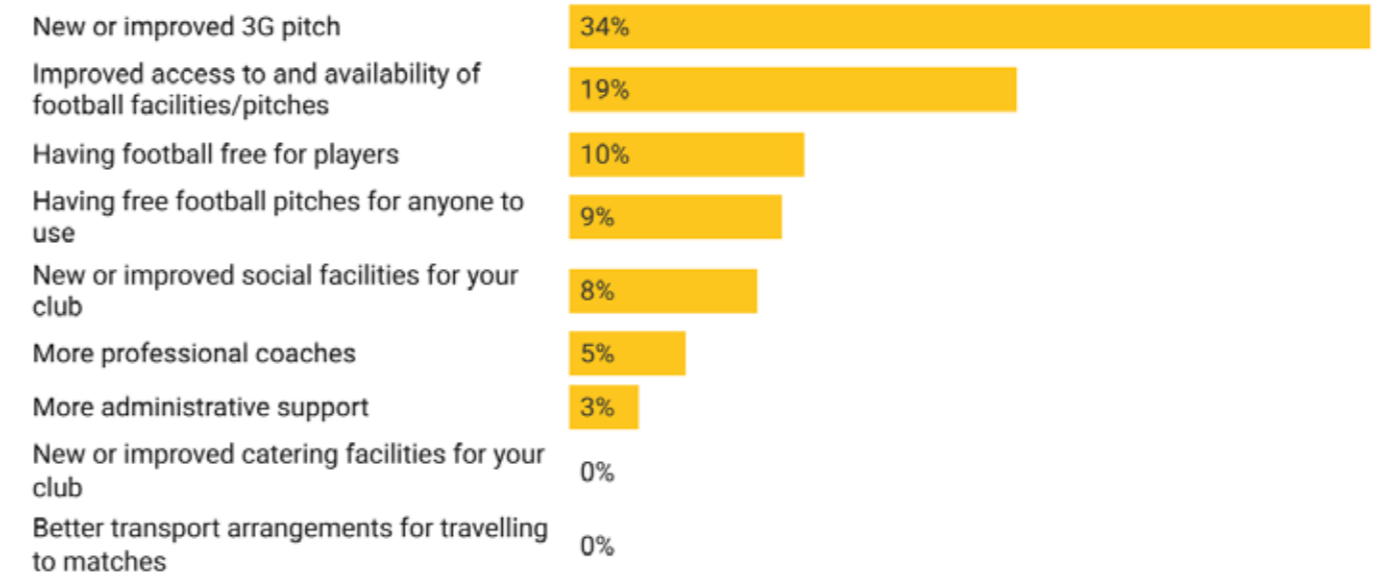
Thinking about your club's priorities at the moment, looking at the list below, what are the three most important issues for you? (Select up to 3)

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PRIORITIES FOR THE FUTURE

The chart highlights the key immediate future priorities for clubs. As covered in this report, the issues of pitches and facilities dominate club thinking.

What would you say is the single biggest improvement that could be made to help your club?



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"I think we are very clear. For us it is about facility and employment of staff. In terms of sustainability and looking at our plan for the next five years it is about facility and employment and the Scottish FA know that.

"For our priorities, we've lost a lot of volunteers through the couple of years of the pandemic and I think getting those volunteers back and training them but also managing to retain them, having some sort of satisfaction in what they're doing is a big thing and I think there should be a wee bit more support on that.

SUMMARY

- A plurality of clubs think that recruiting players has become more difficult since Covid,
- However, some clubs have waiting lists of new players because they do not have the capacity or facilities to bring new players in,
- The recruitment of coaches and other volunteers is more of an issue for clubs and an area where some clubs are currently struggling,
- Although a majority of clubs reported that Covid had a negative impact on their financial situation, a plurality of clubs also thought that their club finances are currently in a healthy position,
- A significant proportion of clubs have car sharing and recycling processes in place but limited progress has been made on other issues of environmental sustainability
- Thinking ahead, the improvement of facilities dominates the priorities for clubs in terms of improvements they want to see.

CONSIDERATIONS



We make the following 10 considerations for action. In our view, the Scottish FA should:

- 1 / Encourage and support community clubs to collect and maintain, where possible, records of those from minority groups who participate in any capacity at their club
- 2 / Undertake activity with clubs to communicate and promote the valuable community done by clubs to the wider public
- 3 / Work with clubs to address the ongoing issues of recruiting girls as players by promoting the work of clubs in the community and helping improve the facilities or girls and women
- 4 / Review the guidance to football coaches concerning issues of negativity towards young players, and consider how this can be reinforced
- 5 / Consider introducing a Code of Conduct for parents in terms of behaviour during matches and work with clubs to communicate this to parents and all other stakeholders
- 6 / Work with clubs and education departments in local authorities to ensure that barriers to accessing school footballing facilities can be overcome
- 7 / Accelerate help to clubs in terms of identifying funds and financial options which may allow them to pursue their ambition if buying their own facility
- 8 / Assist in a review/audit of the physical condition of footballing facilities to identify priorities for repair and upgrade
- 9 / Set achievable sustainability targets for clubs and help support clubs to become more environmentally friendly
- 10 / Enhance assistance to clubs in recruiting coaches and volunteers, streamlining process and promoting roles as far as possible



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