



**Special
Olympics**
Great Britain



SOGB Network Insights 2023-25

These insights form a part of our Strategic Plan to enhance and strengthen our infrastructure as a part of **Inclusion in Action**.

For more information on Special Olympics GB data and insights, get in touch with membership@soqb.org.uk.

SOGB Insights by Member Type – 2023-25

Sources: **Special Olympics GB** Membership Consultation Survey 2023, Annual Accreditation Insights 2021-24 and Annual Census Data
Pochstein, F.; Diaz Garolera, G.; Menke, S.; McConkey, R. *The Involvement of Athletes with Intellectual Disability in Community Sports Clubs*, *Disabilities* 2023, 3, 50–61.
Activity Alliance Annual Disability and Activity Survey 2023-24
Davison, R.R.C.; McPherson, G.; Carlin, L.; Lumsdaine, G. *Understanding Disability Sport in Scotland 2023 (OSS/UWS)*
Disability Sport Wales Inclusive Club and Session Survey Report 2023-24
Scottish Disability Sport National Survey (2025)
Athlete Leadership Forum Insights – Empowering Leaders in Development of Club Network Structure (2024)
For more information about this research, please contact membership@sogb.org.uk.

The Athlete

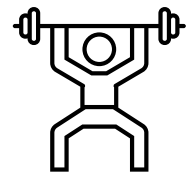
Insights

- **54%** of athletes say they **feel supported** in their Special Olympics GB network, with **over 30%** saying there are **barriers** to accessing support.
- Key motivators include **'the love of taking part'** (81%), **'being the best they can be in their sport'** (64%), **meeting people**/combat loneliness (81%), **'improving health'** (physical, social and mental) (74%) and, almost unanimously - to **'have fun'/'enjoy themselves'** (91%).
- Barriers include **difficulties with transport, confidence** to participate, **limited opportunities** and **lack of awareness** about disabilities. **Only 10-20%** of people with ID – and fewer with a disability and ID/LD - across the board meet the recommended levels of activity and exercise in Scotland, England and Wales.
- Other challenges include **communication** and **information access**, with **over half** of athletes saying all sport-related communication comes from clubs.
- **Under-reported barriers** for those not engaged in sport include complex **health challenges, socioeconomic** factors like education, income and location. In Scotland, 41 % fear losing support if they are "too active".



Opportunities

- To ensure athletes stay involved in sport, we must work on **building a sense of belonging** – this is found to be highly important for participants with an ID.
- Insights show **athletes want to be a part of decision-making**, which is a core foundation of Special Olympics GB organisationally.
- Athletes report that **more opportunities, more qualified coaches** and club/coach **better understanding of Intellectual Disability** would help with their ongoing participation in sport.
- **Word of mouth/friends and family** and **social media** were found to be the best ways for athletes to learn about opportunities.
- Athletes in Special Olympics GB want to **increase the awareness of disabilities** and **inclusivity** in sport.
- Almost half of athletes want to **become coaches or volunteers**, presenting a huge opportunity to develop and harness the power of Special Olympics GB Athletes. The number of **athlete leaders** has also **doubled** year on year since 2020!



The Club

Insights

- **Over 70%** Special Olympics GB Clubs feel **supported** in their club general management and development.
- Clubs are overall struggling to sustain, retain and recruit due to high levels of **duplication of processes** with other organisations such as national governing bodies, and **lack of flexibility** to imbed into existing structures.
- Clubs find existing club accreditation processes **too complicated** or confusing.
- The Special Olympics GB **bottleneck communication channels** to clubs creates more **pressure** for club main contacts and **challenges** in reaching athletes & families.
- Special Olympics GB club structures are **confusing and complicated**, with **no standardisation** across Scotland, England and Wales, requiring **more resource to service** locally and to develop.
- Clubs say it is **not easy to connect with other accredited clubs** and programmes effectively.
- Clubs are facing **higher levels of risk** in safeguarding, finance, and more, with a landscape of club management becoming more complex and resource intensive.



