



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

Academic of Sport

AOS

AN INDEPENDENT THINK TANK

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

University of Edinburgh  
Influencing the world since 1583

Academy of Sport  
Building upon a heritage of influence through sport since 1591

*“This is a fascinating piece of research and really insightful and informative. The survey and partnership we have had with the Uni has been brilliant.”*

- CEO Scottish Premier League Football Club 2022

*“Thanks to everyone on the team for making this amazing course. I will walk away from this with a completely different outlook on the footballing world”*

- Student from Spain 2022

*“The Academy of Sport is unique. Its researchers perform cutting edge, rigorous scholarly work on a wide range of topics on sport. It brings together scholars from around the world to develop projects that enhance the role sport plays, e.g., battling racism, sexism, and poverty. It has created innovative community programs that increase access to education and democratize learning.”*

- Professor Lucia Trimbur “The City University of New York” (CUNY)



## University of Edinburgh Academy of Sport 2021-2022 Highlights

- 170 countries reached by our online access to education.
- Ranked 1st in Scotland for sports research (2021 REF).
- Supported World’s First Bi-lateral Governmental Sports Diplomacy Meeting.
- 17,000 hits on FC Barcelona Website.
- Co-leadership World Innovation Summit for Health – Doha.
- 48 **Sport Podcasts** on global and local issues and voices.
- 61 **Sport Matters** evidence-based blogs on sport.
- New Honorary Professors and PhD students.
- Scottish Government Lecture at 2022 Birmingham Commonwealth Games
- 8 Research Reports helping the Scottish Football Industry Build Back Better.
- Co-leadership Eric Liddell 2024 Celebrations.
- Sports News – the launch of **Sports News** – dedicated to covering an insight into sport in local and international affairs and geo-politics.
- Advocacy calling for international governments to introduce a sports boycott of Russia and Belarus following the invasion of Ukraine.
- Supporting the creation of the world’s first national affiliated para football association.
- Widening access by delivering education through sport in local communities and through e.g., local football stadiums.
- Partnership with the Homeless World Cup Foundation.

## ACADEMY OF SPORT | IMPACT, STUDY AND DIALOGUE

2021-2022 was another remarkable year for AOS as our members and associates helped consolidate our position as a bespoke international think tank on sport, supporting communities locally and globally. The following provides a brief insight into our activity, partnerships, research, and open knowledge exchange in and with communities over the last year.

### EDINBURGH GLOBAL



Sport is a space that facilitates international engagement. Maximizing the contribution of sport to sustainable development, peace, diplomacy, social justice, and human rights has long been a human imperative but there is still much more we can do to enable sport's international UN mandate, foster common good and realize the international reach of our Edinburgh Global activity through sport. Our leadership in the creation of research informed sports MOOCs continues to enable access to education through sport. [Sport and the Sustainable Development Goals](#) (Banda; Jarvie; Murray) reached 5,400 learners this year while [Football More than a Game](#) has now reached 170 countries.

**Sport, Soft Power, and Diplomacy:** Sport continues to be an increasingly attractive soft power tool for cities and nations. Major events can facilitate substantial changes in soft power dynamics and promote positive trade and investment outcomes. Sport contributed £48.9 billion gross value added to the UK economy, accounting for 2.6% of the UK total.

We were invited to join the UK Soft Power Working Group to advise on sport. Our members and associates drive sports diplomacy interventions on the world stage, (Murray; Lee; Reid,) monitor the impact of Brexit (Jarvie), quantify and question the size and subsequent influence of international diasporas (MacDonald) and have produced a comparative analysis of Soft Power and Cultural Relations for the British Council (MacDonald).

**Sport and Mental Health:** Partnering with the Global Health Academy and the University of Toronto, the Academy of Sport is Co-Chairing the 2022 World Innovation Summit for Health. The externally funded research report for the summit focuses upon: Sport, Mental Health and Communities (Almuhanndi; Banda; Grant, Jarvie; Murray; Reid; Simpson) and Elite Athletes and Mental Health (Kerr; Tamminen; Reardon).



**Sport, Refugees and the British Council:** Pakistan is one of the largest refugee hosting nations in the world with an estimated 2.4 million registered and undocumented people to have fled Afghanistan. In partnership with the British Council Pakistan, Edinburgh Global, ICR Research and Cricket East we hosted an online workshop to consider the role of cricket and digital education in assisting with Afghan Refugee communities in Pakistan (MacDonald).

