LEEDS BECKETT UNIVERSITY

CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SPORT AND SOCIETY

activity alliance

disability inclusion sport

Intersectionality in place-based sports and physical activity systems

Research commissioned by Activity Alliance

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Executive summary

The Centre for Social Justice in Sport and Society at Leeds Beckett University was commissioned to undertake research for Activity Alliance between November 2025 and May 2026. The research sought to understand how intersectionality is integrated into local systems that drive place-based working across sport and physical activity. This research was underpinned by four research questions:

1. How does the place-based workforce understand intersectionality?
2. How do place-based organisations and the workforce apply intersectionality in policy and practice?
3. What is working well in terms of the place-based workforce embedding an intersectional approach in place-based work?
4. What are the gaps and challenges in supporting the workforce to embed an intersectional approach into place-based work?

To answer these questions data was collected through an online survey (n=104), interviews with place-based practitioners and strategic leads (n=18), and a desk-based scoping review of existing intersectional CPD resources within and beyond sport. The workforce was categorised into three groups: strategic (e.g. CEO, Director, Head of Service), operational (e.g. Manager, Team Lead, Activity Co-ordinator) and delivery (e.g. Activator, Coach, Trainer, Engagement Officer). The findings provide a comprehensive analysis of how intersectionality is understood, used and embedded within policy, strategy and programmes within place-based work in sport and physical activity.

In terms of familiarity with the term intersectionality, two thirds of the survey respondents felt that they had a 'good' or 'excellent' understanding. In contrast, under half of survey respondents felt 'quite' or 'extremely' confident explaining intersectionality to others. The survey and interviews highlight that those in strategic roles were the most confident explaining intersectionality. This was attributed to greater familiarity with the term because of more direct dealings with, and the steer from, Sport England.

In relation to usage, nearly half of survey respondents said their organisation uses the idea of intersectionality. Operational staff were most likely to use the term (53%), followed by those in strategic (39%) and delivery (33%) roles. Reasons offered for non-usage included it being an academic term, jargon, a buzz word and not community friendly. Alternative terms used include diversity, inclusion and person-centred. Importantly, these alternatives do not sufficiently reflect the notion of intersectionality. When asked about understandings of intersectionality, the survey and interviews revealed that it is largely understood as identity-based, with less acknowledgment of the wider environment (e.g. policy, context, beliefs, relationships) and how this creates barriers and inequalities.

The survey findings suggest that the explicit idea of intersectionality does not feature extensively in organisational policy and strategy. However, importantly a large percentage of respondents stated ‘unsure’ in response to this question. The interviews offer some insight as to why intersectionality is not embedded extensively within policy and strategy and this is linked to its relatively recent emergence in national sport policy and limited CPD and training opportunities for the operational and delivery workforce.

This research highlights three key features driving person-centred and community focused place-based work including workforce connectivity, a ‘one size does not fit all’ outlook, and collaborating with others. Individually, these three features do not reflect an intersectional approach to provision or delivery. However, if collectively used there is closer alignment with intersectional thinking and practice. The report concludes by providing a number of key evidence-based recommendations to guide future place-based intersectional work in sport and physical activity.



1.0 Introduction

Overview of the research

Researchers from the Centre for Social Justice in Sport and Society in the Carnegie School of Sport at Leeds Beckett University were commissioned by Activity Alliance to undertake an independent piece of research between November 2025 and April 2026. Activity Alliance commissioned this research to better understand how intersectionality is integrated into local systems that drive place-based working across sport and physical activity. The following research questions were addressed:

1. How does the place-based workforce understand intersectionality?
2. How do place-based organisations and the workforce apply intersectionality in policy and practice?
3. What is working well in terms of the place-based workforce embedding an intersectional approach in place-based work?
4. What are the gaps and challenges in supporting the workforce to embed an intersectional approach into place-based work?

Data collection

To answer the research questions data was collected through an online survey, interviews with place-based practitioners and strategic leads, and a desk-based scoping review of existing intersectional CPD resources within and beyond sport.

