



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

University of Edinburgh
Influencing the world since 1583

Academy of Sport

AOS

AN INDEPENDENT THINK TANK

ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024

Academy of Sport

Building upon a heritage of influence through sport since 1591

Vision

Sport has a part to play in addressing the challenges that face humanity in the 21st Century and is seen to be addressing such challenges.

"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

"Thank you very much. I have thoroughly enjoyed these past six weeks and the University of Edinburgh is a place where I am looking at going to study."

- Football More than a Game Student from Brazil, Future Learn, 2023

"As a football player and a fan, I loved discovering different aspects of the game on this course. Lots of information about how football serves various roles to touch human lives. Would recommend!"

- Football More than a Game Student from India, Coursera, 2024

"Following the publication of the report Sport for Mental Health at the WISH Conference in Doha 2022 by the University of Edinburgh and an emerging paper looking at the close links between sport, climate change and mental health, it is clearer than ever that sport has the potential to be a powerful platform for addressing these broad issues through its unique global reach and the power to unify people and cultures through a universal language."

"The 7th Debate will further highlight and raise awareness of the role of the Commonwealth Secretariat, and its hosting partner the University of Edinburgh, as a global thought leader in SDP policy".

- Commonwealth Secretariat 2023

"The players are buzzing about their future, how things in school don't seem as dry or unimportant as they used to."

- Educated Pass parent 2023

"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."

- Visiting Professor 2020



University of Edinburgh Academy of Sport 2023-2024 Highlights

- More than 4,760 learners take Football more than a Game [Coursera].
- Support Commonwealth Secretariat to run 8th Commonwealth Debate on Sport and Artificial Intelligence London.
- Eric Liddell Annual Lecture in partnership with Eric Liddell Community and HRH Princess Ann.
- Official Launch of Eric Liddell online MOOC.
- Support the launch of the Commonwealth Report on Addressing the Rising Burden of Non-Communicable Diseases in the Commonwealth.
- Sustaining positions of influence in local and global sport.
- Supporting The Homeless World Cup, Edinburgh Futures Institute and the Oscar Foundation address poverty through sport.
- Partnering with Queens Park Community Foundation to deliver access to education.
- Providing opportunities for students locally and globally.
- Partnership with Edinburgh Business School to deliver Business of Football event.
- Supported local internal review of university knowledge exchange and network centres.
- 55 **Sport Podcasts** on global and local issues and voices.
- 73 **Sport Matters** evidence-based blogs on sport.
- New Honorary Professors and PhD students.
- Production of Paris 2024 Briefing and supporting Olympic Research Centres.
- Co-leadership Eric Liddell Community 2024 Celebrations including Annual Lecture and Commemorative Plaque at Stade Colombes.
- Hosting Scottish launch of How Climate Change is Changing Sport.
- Hosted 2 events highlighting changing sport and human rights landscape.
- Supported the British Council and British Foreign Policy Group Government Briefings on sport and soft power.
- Supporting company formation and 2 new sport podcasts to advance data analytics in sport.
- Hosting a dedicated Gaelic sports website.
- Hosted a workshop on the ethics of a high-performance sporting environment.

ACADEMY OF SPORT | IMPACT, STUDY AND DIALOGUE

2023-2024 was another remarkable year for AOS as our members and associates helped to 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.

EGLOBAL AND LOCAL POSITIONS OF INFLUENCE

Members of AOS hold **positions of influence** locally and internationally all of which helps to support communities, inform research and knowledge exchange and create impact. These include members of and/or strategic advisors to the following:

The Commonwealth Ministers Advisory Board for Sport; United Kingdom British Foreign Policy and Soft Power Working Group; Scottish Local Authority Leisure, Culture and Trust Boards (Chair); The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St Andrews, Royal Dornoch Golf Club (President); The Ramblers Association of Scotland (Vice-President); World Athletic Indoor Championships 2024 (Chief Medical Advisor and Scientific Officer); DP World Tour, European Tour Health and Performance Institutes, Ryder Cup Europe (Chief Medical and Scientific Advisor); Scottish Government Health and Inequality Committee; International Cultural Relations Research Alliance (steering group member); Public Diplomacy Council of America; Board of Directors Scottish Football Clubs; Advisory Council Global Compassion Coalition; Palliative Care Working Group Consortium of Universities for Global Health (Chair; Scottish Government Global Citizenship Board; The Vatican-Mario Negri-Lancet Commission on the Value of Life; Iona Community Council Trustees (Vice-Convener); Australian Olympic Team, Australia Rugby World Cup Squad, England Rugby National Team (psychology team member); UK Sport (social impact advisor powered by purpose programme); UNESCO ICM (South Korea); Sport Ecology Group (Founding member); North American Sports Management Group (Sustainability Chair); University of Toronto (ombudsperson); Beijing Opera Critique Association (Board Member); Scottish Basketball Hall of Fame (panel member); Scottish National Para Football Association (Board Member); Asian Sport Foundation (Trustee); Scottish Centre for Olympic Research and Education (Research Director); Institute of Olympic Studies and Research - Shanghai (Co-Founder- Director); Olympic Studies Centre (South Africa); Qatar Sports Museum (advisor); Football Federation of Australia (advisor). Brazilian College of Sports Sciences (Vice-President); Asian-Pacific Association of Sports Studies (President); European Academy of Arts and Sciences; Fulbright Finland Commission (evaluator); Research Consultant, Q(h)uebeka Trust, Johannesburg. Currently policy advice has been provided to, for example, the Governments of Scotland, United Kingdom, Wales, Germany, Australia, Brazil (Education and Sports Ministries), China, Japan and the Commonwealth Secretariat (56 countries).

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.

Sustainable Development Goals

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) has reached 6,960 learners this year and is now available in French, Spanish, Arabic and English. Dr Banda helped to facilitate a workshop on this MOOC in partnership with the African Union and the Commonwealth Secretariat.



Our partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat continues to enable the delivery of the sustainable development goals through sport in several ways including facilitating and being part of the impact, supporting Commonwealth Ministers Advisory Board on Sport and the launching of research reports and youth focused guidelines.

[*The 7th Commonwealth Debate of Sport*](#) has now reached more than 450 representatives of government, leaders in the sport and development field, policymakers, intergovernmental organisations, academics, students, media and the Commonwealth family of organisations. The debate has reached 56 countries, all of which were made more aware of the Commonwealth and Edinburgh's role (Reid, Grant, Ross, Jarvie, Banda) as a thought leader in SDP and broader issues linked to human rights. The event reached 500,000 unique users through partnering with the Sports for Development Platform.

This was followed by supporting and attending [*The 8th Commonwealth Debate on Sport*](#) in which the focus turned to the role of Artificial Intelligence in helping sport to achieve the sustainable development goal. Our involvement also facilitated access for Edinburgh University students to attend the event.



The 8th Commonwealth Debate on Sport

Sport, Human Rights, Mega Sports Events and Olympic 365

Throughout 2023-24 we continued to work with [*The Centre for Sport and Human Rights and Olympics 365*](#) to enable human rights and the sustainable development goals. As a network member and partner of both we hosted visits and workshops during 2024. David Grevemburg (CBE) in partnership with the Centre for Sport and Human Rights addressed the question of what does it mean to host Responsible, Sustainable and Impactful Sports Events and Legacies? Our briefing paper on [*Qatar FIFA 2022 World Cup*](#) was followed up with our briefing on the Paris 2024 Olympics. Members contributed to the production of [*The Routledge Handbook of Mega Events, Sport and Human Rights*](#) supported by the Centre for Sport and Human Rights. Associate Editor Shubham Jain visited us in May to follow up on policy and research opportunities working with the Centre for Sport and Human Rights.



Honorary Professor Corrinne Reid delivered a workshop for coaches, clinical therapists and sport psychologists on the ethics of a high-performance sporting environment.

Peter Donnelly made the case for [*children to be a protected class in sport*](#).