**Olympic Sport:** Our team of associates has been strengthened by Professor Corinne Reid joining the team. Corinne previously served as Acting Principal of Victoria University, Professor at the University of Edinburgh and remains part of the Global Health Academy and the Academy of Sport. She has served as psychologist to Australian and GB Olympic teams as well as being national team psychologist to two Olympics (Reid). Members serve on the Executive Board of the Olympic Studies and Research Centre - Shanghai (Fan Hong; Vamplew) and lead the online educational development aspect of the Eric Liddell 100 project (Jarvie, Walker, Fan Hong). In 2024 it will be 100 years since the Chinese born Scottish athlete Eric Liddell won Olympic gold at the 1924 Paris Olympics.

**PhD research students:** are currently exploring; the place of sport in China's approach to diplomacy and cultural relations (Wen); sport for development and peace in Taiwan's international relations (Chun-Chieh); international football governance, regime complexity and China (Chufeng); case studies of sport and small states - the case of the Republic of Malta (Vella- White); an examination of the relationship between Formula 1, nationalism, and national identity (Worth); and sport for development in Zambia (Holmes).

**Advocacy:** On March 8th, 2022, Ministers from 37 nations signed a joint statement calling for sporting sanctions to be imposed on Russia and Belarus following the invasion of Ukraine "until co-operation under the fundamental principles of international law has become possible again." On 26 February 2022 we joined a group of international sport and human rights Professors who wrote to world leaders including President Biden, President Trudeau, Prime Ministers Johnson and Trudeau and First Minister Sturgeon calling for such a ban (Kidd, Donnelly, Jarvie). To date responses have been received from Trudeau and Sturgeon.

The politics of sport in Trump America and ethnographies of concussion in sport were the focus of [Episode 60 - sport and Politics on the field](#) (Trimbur). Building upon [Sport, Politics and Black Lives Matter Briefing Paper](#) members have continued expose racial injustice in different forms including the fight for racial justice in the NFL's concussion statement (Trimbur) and acting as panel chair and discussant at the 2021 American Studies Association Annual Studies Meeting Session on The Revolt of the College Athlete: Power, the Pandemic, and Resistance (Trimbur).



**University of Toronto Partnership:** Formed in 2014 the partnership with the Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education continues to flourish and support jointly funded research projects, access to public symposia and international sports advocacy. The [Edinburgh-Toronto Public Symposia and Lectures](#) now hosts 48 sports podcasts.

The co-funded study of the impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on sport and youth in Canada and Scotland is supported by 3 new research assistants (Simpson, Walker, Aegon).

**Sport and the Sustainable Development Goals:** Our research and knowledge exchange continue to support international platforms advancing the contribution of sport for development to the sustainable development goals. These include the Commonwealth Secretariat Policy Workshops on sport and sustainable development goals indicators and measurement (Jarvie); the GLoKnoCo 3rd Conference on sport for development and peace (Banda, Burnett), the FIFA Football for Schools project (Banda) and an Academy of Sport presence at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (<https://thecommonwealth.org/chogm>) in Rwanda (Banda).

The Academy of Sport (AOS ) is supporting attendance at the United Nations high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) , July 2022, under the support of the [Economic and Social Council](#). Members are facilitating a partnership discussion between Generation Amazing (GA) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Using the classroom and the football pitch as complementary to one another, Generation Amazing, with the support of IFRC National Societies in Argentina, Myanmar, Uganda, and Iraq, has designed activities to strengthen youth capacity and expand knowledge while implementing sports-based, community-driven social impact programmes (Banda).

The life of international advisory board member, Olympian, activist and former Chair of the Commonwealth Ministers Advisory Board on Sport, Bruce Kidd, was captured in [The Runner's Journey](#), published earlier in the year.



Partners have: facilitated and contributed to a better understanding of [The Business of the FIFA World Cup](#) by surveying the history and evolution of the tournament and the geo-political background against which bidding and hosting decisions take place (Widdop); and [In the Games People Played: A Global History of Sport](#) offered all spectators and participants reason to cheer—and to think (Vamplew).

One of our associates has led a two-month review for DFAT's Office of the Pacific on Pacific-Australia Sport, a multi-million-dollar project that uses sport to bring Australia and Pacific Island countries closer together (Murray).

