Sport and physical activity sector local skills plan

East of Scotland: 2026-2029

CREATED BY

Sport and Physical Activity Sector Local Skills Accountability Board – East of Scotland

CIMSPA®





Contents

Introduction and context 3	Themes, recommendations, partners and stakeholders 9	Recommendations and actions 12
Data and insight that have informed this work 17	The scope of the sport and physical activity sector 20	Glossary 22

Photo credits:

CIMSPA would like to thank Edinburgh Leisure, MHEC Gym, Club FEA and Live Borders for their support in sourcing photographs for this skills plan.

Introduction and context

The Sport and Physical Activity Sector Local Skills Accountability Board – East of Scotland

About the board

Chair: Jack Martin, Coaching Workforce Manager, Edinburgh Leisure

Vice Chair: Ben Lewis, Business Operations Manager, The MHEC Academy

Board member organisations

- Active West Lothian
- Edinburgh College
- Edinburgh Leisure
- Edinburgh Napier University
- Live Borders
- Midlothian Leisure
- **sport**scotland
- The MHEC Academy
- The Fitness Education Academy/CLUB FEA
- West Lothian College
- University of Edinburgh
- Xcite West Lothian Leisure

East of Scotland – geographical area

Currently, the East of Scotland Local Skills Accountability Board (LSAB) includes stakeholders across the City of Edinburgh, Fife, Midlothian, Stirling, the Scottish Borders and West Lothian.

However, this plan takes into account the needs of additional areas in the East of Scotland with the intention of expanding its actions and the LSAB network to include Angus, Clackmannanshire, Dundee, East Lothian, Falkirk, and Perth and Kinross.



CIMSPA and local skills

The right training, delivered in the right place, at the right time.

Our collaborative local skills project is bringing together employers, education providers and employability-focused organisations to effectively and efficiently match supply and demand.

CIMSPA – the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity – is the chartered professional body for the sport and physical activity sector workforce.

In 2023, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published "Get Active: A strategy for the future of sport and physical activity". This strategy explicitly backs CIMSPA's rollout of local-based skills and training: "We will support CIMSPA in the development of local skills improvement plans with full national coverage."

In line with its "Uniting the Movement" strategy, Sport England has commissioned CIMSPA to help accelerate local-focused skills improvements within the sport and physical activity workforce.

CIMSPA has already deployed a complete delivery team of multiple workforce development managers working at a local level across England, Wales and Scotland.

Funding and support

Our local skills work to engage with employability-focused organisations and build a representative sport and physical activity sector workforce is funded and supported by Sport England, **sport**scotland and the National Lottery.

Get involved

To learn more about this local skills plan or the work of your local skills accountability board please contact CIMSPA who will link you with their workforce development manager for the East of Scotland.

partners@cimspa.co.uk

LOCAL SKILLS ACCOUNTABILITY BOARD WEBSITE PAGE

Vision and purpose

To build an informed, skilled, connected and sustainable sport and physical activity workforce across the East of Scotland.

The East of Scotland Local Skills Accountability Board will achieve this through improving the connectivity of employers, education providers and national partners. This will enable us to better understand the landscape in which our workforce operates and offer clear career pathways that support their positive impact on our local communities.







National context

Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Act 2026

Introduced as part of wider education reforms across Scotland, the 2026 tertiary education act aims to simplify the funding model for post-16 skills development. It focuses on creating a more joined-up approach across further and higher education as well as other training provision and mandates a national funding strategy.

This will be based on consultation with employers and industry bodies such as CIMSPA, ensuring that industry need is taken into account when designing and delivering learning programmes.

sportscotland strategy

In 2019, **sport**scotland launched its 'Sport for Life' strategy with a vision for "an active Scotland where everyone benefits from sport". This was updated in 2025 in line with the Scottish government's 'Physical Activity for Health: Framework'.

One of the key enablers of the system the strategy relies on is people. **sport**scotland states:

"We have talented people working in sport: at the heart of our sporting system are thousands of skilled staff and committed volunteers who help others take part and progress. We see them in our outdoor environments, communities, places of education and work, and in our sports clubs and performance programmes."



Regional Skills Investment Plans (RSIPs)

Regional Skills Investment Plans are an extension of Skills Development Scotland's Skills Investment Planning approach first launched in 2019. They aim to tackle economic and employment challenges according to the specific needs of each area of Scotland by connecting education with employer need.

While the plans highlight key sectors and skills to focus on, sport and physical activity is not named as a priority. Nonetheless, the sector has a vital role to play in supporting the aims of each RSIP, contributing to a healthy workforce and matching skills demand with education.