International Evidence and Advocacy for Sport, Mental and Planetary Health



We continue to build upon our partnering with [the The Global Health Academy](#) and [University of Toronto](#). Our evidence based report, [Sport for Mental Health : A Global Strengths Based Change System](#) (Reid, Grant, Kerr, Brockett, Morris, Banda, Murray, Almuhanadi, Tamminen, Reardon, Simpson) called on governments, sports authorities, and the wider sporting community to maximize the scale and reach of sport to advance mental health benefits for communities. Our subsequent collaborative reports this year have included [The Game of Life: Sport's Contribution to improving the Health of the Planet](#) (Reid, Grant, Morris, Brockett, Jarvie, Murray) and [Organizational Responses to The Covid 19 Pandemic on Youth Sport in Canada and Scotland](#) (Aubin, Darnell, Jarvie, Walker, Qiao).

We seek to continue to advance the position Edinburgh as global thought leaders on sport and planetary health and support the work of [The Sport Ecology Group](#) (Ross).



In May 2024 we partnered with Bloomsbury Publishing and the University of Toronto to support the Scottish launch, by the founder of the Sports Ecology Group, of [Warming Up How Climate Change is Changing Sport](#) (Professor Maddy Orr). The proposition is that the world of sport has a new opponent- climate change. The argument is that while the threat that climate change poses to sport is clear, with billions of participants and fans around the world relying on the sector for entertainment, jobs, fitness and health, this is one industry we can't afford to lose.



Professor Maddy Orr Book Launch in Edinburgh

University of Toronto



The complexity of today's challenges, requires us to seek out complementary expertise from scholars and communities in other fields, other parts of the university and other quality partners whether they be international or local. Our partnership with the University of Toronto has continued to flourish since its inception in 2014.

Our close association with the University of Toronto has this year, for example, supported (i) research and advocacy efforts to shift the dial on Sport and Youth; (ii) joint collaborative research grants; (iii) staff exchanges; (iv) reviews of Edinburgh's high performance sports provision (iv) knowledge exchange through opening up [access to education](#) and (v) access to comparative developments such as [The Future of Sport in Canada Commission](#).

From Human Rights to Human Physiology Toronto and other partners have supported our production 55 open access sports podcasts and lectures.

International Reach through Football

Learners from the following countries have enrolled on Football More than a Game United Kingdom; India; United States of America; Egypt; Nigeria; China; Brazil; Mexico; Australia; France; Turkey; Pakistan; Italy; Russia; Spain; Germany; Ireland; South Africa; Canada; Indonesia; Ghana; Netherlands; Ukraine; United Arab Emirates and Colombia.

The above is illustrative but not an exhaustive account of where Academy of Sport researchers and associates have strived to make a difference this year working with partners as we collectively tackle global challenges.

Edinburgh LOCAL



Maximizing the contribution of sport to building and strengthening relationships between the University, the City of Edinburgh and our local Scottish and United Kingdom communities is important to us and requires a better understanding of what sport can and cannot 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.

Homelessness and the Homeless World Cup



Our work through Edinburgh Local uses the sports resource to work with communities and people on the margins both within and external to the University. Our innovative programmes can and have been used to advance digital literacy, financial literacy, health literacy within the City of Edinburgh and beyond.

In February 2024 Mel Young CBE, Co-Founder of [The Homeless World Cup](#) challenged us help change the lives of 2 million homeless people or those at risk of homelessness by 2025. In April we were invited to attend and supported the launch of [The Beautiful Game](#).



You can find out more about the proposition and the challenge in [Homelessness and the Homeless World Cup](#).

Addressing the Data Equity Gap in Football

Our 2023 [Hampden Nights](#) survey of fans attending Scottish Women's National Team Matches at Hampden continues to enable a better understanding of fan experiences at Scottish Women's International Matches at Hampden Park. Our harnessing of Edinburgh Universities leadership in the Data, Digital and Innovation space coupled with our own commitment to helping to close the data equity gap in Scottish football continues to benefit from a valuable partnership with the Scottish Women's Premier League and the Scottish Football Association. Throughout 2024 we conducted a survey and a sentiment analysis of fans attending Scottish Women's Premier League Club Game. The research has been supported by the SWPL and will continue into late 2024 with a report on the women's club game expected to be released in late 2024.