## EDINBURGH LOCAL



Maximizing the contribution of sport to building and strengthening relationships between the University, the City of Edinburgh and our local communities is important to us and requires a better understanding of sport and the city and in particular what sport can do. UN habitat guidance states that a minimum of 15 per cent of urban areas should be allocated as open green spaces and public facilities.

Integrating opportunities for sport, throughout such spaces and across urban environments can have widespread and long-term impacts. Cities are living entities and our work through Edinburgh Local; Widening Access and Open Education uses the sports resource to work with communities and people on the margins both within and external to the University.

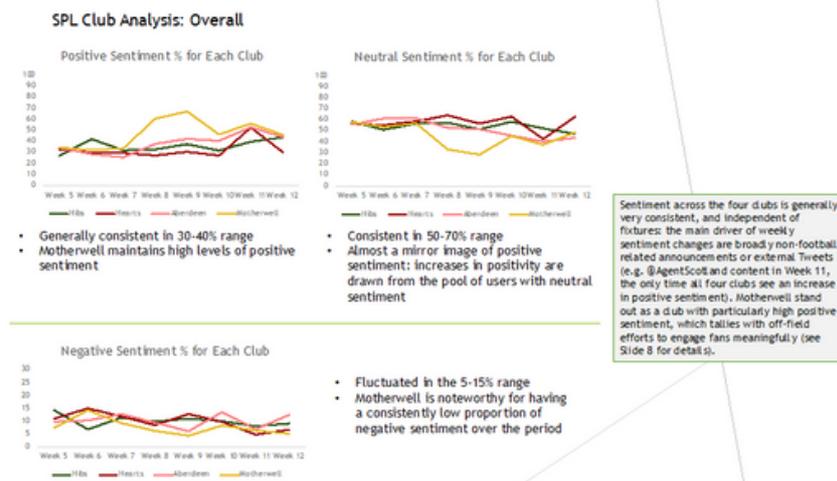


[Building Back Better, Data Driven Innovation and the Sports Industry](#): This is a collaborative partnership with the Bayes Centre and four Scottish Premier League Football Clubs. The proof-of-concept report was supported by £30k of funding through the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) Building Back Better initiative. The grant helped to evidence the need for a Sports Data Lab to support the sports industry and in particular the use of off-field data.

The funding helped to support 4 research assistants (Barrett; Robbins, Frank Delgado, Widdop) and 4 bespoke research reports for Aberdeen, Heart of Midlothian, Hibernian, and Motherwell. Valuable in-kind support was provided through Professor Rovatsos, John Scott and Neil McGillivray.

[Geo-Spatial Analysis of Scottish Football](#): 36% of the season ticket holders across the four SPFL clubs reside in either the most deprived or second most deprived postcode districts in Scotland. 37% of season ticket holders, from the four clubs, resided in the 20% most affluent areas. EH4 (NW Edinburgh, Cramond / Blackhall / Craighleith) was the top postcode for both Hearts (5.79%) & Hibs (7.03% of sales). From our data and [Micro-Briefing Report](#) we can show that fans are disproportionately drawn from areas with low levels of deprivation and poverty.

### Social Sentiment Analysis of Football:



Understanding sentiment towards what clubs do can help them develop relationships and more fully understand fans, communities and key influencers who may or may not help with positive, neutral, or negative attitudes towards football clubs and the football industry more fully.

Key take aways from the football industry research include (i) sentiment is driven by off-field events and understanding it is key to understanding the business of football; (ii) starting meaningful conversations fosters an engaged online community; (iii) "Player Folk Appeal" has not yet been optimally leveraged by clubs and the sports industry; (iv) external tweets can drive league-wide engagement (economies of scale); (v) SWPL engagement has increased rapidly over the period of analysis (vi) there is still a gap between emotional engagement with SPL and SWPL clubs but this gap is small, particularly during the season (vii) links between SPL and SWPL clubs can be leveraged to foster a larger online community and it is crucial for clubs to build relationships with key influencers; and (viii) a data equity gap exists between men and women's football which we are trying to reduce. (Barrett; Jarvie; Robbins; Frank Delgado; McGillivray; Rovastos; Scott; Widdop).

By scrutinising a range of digital information, clubs can build a clearer understanding of who their followers are, what they want and how best to engage with them.

**Fan Engagement Surveys:** The initial SFC grant facilitated a series of further grants which produced a range of data driven studies including (i) International engagement of Scottish football fans at the Euro 2020 which was hosted during 2021 due to Covid-19; (ii) a preliminary data analysis of Scottish Women's Football; (iii) the production and consumption of Scottish women's football and (iv) 2022 Hibernian Fan Engagement Survey and Report.