Local skills plans in Scotland

The delivery of local-based skills development and training will differ slightly between the home nations in how these will be funded. Currently, local skills plans are only fully funded in England.

However, the principle that the talented people working throughout our sector deserve to be supported, developed and retained within the sector remains a key strategic priority for CIMSPA across the UK.

The decision to standardise our rollout of local skills plans was taken on the basis that they will benefit everyone across the sector, regardless of their postcode.

This ensures that CIMSPA continues to share best practice in workforce development to support all stakeholders.

In future, the political landscape may change and enable full funding of local skills plans to be expanded to all home nations. If this happens, then the systems, processes and mechanisms will already be in place and working to improve the skills within the communities of Scotland.



Themes, recommendations, partners and stakeholders

Themes

This plan has four themes.

1 Recruitment

Ensuring supply meets demand by attracting the best talent to work in the sport and physical activity sector.

2 Training and professional development

Enhancing the training offered locally and ensuring that the funding which supports it can:

- Meet the demand and needs of employers
- Produce work-ready people
- Add complementary skills to enable people to achieve their career or business goals

3 Support

Ensuring the right support is available for the local sport and activity workforce and their employers to enable the outcomes of this skills plan to be achieved.

4 Retention

Working to retain talent within the sector and upskilling our workforce with the skills required to flourish.

Recommendations

This plan has two headline recommendations:

Connect the sector 1

Develop relationships between employers, education providers and other sector stakeholders to enable the raising of standards and more high-quality opportunities for workforce development.

Use data effectively 2

Continually collect and analyse data to inform strategic decision-making and develop tailored workforce development models.



Partners and stakeholders

CIMSPA will work collaboratively with a range of partners and stakeholders to deliver on the actions that underpin this plan's recommendations.

These include:

Education and training providers

Those delivering accredited training – both sector/occupation-specific training and training around basic skills, knowledge and behaviours – for example, further education colleges and higher education institutes.

Skills and sector partners

Those with knowledge and understanding of the sport and physical activity sector, with expertise to support both employers and training providers, national governing bodies of sport and other system partners.

Employers and deployers

For example, leisure providers, coaching companies and gym owners.



Recommendations and actions

RECOMMENDATION 1

Connect the sector: Develop relationships between employers, education providers and other sector stakeholders to enable the raising of standards and more high-quality opportunities for workforce development.

Theme(s)	No.	2026–2029 actions	What does success look like?	How will it be measured?*
TRAIN SUPPORT	1a	Use networking events to share knowledge and opportunities.	▸ A minimum of two breakfast networking events are held each year ▸ Networking events include educational sessions that support professional development and offer CIMSPA CPD points ▸ Sector stakeholders use the events to share challenges and best practice ▸ The event structure evolves over time to respond to feedback and sector needs ▸ The events are attended by sector stakeholders and professionals beyond the LSAB ▸ Attendees provide positive feedback on the events ▸ Attendance increases over time ▸ National stakeholders attend the events ▸ Increased awareness of how CIMSPA can support professionals to gain recognition and progress their career ▸ More individuals in the East of Scotland with CIMSPA professional status	▸ Number of events ▸ Number of event attendees ▸ CIMSPA CPD data ▸ CIMSPA professional status data ▸ Qualitative data (event attendee feedback) ▸ Local documentation and reporting
SUPPORT	1b	Understand and respond to the needs of self-employed professionals, microenterprises and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).	▸ An initial virtual networking event is held in collaboration with the Fitness Education Academy, inviting their alumni network ▸ Networking events specifically for self-employed professionals, microenterprises and SMEs are held at least twice a year ▸ Self-employed professionals, microenterprises and SMEs in the region attend networking events ▸ Increased awareness of how CIMSPA can support sector microenterprises and SMEs ▸ More microenterprises and SMEs are CIMSPA Employer Partners ▸ More data is collected on self-employed professionals, microenterprises and SMEs via the CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool ▸ Workforce planning support is better tailored to self-employed, microenterprise and SME needs	▸ Number of events ▸ Event attendee data ▸ Number of CIMSPA Employer Partners in the East of Scotland ▸ CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool data ▸ Qualitative data

*See glossary below for more information on specific terms.