Opportunities

- There is considerable **growth potential** in Special Olympics GB which is not currently being realised – the **number of clubs has remained steady** (+/-10%) in the last 5 years with some folding. Thousands of people with ID therefore remain inactive/ not connected to sport and physical activity.
- **Fewer than half** of sports clubs have a relationship with their National Governing Body, and **fewer than a third** with schools or community organisations, which is **below the sector average**. This means huge opportunity in connecting into these spaces.
- Clubs are generally reporting high **satisfaction with support** received in club management, which shows an opportunity to build on what exists.
- **Connecting more with existing structures** would support club growth, particularly in areas where there is less Special Olympics GB presence such as Scotland, the South of England, London and rural Wales.



The Volunteer & Coach



Insights

- There is an **over-reliance** on a relatively **small pool of volunteers** who very often will hold multiple roles in a club, or they are also parents/family members of athletes, creating succession concerns. The average volunteer holds **2.1** volunteer roles with SOGB.
- The organisation **needs more volunteers**, with over 70% of clubs reporting that recruiting and retaining coaches is one of the biggest challenges.
- Special Olympics GB holds a **below average** % of **volunteers and coaches with a disability**. Athletes have reported that they want to be coaches, but majority have 'never been asked' or 'do not see accessible pathways to become a volunteer'.
- **Over half of volunteers** state they want to **raise awareness of intellectual disabilities** through their volunteering activities.
- There is a **bottleneck for membership communication** via volunteers/ coaches fuelling challenges with engagement.
- Insights also show volunteers **do not feel connected** to the organisation of Special Olympics.

Opportunities

- Some of the biggest value contributions – social and wellbeing value for example - within SOGB are found by **harnessing and nurturing the joy of volunteering**. In order to achieve this, there must be **clear pathways, more opportunities** and **more support**.
- Special Olympics GB is committed to developing a fit-for-purpose volunteer framework which responds to a **unanimous ask** across all stakeholder groups to **invest in volunteers** – this includes everything from reward and recognition, to general training, to high quality coach qualifications. Over 50% coaches in Special Olympics GB stated they do not have access to CPD outside of Special Olympics GB.
- There is huge potential in **diversifying volunteer and coaching pathways** to engage with more audiences, more often. This includes **breaking into existing sport structures**.

The Educator



Insights

- Educators and teachers feel the **most supported** by Special Olympics GB across all stakeholder groups – this may be due to project-specific delivery in schools.
- Special Olympics GB has a **lower recorded presence** in schools meaning that development opportunities are limited. There is seen by a **very low participation** in Special Olympics GB participation for those **under the age of 21**.
- Special Olympics GB does not have equitable reach across Scotland, England and Wales in schools/education networks, and has limited activity with Universities, colleges and associated organisations.

Opportunities

- Schools and educators are key to **accessing youth**, and through accessing youth, it is found to have a **better and longer lasting impact** on changing perceptions of ID and engaging in sport.
- Schools are reported as one of the **more easily accessible** ways for athletes to find out about or **engage with sport** and physical activity.
- Existing structures in schools present a huge opportunity to connect better with **health and education**, key contributors to activity levels.

The Family, Friend & Carer



Insights

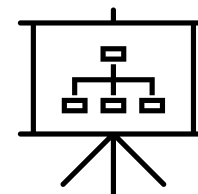
- Family members are highly dedicated in the network and are often the **lifblood of the clubs, grassroots delivery** and **athlete access** to clubs and pathways.
- Families, friends and carers often **do not have direct communication** with Special Olympics GB, leaving a feeling of lack of support, connectivity & understanding.
- Findings across all Home Nations show that for an athlete, a lack of support from family and friends would prevent them from being active, further highlighting the **important role of family & friends** in helping shape people with ID's experiences in sport. In Scotland 67% athletes would find it hard to take part without them.
- Those in care support experience significantly **more barriers** in accessing competition and weekend activity.