Figure 1: Overview of data collection approaches



Survey and interview respondents were categorised into three workforce groups: strategic (e.g. CEO, Director, Head of Service), operational (e.g. Manager, Team Lead, Activity Co-ordinator) and delivery (e.g. Activator, Coach, Trainer, Engagement Officer). Table 1 provides an overview of the workforce contributing to the survey and interviews. Notably, survey responses were relatively low in number for the delivery respondent group compared to the strategic and operational workforce groups. Therefore, interpretation of findings from the delivery cohort, particularly when making comparisons across workforce groups should be considered with some caution.

Table 1: Research participants.

Data collection	Strategic	Operational	Delivery	Total
Survey	41	51	12	104
Interview	6	7	5	18

Ethical approval was gained for this research through Leeds Beckett University.

What will this report do?

Having outlined the key research questions and approach to data collection, this report will next offer a brief review of key literature focusing on intersectionality, sport and physical activity. This is followed by the findings which focus on:

- Familiarity with intersectionality; use of intersectionality.
- Terms used instead of intersectionality.
- Understanding(s) of intersectionality.
- Embeddedness of intersectionality within policy, strategy and programmes.
- Intersectional training and CPD.

Consideration is then given to three key features driving person-centred and community focused place-based work which closely align with an intersectional approach. The report concludes by providing a series of evidence-based recommendations to guide future place-based intersectional work in sport and physical activity.

2.0 Setting the scene: Intersectionality, sport and physical activity

The term intersectionality, first coined by Crenshaw (1989), emerged through her work on three legal cases centred on both racial and sex discrimination. Crenshaw argued that a single-issue focus on either racism *or* sexism failed to address the very specific challenges, and 'compounded discrimination', experienced by Black women, as opposed to those experienced by White women or Black men. Whilst various definitions of intersectionality abound, for this report we use Davis' (2008, p.68) definition:

> **Interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference [for example, disability, sexuality, socio-economic status, religion and age[1]] in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power.**

It is important to note here that intersections occur at different levels. For example, at an individual level, the intersections of an individual's multiple identities (e.g. their gender, race, disability, social class and sexuality) interplay to shape their uniqueness and individuality. Moreover, an individual's identities intersect with wider society and institutional practices, policies, programmes, processes, regulations and legislation. In turn, this can create different situations for individuals – ones that may advantage some whilst disadvantaging others (Hill Collins, 2000). As such, taking an intersectional lens can help to identify how power operates, and how instances of privilege and inequalities are created. Promisingly, intersectionality has social justice as a core principle, making it useful for those who are committed to tackling inequalities in people's lives (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2000).

Intersectionality is a relatively new term in sport, physical activity and Physical Education (PE). In PE, scholars have explored the intersections of migration and gender on students' experiences (Jansson et al., 2024; Van Doodewaard & Knoppers, 2018). Within sport, research has considered how LGBTQ+ coaches' experiences can be more fully understood through an appreciation of their multiple identities at the intersections of sexuality, gender, and race (Burgess et al. 2025), and how the lived experiences of disabled women footballers are differently influenced by policies and practice (Macbeth & Sprake, 2025). Within physical activity, intersectionality has been used to explore how the combination of workplace structures, cultures, and motherhood operate to influence physical activity engagement for divorced, single mothers (Zhou & Molnar, 2025). Despite an increased interest in intersectional work in these fields, some identity categories remain largely absent - specifically, disability (Devis-Devis & Perez-Samaniego, 2026). Historically this has been the case within single-issue research (e.g. where the focus is on one identity) but this is also being

[1] We have purposefully added to Davis' (2008) examples in order to be more reflective of a diversity of identity characteristics.