RECOMMENDATION 1 (continued)

Theme(s)	No.	2026–2029 actions	What does success look like?	How will it be measured?*
RECRUIT TRAIN SUPPORT	1c	Connect employer needs with education provision.	▸ Education providers and employers attend LSAB meetings ▸ CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool data is consistently shared with education providers and other LSAB members ▸ Education providers are aware of how CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool data can support industry-informed curriculum development ▸ Local CIMSPA Education Partners and Employer Partners collaborate to create pipelines from qualifications to work experience and employment ▸ The **sport**scotland PASS framework is used by employers and education providers as a foundation for developing industry readiness in learners ▸ Work experience opportunities are identified and recorded ▸ More work experience opportunities are shared with education providers ▸ Learners are better prepared to enter the sector workforce	▸ LSAB meeting attendance data ▸ Work placement data from employers and education providers ▸ Number of employers using the PASS framework ▸ Education provider course destination data ▸ Local documentation and reporting
RECRUIT TRAIN SUPPORT RETAIN	1d	Raise awareness of sector career pathways.	▸ Case studies of experienced sector professionals are shared to highlight career opportunities and pathways ▸ Case studies of professionals with CIMSPA professional status are shared to highlight how this supports professional development and workforce planning ▸ Education provider alumni share their career pathways with learners ▸ Education providers use the CIMSPA Careers Hub and careers guidance resources to inform learners about sector career pathways ▸ More career explorers are aware of sector career pathways ▸ More sector professionals are aware of how CIMSPA can support their career in the sector ▸ More employers understand how CIMSPA can support their workforce planning ▸ More individuals with CIMSPA professional status ▸ More CIMSPA Employer Partners	▸ CIMSPA Careers Hub data ▸ CIMSPA Employer Partner data ▸ CIMSPA professional status data ▸ Qualitative data ▸ Local documentation and reporting

*See glossary below for more information on specific terms.

RECOMMENDATION 1 (continued)

Theme(s)	No.	2026–2029 actions	What does success look like?	How will it be measured?*
TRAIN SUPPORT RETAIN	1e	Ensure workforce development is consistent across the sector.	▸ Case studies of good workforce development practice are shared with sector stakeholders ▸ Increased awareness of how CIMSPA can support sector employers with workforce planning ▸ More CIMSPA Employer Partners ▸ Employers use CIMSPA Employer Partnership to support their workforce planning ▸ Employers use CIMSPA Priority Plans to track their progression in workforce development ▸ Employers consistently offer high-quality development opportunities to the workforce ▸ Employers report better employee retention ▸ A better skilled sector workforce	▸ CIMSPA Employer Partner data ▸ CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool data ▸ Local documentation and reporting ▸ Qualitative data

*See glossary below for more information on specific terms.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Use data effectively: Continually collect and analyse data to inform strategic decision-making and develop tailored workforce development models.

Theme(s)	No.	2026–2029 actions	What does success look like?	How will it be measured?*
SUPPORT RETAIN	2a	Understand retention trends and barriers.	▸ Retention data collected through the CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool is shared with sector stakeholders ▸ CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool data is used to analyse retention across the region ▸ Employers have a better understanding of their retention rates and barriers to retention ▸ Current retention practice is analysed and understood ▸ Employers start to understand how to improve retention	▸ Local documentation and reporting
TRAIN SUPPORT	2b	Use local sector insight to support skills development funding applications.	▸ A network of local sector boards shares knowledge of available funding opportunities ▸ Funding providers signpost to opportunities at sector networking events and LSAB meetings ▸ Employers understand funding opportunities available to them and how to apply ▸ Employers accessing funding pots ▸ Increased funded training and development for sector employees	▸ Number of local and national funding streams shared ▸ Number of funded training courses delivered ▸ Qualitative data ▸ Local documentation and reporting
SUPPORT	2c	Support employers to make insight-led workforce planning decisions.	▸ Wide-reaching sector stakeholders such as **sport**scotland encourage increased employer engagement with the CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool ▸ More employers completing the CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool ▸ More employers using CIMSPA Data Lens ▸ A greater diversity of employer data collected through the CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool ▸ A greater understanding of workforce challenges and needs ▸ Sector stakeholders use data and insight to inform strategic decision-making and planning	▸ Workforce Development Tool data ▸ CIMSPA Data Lens user data ▸ Local documentation and reporting

*See glossary below for more information on specific terms.

RECOMMENDATION 2 (continued)

Theme(s)	No.	2026–2029 actions	What does success look like?	How will it be measured?*
TRAIN SUPPORT	2d	Explore how mentoring could support professionals in the sector.	▸ CIMSPA Workforce Development Tool data is analysed to understand existing appetite and opportunity for mentorship ▸ Education providers are connected with professionals offering mentorship opportunities for learners ▸ Sector events are used to share and explore formal and informal mentoring opportunities ▸ Ways to increase the number of mentors are explored ▸ More mentoring in the sector locally ▸ Sector professionals are better supported in their professional development through mentoring	▸ Number of mentorships ▸ Local documentation and reporting

*See glossary below for more information on specific terms.