Opportunities

- Special Olympics GB members feel like 'one big family', emphasising the **commitment and passion** that sits within the club network to be valued and nurtured.
- Almost 2/3 family members in Special Olympics GB reported they aspire to **create more opportunities in inclusive sport**, presenting opportunities to engage with families to drive growth.
- There are currently **no specific or tailored pathways** for family members, friends or care support, presenting a **huge opportunity** for better engagement as they do not always want to volunteer.



The Organisation



Insights

- The existing Network Structure is **not accessible**, **flexible** or **scalable** due to rigidity and singularity.
- The organisation does not operate an inclusive governance structure across 3 home nations, leading to **complex challenges** - from **resource** and **funding**, through to **delivery** and **pathways**.
- The organisation faces **high levels of risk** from extremely limited resource, to safeguarding, to financial, to reputational.
- With this, comes **resource-intensive processes** and **inefficiencies**, putting a bigger strain on the organisation to perform across key areas such as competition, pathway development and operations, before we even reach innovation.



Opportunities

- Special Olympics GB holds **strong relationships** with key stakeholders across the sector locally and internationally, who support the strategic direction of the organisation and Inclusion in Action. SOGB is able to leverage the support of these organisations through **collaboration and connected goals** to promote innovative practice.
- The organisation has the **flexibility and willingness** to evolve its structure in a way that best serves its athletes on a local level.
- The organisation has a **strong understanding** of risk, challenges and opportunities, with action plans in place to appease.
- The organisation **listens** and values **empathy**, and will continue to value stakeholder insights and views.

The Sector & Society



Insights

- The key players in the sector, such as National Governing Bodies of sport, **do not always know how to support or engage** with Special Olympics GB or with people with an intellectual disability.
- It is not always clear what the role(s) of organisations are, and what their part to play looks like when it comes to inclusive sport – **there is no blueprint** for cross-organisational connectivity in national disability sport.
- Organisations operating within the sector do not know how to best work together to achieve like goals.
- Across the sector, there is a **highly competitive and saturated market for resource** – from volunteers to funding – making it more important than ever to unite to ensure succession, sustainability and growth.
- There are not many pathways for people with an ID in sport, and even fewer major event pathways, with people with ID feeling limited impact at grassroots.
- Wider factors such as **unemployment and benefits**, **education** and **health** are often underconsidered and misunderstood for people with ID, which are proven **influencers of inactivity levels**, ultimately leaving these individuals underserved.
- Athletes say that 'even if a **club is inclusive**, if the **sport is not inclusive**, it will still be **inaccessible**'.



Opportunities

- **All stakeholders** have reported that a key motivation of theirs is to **enhance awareness of people with ID** in sport – this can be channelled into the work we do from a local to national level.
- There is a **strong appetite and demand** for key players in the sector to **work with Special Olympics GB** to enhance opportunities for people with ID. The opportunities in this space is huge and therefore the organisation will need to prioritise its approach. Examples of this have included the Active Norfolk Partnership, National Governing Body Partnerships and Collaborative work with the Youth Sports Trust.
- Special Olympics GB is well positioned to **harness the value in the sector** into the world of those with an ID, by pushing ID expertise, insights and lived experience into the sector and pulling the sport specific resource into our athletes' context. This could include through training, funding and advocacy.
- Special Olympics GB has the ability to truly **change people's lives**, and through this, **change perceptions**, which **influences decision-making** and ultimately **changes society** for the better.
- There is an aligned perspective in research that the **direction of travel to achieve growth needs to change** from getting more people into ID specific settings to be active, to increase the opportunities for people with ID to connect with society and existing structures.



Inspiring stories of courage,
strength and determination

Let me win.
But if I cannot win,
let me be brave
in the attempt.
- Special Olympics athlete oath





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