replicated within intersectional research; a situation that Watermeyer and Swartz (2023) describe as 'selective intersectionality'. There are some exceptions: Azzarito's (2020) work highlighting how ableism is not independent of racism, sexism or classism; Haegele's research (Haegele et al., 2018; Haegele & Kirk, 2018) noting how gendered norms differently influence visually impaired boys' and girls' PE experiences; and Brazier et al. (2025) who explore the PE and education experiences of girls at the intersections of disability, ethnicity and gender. Another tendency of intersectional research within sport, PE and physical activity is the preoccupation with identity (Devis-Devis & Perez-Samaniego, 2026; Fitzgerald, 2024; Flintoff et al., 2008). In other words, how do individuals at the intersections of more than one identity marker experience a context and how does this influence activity engagement. This is a limited approach to take, and one that risks placing the responsibility for non-participation with the individual. When this occurs, there is no consideration of how wider social structures and systems contribute to (non)engagement, meaning (dis)advantage and discrimination remain intact (Stride et al., 2025).

Whilst intersectionality has begun to gain traction in the academic disciplines of sport, PE and physical activity, there has been limited attention afforded to intersectionality in sport policy and practice. That said, Sport England's (2021) Uniting the Movement ten-year vision and related data driven tools, such as the Inequalities Metric[2] and Place Need Classification, Activity Alliance's (2023) resource 'Inclusive Activity - Taking a person-centred approach'; and the Moving Intersectionality strand of the Moving Social Work programme (Williams et al., 2026) are, in different ways, beginning to more explicitly address intersectionality in sport and physical activity.

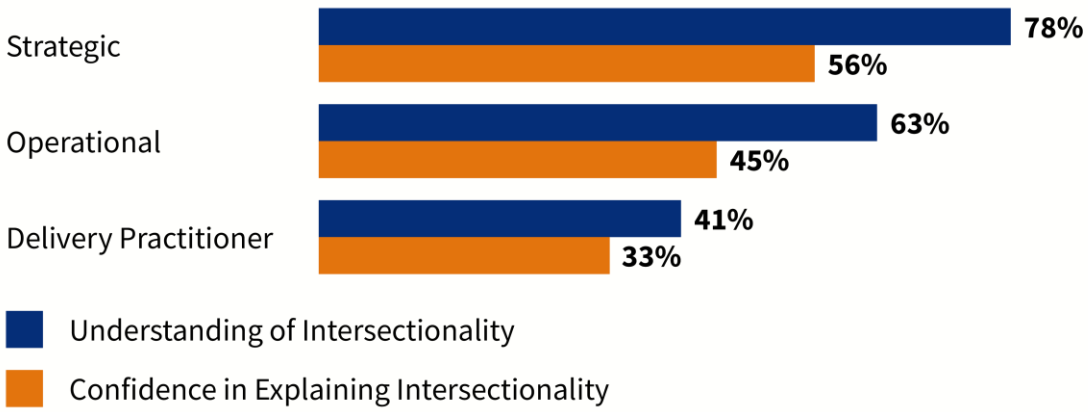


[2] Regarding Sport England's Inequalities Metric, concerns have been raised about the more limited granularity of the national data and its use in informing place-based actions (Downward et al., 2025).

3.0 Familiarity with intersectionality

The survey revealed that two-thirds (66%) of respondents felt they had a 'good' or 'excellent' understanding of intersectionality. Interestingly, respondents were less confident when having to explain intersectionality to others, with just under half (48%) feeling 'quite' or 'extremely' confident in explaining intersectionality. Notably, those in strategic roles (56%) feel more confident than operational (45%) and delivery (33%) colleagues in explaining intersectionality to others.

Figure 2: Understanding and confidence in explaining intersectionality.



The interviews also highlight that attempting to explain intersectionality to others can be challenging: 'it's tricky to explain', 'I have trouble putting my finger on it and then you know, explaining', and 'intersectionality is a wordy word, so I end up being wordy and basically confuse people'. All the strategic leaders indicated that the steer from Sport England has increased their familiarity with the term intersectionality:

> **I'm hearing intersectionality more, Sport England are advocates, so it's getting used in organisational lead circles, for a couple of years now… Hearing this has helped me keep up to speed. (Strategic)**
>
> **As Sport England started to shift their own strategic focus and investment the language of intersectionality became more apparent. Intersectionality has probably come along, I suppose, in the last couple of years, and again I'm in a position where I'm exposed to this shift. (Strategic)**

In contrast, the delivery workforce had less familiarity with intersectionality.