Data and insight that have informed this work

Employment

Employment rate

The proportion of people aged 16–64 in paid work or with a job that they are temporarily away from.

Scotland	City of Edinburgh	City of Dundee	Scottish Borders	Clackmannanshire
74%	82.1%	63.7%	74.8%	67.3%

Source: Local indicators – Employment rate, Office for National Statistics, 2024

LOCAL INDICATORS – EMPLOYMENT RATE

Unemployment rate

The proportion of economically active people aged 16 and over without a job who have been actively seeking work within the last four weeks and are available to start work within the next two weeks.

Scotland	City of Edinburgh	City of Dundee	Stirling	Fife
4%	3.6%	5.9%	2.1%	4%

Source: Regional labour market: local indicators for counties, local and unitary authorities, Office for National Statistics, 2026

REGIONAL LABOUR MARKET: LOCAL INDICATORS



Education and skills

Level 3 or above qualifications

The percentage of the population aged 16–64 with Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) level 3+ qualifications.

Scotland	City of Edinburgh	Midlothian	Falkirk	West Lothian
73.7%	85.5%	73.9%	64.3%	65.5%

Source: Local indicators – Level 3 or above qualifications, Office for National Statistics, 2024

LOCAL INDICATORS – LEVEL 3 OR ABOVE QUALIFICATION

No qualifications

The percentage of the population aged 16–64 with no qualifications.

Scotland	City of Edinburgh	Angus	Perth and Kinross	Falkirk
8.2%	4.2%	7.1%	5.2%	13%

Source: Local indicators – No qualifications, Office for National Statistics, 2024

LOCAL INDICATORS – NO QUALIFICATIONS



Understanding these findings

This data shows that employment and qualification challenges vary significantly across the East of Scotland. In order to support struggling regions to develop, employers such as Edinburgh Leisure have been sharing best practice in areas such as working with education providers, recruitment and workforce development.

With the focus on this skills plan being to encourage collaboration and data-led planning, the LSAB intends to expand on this initial work to create a more consistently positive picture across the region.

Additional data that informed this plan

Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020, Scottish Government, 2020

SIMD (SCOTTISH INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION)



The scope of the sport and physical activity sector

Sector and industries definitions

The sport and physical activity sector:

"Everyone working in the sport and physical activity workforce in the industries and occupations detailed below and overleaf."

Sector industries

Industry definitions from CIMSPA for the purpose of this strategy are shown in the table (right).

Paid/voluntary workforce

This sport and physical activity sector local skills plan aims to be broad enough in its outcomes to not need to be separated by employment/deployment status.

Industry	Definition
Exercise and fitness	Services, activities and venues that predominantly improve participant physical fitness.
Community sport	Sport/skill-based services, activities and venues that increase participation and develop skill, sometimes targeting under-represented groups and inequalities.
Leisure operations	Services, activities and venues that predominantly improve participation in physical activity.
Health and wellbeing	Holistic services and activities that promote improvements across all aspects of health, sometimes involving health care and other non-sector professionals.
Adventure sport	Activities, services and venues both indoor and outdoor improving participation in sport perceived as having a high level of risk.
Performance sport	Competitive sport and activities including those in which athletes receive payment for their performance; professional, semi-professional and grass roots sport.

Occupations

Introduction

"Occupations" are a standardised set of job roles that cover the whole of the sport and physical activity sector. For example, what some operators might call a "leisure attendant" is considered to be part of the "recreation assistant" occupation.

Definitions

- Frontline – occupations in sport and physical activity directly servicing the needs of the participant.
- Support chain – occupations in sport and physical activity servicing the needs of the front line and/or the facilities.
- Extended workforce – enablers and influencers of sport and physical activity who are not part of the sector workforce.

Frontline occupations

Sector workforce Occupations aligned with CIMSPA professional standards	Gym Instructor, core group exercise instructor, coach, coaching assistant, personal trainer, strength and conditioning trainer, pilates based matwork instructor, yoga instructor, aspiring manager, entry manager, health navigator, swimming teacher, lifeguard, recreation assistant, assistant swimming teacher, sports therapist*, nutritionist*, sport nutritionist*, physiotherapist*. *Occupations supported directly by other professional bodies
Broader workforce	Receptionist, bar staff, kitchen and catering assistant, waiting staff, cleaning assistant, domestic assistant, sales and retail assistant, chef.