Edinburgh Futures, Football and the City



We know that football is a game rooted in traditions, symbolism, myths, narratives and the social fabric of Edinburgh. Our club research suggests that 77% of football supporters surveyed believed that The City of Edinburgh is extremely important to their lives. The importance of football clubs as community assets should not be underestimated. They are cultural heritage, a place of physical importance, sometimes the essence of places.

Edinburgh presents itself as a SMART City but does not yet present itself as Global City of Sport or fully capitalize upon success in football, event hosting opportunities or the capability of university sport, including football, to enable city soft power and cultural relations building. If anything, football is a pillar of connectivity for the City of Edinburgh that has still to be fully grasped or even understood.

Supported by a grant from the Universities Future Cities research fund we held an open event in June to both show case some our data driven research on football in the city but also more critically reflect upon the significance of football in Future Cities and including City of Edinburgh strategies and plans for the city. The event was supported by the Academy of Sport Edinburgh Futures, Football and the City Policy Briefing Paper.

Edinburgh Futures Institute and the Oscar Foundation



The Academy of Sport has committed itself to establishing a partnership with The Edinburgh Futures Institute, The Oscar Foundation and The Homeless World Cup to help tackle poverty in India. In June the partners met in the Edinburgh Futures Institute to establish a working relationship and potential remit moving forward.



OSCAR Foundation is a community-based Sports for Development (S4D) organisation that uses the power of football to encourage children to stay in school and equip them with skills to make them resilient and future ready. Through its Football, Education and Young Leader programmes, it has empowered 14,000 children and youth in low-income communities in India since 2010.

[Listen to Ashok and find out more about the work of the Oscar Foundation.](#)

Eric Liddell 100

With a grant from the Eric Liddell 100 Community we have had the privilege to be able to employ research assistance (Walker, Fan Hong, Woodgate, Jarvie,) to support the work of the [Eric Liddell 100 Campaign](#). The outputs from this work have been supported by the University and a thank you is due to the Principal's Office, the Registry, the Centre for Sport and Exercise and Professor Liz Grant. A number of significant outputs include (i) The Eric Liddell Online Learning MOOC; (ii) [An Eric Liddell Timeline](#); (iii) [The Inaugural Eric Liddell Annual Lecture](#) (iv) several publications; (v) the enabling of an Honorary Doctoral Degree.

In 2024 it will be 100 years since Eric Liddell struck gold at the Paris Olympics. Our commissioned work explores the life of Eric Liddell and lessons to be learned for today's changing world.



HRH Princess Anne supporting the Inaugural Eric Liddell Annual Lecture

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.

Educated Pass



The strength of community relationships built up over the years were never more evident than in the discussions with the squads taking part. SYFA boys' clubs (under 14s) across the central belt from Holytown to Musselburgh took part. The project also including girls' squads. The project continues to illustrate the relevancy of curriculum to the players through the lens of football. Touching on, for example, foreign languages, modern studies, history, geography, biology, home economics and politics. The project benefits from strong relationships with the Academy of Sport, the Centre for Sport and Exercise and the University Men and Woman's football teams – along with student athletes from other sporting disciplines.

Football More than a Game

Football More than a Game contributed to the showcasing of Edinburgh's 10 years of Global Learning through MOOC'S. The course review scores continue to be 4.7 and 4.5 out 5 with 5 being excellent.

During 2023-24 both the [Coursera](#) and [Future Learn](#) versions of the course ran online, were updated, and benefited from the significant amount of football data that has been produced through AOS research. The project continues to illustrate the relevancy of curriculum to communities through the lens of football - including data, digital health, and financial literacy, geographical and social inequality.



During 2024 we were supported by [Girls United](#) whose work continues to open opportunities for Girls through football in London and Mexico.

Academy of Sport partners with the Business School Deloitte



There has perhaps never been a more pressing time to take stock and reflect upon the fast-changing business of football. In November this year we partnered with the University of Edinburgh Business School and Deloitte to reflect and take stock of the fast-changing Business of Football. 155 participants from the University, the business community and the football industry heard from Calum Ross on the Business and Future of Football.