> **I've heard a few people mention intersectionality, but no one's explained it to me. I feel like I've made up what it is! (Delivery)**
>
> **To be honest, I've googled it a few times in the build up to this meeting... just to have a quick look... So, I've got a little bit of an idea now. (Delivery)**

In part, the closer connections between the strategic workforce with Sport England, and other similar national sport and physical activity leads, means exposure to wider discussions about intersectionality is likely to be greater than for those supporting the delivery of sport and physical activity programmes.



4.0 Use of intersectionality

Overall, 45% of survey respondents said their organisation uses the term intersectionality. Across job roles, operational staff were most likely to use the term (53%), this was followed by those in strategic roles (39%). The delivery workforce was least likely to use the term intersectionality (33%).

Figure 3: Use of intersectionality.



For those interview respondents who do not use the idea of intersectionality, responses included: 'no we don't say intersectionality', 'not something I use', 'this is not part of my everyday language', 'it's jargon and needs to be meaningful to who we're talking to', 'another buzz word' and 'intersectionality isn't a community friendly term'. More detailed responses included:

> **It is a term we're familiar with, I would say it's maybe not a term that we overly use perhaps within the team. There's no point, it doesn't land, so becomes a barrier. (Operational)**
>
> **It's more of an academic word so I don't use it… I can tell you about the communities I work with and what might be hindering or helping activity. I've been doing this for years and this is why I do my job. Without intersectionality I'd still be doing what I do. (Delivery)**

Interestingly, a number of operational and delivery respondents highlighted how they adjust their language around intersectionality depending on context, colleagues and activity participants. For these respondents, intersectionality is sometimes explicitly used, whilst on other occasions alternative terms are adopted.

> **I think when it comes to the terminology itself and the language, I think part of that role that we play at that local level is understanding when you need to adapt to that language, depending on your audience. This has to be responsive, that's a must. (Operational)**
>
> **You know, if you're with someone, like with the Activity Alliance, if you're talking a GOGA (Get Out Get Active) project, I know there's an understanding there. I was thinking more of when it's put on presentations potentially to local community partners where there isn't such a good understanding. I'd probably use a lot of words around inclusion, you know, making sure that what we're doing is accessible to everyone from different areas. (Operational)**
>
> **I wouldn't say that I necessarily use it a lot within my day-to-day work, purely because I don't. I think there are different understandings that people have... within the partners, within the communities. So, some are not sure exactly what I'm talking about, so I would tend to phrase it differently. (Operational)**

This kind of agility, to be sensitised to different contexts and people, is key to ensuring intersectionality, even if implicitly used, is relatable to all. Next, consideration is given to the alternative terms used instead of intersectionality.



5.0 Terms used instead of intersectionality

The survey highlights a range of alternative terms being used in place-based sport and physical activity rather than intersectionality with Figure 4 offering an overview of these.

Figure 4: Alternative terms.



The most popular terms used were inclusion, diversity, equality, EDI, belonging and protected characteristics. The interviews reveal these kinds of alternative terms are considered useful as they are more relatable to the workforce and activity participants.

> **We've been talking about inclusion for years, for years now. I'm sure, well I know, my team understands it's about getting everyone active. This is, and has got to be, always the driver. (Operational)**
>
> **When we talk about diversity we are talking about everyone. It happens to be the thing that we all agree on. This is the direction that has kept us with that focus, a real focus. (Delivery)**
>
> **I say person-centred. Put them slap bang in the centre... they're at the centre of all our work right in there... Who are they? What do they want? How can we help? Who else can help? How can they help? In the centre like I say. (Strategic)**

It should be noted that whilst each of these alternative terms have connections to intersectionality, they do not individually or in combination fully capture intersectional thinking or practice.