Collectively, the series of research and knowledge exchange reports helped to consolidate the Academy of Sport's capability to support the Scottish Sports Industry and beyond, with data driven analysis and innovation.



**Widening Access, Social Class and Inequality:** We continue to offer opportunities to access study at one of the world's leading universities. From a range of non-credited online courses to open studies for adult learners with credit and supporting courses in the community. These help with knowledge exchange.

[Football More than a Game:](#) Launched in 2014 the first football MOOC in the world has now reached 170 countries and helped widen access to education. It has been delivered 100% online but also in a hybrid model in community settings such as football stadiums. The past year has been affected by COVID -19, but the online version and the materials have been used by football clubs to provide football content to communities in the absence of football in stadiums.

Internal University funding has helped to refresh MOOC content to support data literacy and City deal initiatives. The use of football data to help with health education, financial literacy, social inequality and supporting homelessness (Homeless World Cup Partnership) remains a key aspect of opening access to education through football in communities. The work is recognised in the forthcoming City of Edinburgh City Deal Annual Report.

[Educated Pass:](#) Each year we have supported the innovative Education Pass Programme led by Dr Spiers. Education Pass works with working class communities, using participants commitment to athleticism. The programme engages players and enables relevancy to the school curriculum and social issues through football. Together Football More than a Game and Educated Pass provide a powerful education through football that helps access to education at Edinburgh.

The potential of these two programmes working together to facilitate a strong narrative and more importantly widening access to education has still to be optimised. We should seek funding from The SPFL Trust to enable capacity.

Such interventions contribute to a broader range of work reflecting and evidencing working class voices within and around the University curriculum (Spiers). The Academy of Sport has regularly commented upon sport and social inequality including the school background of UK Olympic teams.



[Health Inequalities and Economics:](#) Earlier this year Professor Bell joined us Honorary Professor. He is a member of the Advisory Board for the Health inequalities in Scotland Independent Review, Vice-Captain of Royal Dornoch Golf Club and one of the respected authorities around government spending and taxation and how it works. Professor Bell brings considerable expertise across a range of sub-disciplines of economics. The economics of sport podcast is currently in the making (Bell).

Work on the economics of sport has also this year seen publications on [Sport economics for non-economists](#) (Vamplew); Economists, economic historians and sports history (Vamplew); and a re-interpretation of early commercialism in sport (Vamplew). You can read a synopsis of the latter in the May edition of [Sport Matters](#).

**PhD Research students:** are exploring the use of basketball as a development tool in Scottish local communities (Walker) and analysing aspects of the relationship between sport and mental health in and between university and national health systems (Simpson).



**EDINBURGH FUTURES** We bring people, data and diverse disciplines together in our open, what-if environment to spark the unexpected and create new ideas through sport and related areas—working on live issues with communities, business, citizens and governments.

We are a network of collaborators both within and external to the University of Edinburgh that exchanges knowledge and enables advocacy in and through sport. The Academy of Sport is at the heart of an international sporting landscape providing a home for ideas, solutions, students, staff, sporting communities and organizations to meet and to make a difference today.

It is an independent gathering place for communities to meet, to develop, influence, exchange, advocate and make a difference through sport. We cannot do this alone.

### We will continue to:

- **REACH-OUT** to deepen and broaden our connections locally and globally.
- **ENGAGE** a critical mass of knowledge, research, strategic collaboration, influence, access and opportunity in and through sport.
- **SUSTAIN** an independent think tank working for, in and through sport.
- **INFLUENCE** future agendas through advocacy and evidence based interventions.
- **ADVOCATE** the potential of education through sport to make a difference.
- **PROVIDE** widening access to the University of Edinburgh and sustain a commitment to exploring more than just the potential of sport to reach disadvantaged communities.
- **PROMOTE** the powerful synergy between evidence, knowledge exchange, education and advocacy.

Each year our work is enabled through the production and sustainability of a bespoke set of tools that the Academy of Sport has developed.

**Sport Matters:** A bespoke evidence and research driven blog space that supports knowledge exchange. Since its launch [Sport Matters](#) has supported to date the production of 61 research blogs with 21/22 entries including; Glasgow 2014 Human Rights Policy; Sport and the War in Ukraine; The US Boycott and the Winter Olympic Games; The Beginnings of Commercialism in sport; and Scottish Football and Data Analytics.