LIVE EVENT

THE BUSINESS OF FOOTBALL

With talk of European super leagues, increased revenue gaps, the growth of women's football presented as one of the biggest growth opportunities in football today, join us in an evening of football discussion as we hear Calum Ross from Deloitte Sports Business Group account for some of the major changes impacting upon the Business of Football both now and looking to the future.

TIME
18:00 - 20:30

DATE
Thursday 29 February

Register here

AOS Partnership: Deloitte Sports Business Group and University of Edinburgh Business School

Sport and UK Foreign Policy

The Academy of Sport commissioned ICR Research Ltd to advance further or earlier research on [Sport and Soft Power](#). The outcomes from this have been (i) A draft network grant proposal which we will look to submit 24/25; (ii) a sport, soft power and policy update in the light of the Paris 2024 Olympics and (iii) a policy briefing for the July 4th UK election on leveraging sport in UK Foreign Policy. The research together with our earlier Report for the British Council on [Sport, Cultural Relations and Peacebuilding](#) has led to further invitations to work with The Scottish Council for Global Affairs in the run up to the Paris 2024 Olympic Games.

We continue to advise the UK soft power working group on matters pertaining to sport, soft power and British foreign policy.

The above is illustrative but not an exhaustive account of where Academy of Sport researchers and associates have strived to make a difference this year working with partners as we collectively tackle local challenges.

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 an International Think Tank, 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.

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 more than 73 evidence based research blogs. Earlier this year we published ground breaking insights into the [role of sport in the reintegration of child soldiers](#). This will be developed further into a policy briefing paper next year.

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 [Knowledge Exchange](#) section of our website.

We continue to support [Gaelic Sports 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. This builds upon several recent publications about the role of sport in a fluid world geo-political economy.

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 Road Map 2024-2025

As we move into 2024-25, we will build upon and continue to support and develop the tools, networks and partnerships that have helped us sustain an International Think Tank focused upon sport from our base in Scotland.

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.

We cannot do this alone.

The following is an illustrative but not exhaustive set of actions for 2024-25:

- Position the University of Edinburgh through advancing our contribution in sport and planetary health.
- Support Moray House School of Education and Sport research and knowledge exchange.
- Support the work of the Oscar Foundation in partnership with Edinburgh Futures Institute.
- Production of sport policy briefings in the run up to UK and USA elections.
- Explore further outputs on sport, covid and the impact upon marginalized youth.
- 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 the role of sport in the rehabilitation of child soldiers.
- Progress work to submit a network grant to advance work on diplomacy, cultural relations and foreign policy.
- Production of two podcasts on sport, data/AI and society.
- Support the Commonwealth Ministers Advisory Board on Sport (CABOS).
- Refresh Football More than a Game both online and short course version.
- Production of Scottish Women's Club Football Report
- Support the Centre for Sport and Exercise and Edinburgh Student's Union as they continue to open opportunities for students and the broader public.
- Promote knowledge exchange and widening access to education by supporting both Football More than a Game in Scottish football stadiums and Educated Pass.
- Explore hosting of more visiting scholars from with a view to co-hosting and planning for international collaboration and co-production of outputs.
- Contribute to the Centre for Sport and Human Rights knowledge exchange outputs.
- Help to sustain and add value to new and current PhD students and research assistants.

Thank You to all who have made 2023-24 a hard but undoubtedly successful year including: The University of Edinburgh; Moray House School of Education and Sport; The Centre for Sport and Exercise; Centre for Sport and Human Rights ; University of Toronto Faculty of Kinesiology and Physical Education; Peking University; The Commonwealth Secretariat; The Homeless World Cup Foundation; The School of Informatics (UoE); ICR Research Ltd; The Scottish Football Association; Royal Dornoch Golf Club; The Eric Liddell Community; The British Council; The Sports Diplomacy Alliance; The UK Soft Power Working Group; Data and Digital and Future Cities College Research Themes, Scottish Women's Professional Football League; Hibernian and Queen's Park Football Club and all our local and global associates.

Academy of Sport Board Meeting of 18 June 2024

[Quick Guide to The Academy of Sport](#)