6.0 Understanding(s) of intersectionality

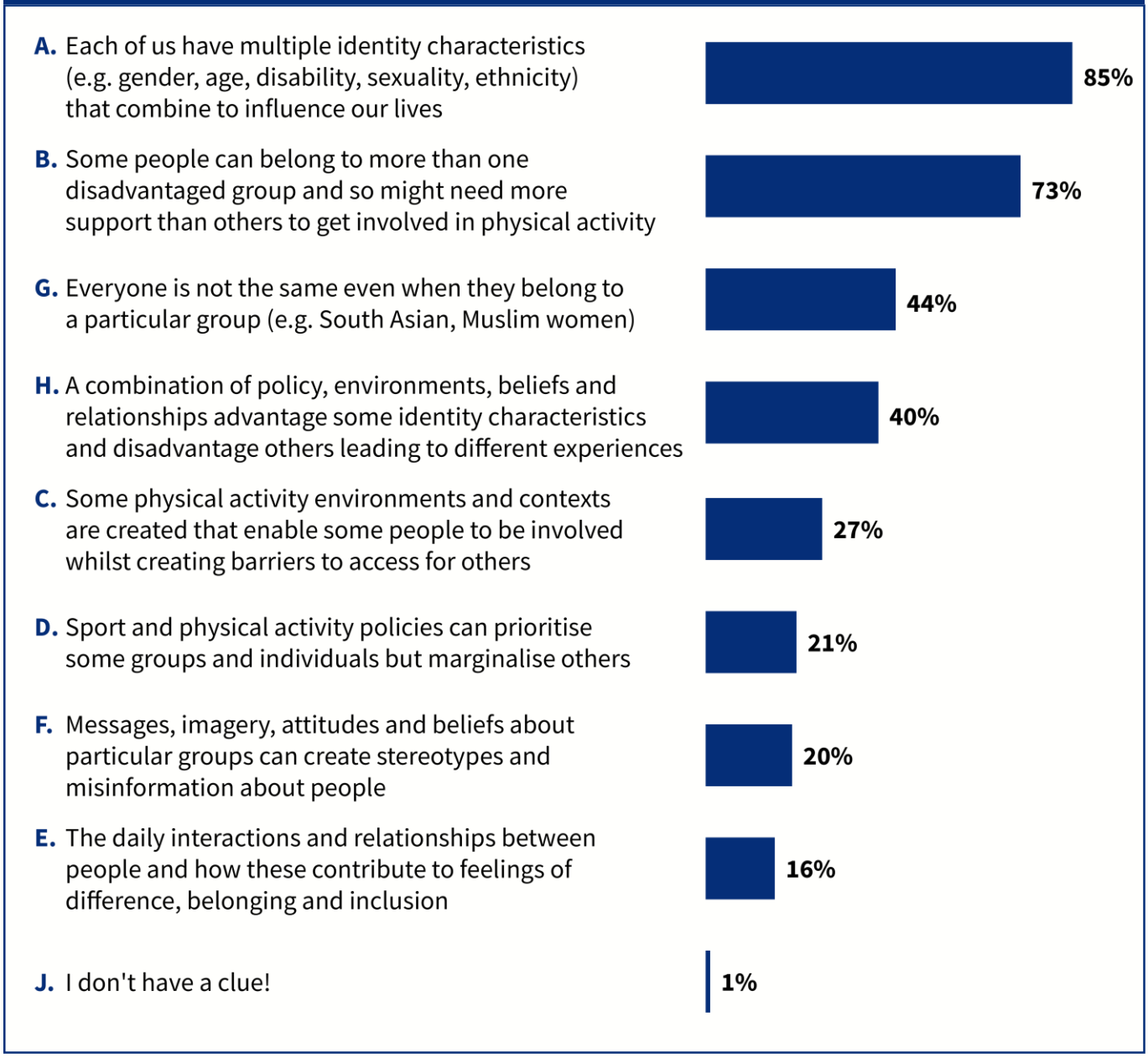
Whilst the survey found that 45% of respondents said their organisation uses the idea of intersectionality, it is important to consider how the notion of intersectionality is understood by the workforce. Survey respondents were asked to select up to three statements found in Figure 5. All of the statements reflect some features of intersectionality. However, statement 'H' is the most holistic outlook, recognising the significance of how different identity characteristics intersect with policy, contexts and wider environments to create inequalities and advantage. As Figure 5 illustrates, this statement received 40% of responses.