Support chain occupations

Sector workforce Occupations aligned with CIMSPA professional standards	Entry manager, general manager, senior manager, tutor, assessor, coach developer, health navigator, pool plant operative.
Broader workforce	Sport development officer, researcher, teacher, administrative occupations, finance occupations, health and safety, quality manager, environmental manager, auditor, sports media and reporters, general assistant, maintenance operative (examples).

Extended workforce

Enablers Enablers of sport and physical activity who don't necessarily hold a CIMSPA-recognised professional qualification	Primary school teachers, teaching assistants, PE teachers, childcare workers, carers, sport event staff/volunteers, activity group leaders (e.g. scouts, guides etc), officiating.
Influencers Influencers of sport and physical activity who don't necessarily hold a sector-specific professional qualification	Parents, sport role models, sport and fitness models, sport and fitness social media influencers.

Glossary

Business skills diagnostic

CIMSPA has developed and launched a business diagnostic process through its workforce development team.

Sole traders and micro-enterprises of fewer than 10 employees make up 89% percent of the businesses in our sector, including over 73,000 freelancers and sole traders.

The diagnostic focuses in particular on this business type – building an understanding of their business needs and exploring how we can position our product offer and partner support to meet these.

CIMSPA Data Lens

The CIMSPA Data Lens is a real-time intelligence dashboard for the UK's sport and physical activity sector.

The Data Lens system uses web-scraping APIs to open access data and machine learning, all segmented through real-world definitions specific to the sport and physical activity sector.

It can be interrogated specifically in niche areas such as exercise and fitness or community sport, or even specific geographies at a county or town level.

DATA LENS

Education provider

In this local skills plan, the term education provider refers to a wide range of organisations working within the learning and skills sector. This includes further education institutions such as colleges and higher education institutions like universities as well as private training providers and awarding organisations.

Local documentation and reporting

Throughout the lifespan of this local skills plan, CIMSPA and the local skills accountability board will look to incorporate any new sector-specific data created by local stakeholders that helps us understand the impact of our actions.

For example – employability and skills reports, survey results and impact reports.

Local skills accountability board (LSAB)

A group of local education and training, skills/employability, health and employer stakeholders across a region and within the sport and physical activity sector.

LSABs are co-ordinated and managed by CIMSPA, enabled by Sport England, **sport**scotland and National Lottery funding.

Local workforce skills diagnostic data

CIMSPA has a team of local workforce development managers working across England, Scotland and Wales.

These workforce development managers are engaged in collecting workforce skills intelligence directly from employers in their local area, through a detailed and standardised workforce skills diagnostic survey.

This data can then be segmented at the level of the local skills accountability board for use in better understanding local workforce needs and in monitoring the success of workforce improvement initiatives.

Micro-enterprises

Micro-enterprises are very small companies with at least two of the following:

- a turnover of £1 million or less
- £500,000 or less on its balance sheet
- 10 employees or fewer.

Priority Plans

Priority Plans are individualised plans created for CIMSPA Employer Partners to help prioritise their workforce development over 12 months. Each plan is created on the basis of the data the employer has submitted via the Workforce Development Tool. This is used to identify workforce development needs within their organisation and create of CPD plans for staff. The employer's regional CIMSPA Workforce Development Manager facilitates regular check-ins to support the implementation of the plan.

Qualitative data

Qualitative data is non-numeric, descriptive information that gathers experiences and perceptions. It includes case studies, feedback via surveys and forms, and interviews.

SME (small- and medium-sized enterprises)

An SME is any organisation that has fewer than 250 employees and an annual turnover of £44 million or less or a balance sheet total of £38 million or less.

Sport and physical activity sector local skills plan

This document is a sport and physical activity sector local skills plan. It is a local skills plan specific to the sport and physical activity sector in a specific region.

The plan has been created by key stakeholders from the local area and coordinated and managed by CIMSPA.

Workforce Development Tool

The Workforce Development Tool, based on the sector's employer-led professional standards which are managed by CIMSPA, is an employer-focused online suite of surveys.

The tool has been developed by CIMSPA to capture workforce insights from organisations operating in the sport and physical activity sector. It explores and supports recruitment, retention, training and workforce planning by gathering data on current workforce structure; skills gaps; recruitment practices; training and development needs; diversity and inclusion; and volunteer engagement.

Local workforce development managers use the Workforce Development Tool to collect data from sport and physical employers across each region of the UK.

This data will help inform each region's local skills plan, identifying current skills within the workforce and gaps that need to be filled based on demand in the area.

PUBLISHED BY:

The Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity
Incorporated by Royal Charter Charity Registration No. 1144545 www.cimspa.co.uk

November 2026