**Sport Voices:** A bespoke sports podcast service that raises awareness and promotes knowledge exchange about sporting issues, problems, solutions. Drawing upon our network of partners more than 50 sport podcasts are hosted on the [Academy of Sport Dialogue](#) section of the website. These have helped to support university teaching during Covid. 21/22 additions have included Towards a Welsh Sports Diplomacy Strategy- International Perspectives; UK Sports Diplomacy Post Covid; The Homeless World Cup; UN Human Rights Mechanisms and Mega Sporting Events and Child Labour in Sport.

We continue to support [Gaelic Voices and Dialogue](#) that helps to enable our commitment to hosting dialogue and discussion about sport locally and more broadly given the interest in sport, for example, The Scottish and Irish Bi-lateral review report.

**Sport News:** A bespoke sports news service that aims to provide a user-friendly evidence-based coffee read about sport in the world that blends with reflective narrative and insight into contemporary sport in geo-political and global affairs.

**Sport Observations:** A bespoke sports briefing and policy insight that provide evidence-based briefings and responses to calls for evidence on national and international concerns involving sport. The objective has been to both respond to government calls for evidence and produce at least two critical briefings per year. The 21/22 output was slightly impacted upon by Covid with our overview of [Sport in the 2021 Scottish Election](#) being the most recent briefing. The work built upon our previous briefings on [Sport, Presidents and the US Elections](#) and [Sport, Protests and Black Lives Matter](#).

**The Road Map 2022-2023:** As we move through a Post Covid phase we will build upon and continue to support and develop the tools, networks and partnerships that have helped us as Scotland's leading Think Tank focused upon sport.

*Faced with the world's most complex issues neither sport, the Academy of Sport, nor The University of Edinburgh has all the answers and necessary expertise. We remain mindful of the need to be collaborative and co-operative. We remain committed to enabling sport to play its part in addressing the challenges that face humanity in the 21st Century and be seen to be actively addressing such challenges, working with and in communities.*

In planning for the future we recognise the strengths of interdisciplinarity in line with Strategy 2030. Such a commitment both enables us to more fully answer critical questions and be better equipped to tackle global and local problems. External funding for some 2022-23 projects is already in place. The following is an illustrative but not exhaustive set of actions for 2022-23:

- Support the World Innovation Summit for Health to be held in Doha October 4-6.
- Support the development of the Eric Liddell 100 online education consultancy.
- Report for the Scottish Football Association and the Scottish Women's Professional League on the production and consumption of Scottish Women's Football.
- Support Moray House School of Education and Sport with its review of research, knowledge exchange and network centres.
- Support the Centre for Sport and Exercise at and Edinburgh Student's Union as they continue to open up opportunities for students and the broader public.
- Host visiting scholars from Australia with a view to co-hosting and planning for bi-lateral government sports diplomacy summit.
- Contribute to the Centre for Sport and Human Rights knowledge exchange outputs.
- Sustain the production of new research and knowledge exchange contributions to Sport Matters, Sport Voices, Sport, Observations and Sports News. For example, the production of a briefing paper on planetary health and sport.
- Refresh research content of Football More than a Game to run twice in 2022/23, prior to the World Cup in October 2022 (Men); a June or July 2023 run (Women).
- Promote knowledge exchange and widening access to education by supporting both Football More than a Game in Scottish football stadiums and Educated Pass.
- Help to sustain and add value to new and current PhD students and research assistants.
- Report on and secure second year of research funding for Sport, Youth and Covid Impact study comparing Canada and Scotland.
- Run a workshop in partnership with ICR Research.
- Explore the development of impact case study.

**Thank You** to all who have made 2021-2022 a hard but undoubtedly successful year including: The University of Edinburgh; Moray House School of Education and Sport; The Centre for Sport and Exercise; Edinburgh Students Union, University of Toronto Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education; The Homeless World Cup Foundation; The Bayes Centre; The School of Informatics (UoE); ICR Research; The World Innovation Health Summit; The Scottish Football Association; Aberdeen, Heart of Midlothian, Hibernian, & Motherwell Football Clubs; The Barca Innovation Hub; The Commonwealth Secretariat; The British Council; The Scottish, UK and Australian Governments and all our local and global associates.

Professor Grant Jarvie ([Grant.Jarvie@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Grant.Jarvie@ed.ac.uk)) on behalf of the  
Academy of Sport Board Meeting 14 June 2022