The top three statements selected by survey respondents were A, B and G. These statements recognise that identity-based characteristics can lead to inequalities for some and advantage for others in sport and physical activity. A number of interview respondents also orientated their understanding of intersectionality by primarily focusing on specific individual identity-based characteristics such as gender or disability or ethnicity or age. This single-issue mindset does not reflect intersectional thinking. However, other respondents talked about multiple and combined identity characteristics needing to be considered.

> **It's all around the different sections within the community and how they overlap and interlink and work together, but also understanding that everyone is different within all those sections of the community. (Strategic)**
>
> **Everyone's kind of an eclectic mix of lots of different things, lots of diversity in and across populations, but we need to be aware that some demographics and some people that do identify with certain groups experience more barriers and more prejudice and more discrimination. (Operational)**
>
> **Just look at who I'm working with. I can tell you right now there are different characters, you know, and that's what they are… Jess, Jess is a single mum, in her 30s, Asian heritage, not working. She's struggling alright. (Delivery)**

By acknowledging combined multiple identities there was recognition that these interconnect to heighten inequalities when engaging in sport and physical activity.

Figure 5: Intersectionality statements.



However, these understandings do not reflect an explicit recognition of the overlapping social structures and systems such as policy (e.g. education, sport, health), context (e.g. work, school, leisure centres, sports clubs, home), beliefs (e.g. stereotypes, assumptions) and relationships (e.g. family, friends, social networks, support systems) which also contribute to enhancing or limiting access and opportunities to sport and physical activity. Relatedly, the intersectionality statements that acknowledged specific features (e.g. policy, context, relationships, and attitudes and beliefs) that intersect with an individual's identities received the lower responses. This suggests that respondents' understandings of intersectionality are more focused on the individual rather than broader structural influences.

On saying this, interview respondents who initially foregrounded identity-based characteristics, either individual or multiple, sometimes connected how wider systems impact on sport and physical activity participation when they were prompted. For example, one respondent noted the importance of assumptions and how these can lead to misunderstanding around non-engagement.

> **I was talking to one CEO, and she was relaying to me a conversation she had had with someone in her county... You know, actually how inequalities combine, and what that really looks like on a day-to-day basis, and the scenario she was giving was a school football club... this person was kind of expressing her frustration that the kids weren't interested in the session and she quietly pointed out this individual probably hadn't eaten... probably hadn't had a bed to sleep in, and they didn't have a winter coat... she was able to then relate how, I suppose, that would manifest itself. (Strategic)**

For place-based work, local insight seemed to be key to understanding how particular social structures and systems impacted on the lives of the community and engagement in sport and physical activity: 'our activators are local people with local knowledge', 'day-to-day they've got their finger on the pulse', 'they live and breathe the community'. Two examples of this local insight are presented in the accounts below. The first highlights how the wide scale nature of social deprivation contributes to the multiplicity and complexity of inequalities within the community.

> **We've always been quite rich on our intelligence on the ground, and that intelligence was that social deprivation is the foundation creating inequalities… But you know, the deprivation is such wide scale, unfortunately, and consistent across the region. Inequality has always been something that I think people who work for us, or volunteer for us, sit on the board, have always been quite comfortable with, but it would be through inequalities being complex and multiple, as opposed to intersectionality. (Strategic)**

In this second account, overlapping aspects associated with the wider environment and relationships are considered in the development of physical activity opportunities.

> **So, where the wellbeing sessions were is where we put on the chair-based session, the Tai Chi, and the yoga, because everybody's been asking for it there. And just by chatting to people you find out about the timings. A lot of people with health conditions struggle to get out in the morning, so one of them is at 11:15. So they get set back a bit, so people don't have to come out in the morning. They've got to consider buses. You know, the bus pass for some people it's after 9:15 you can use. So, we can't, we can't ask people that live 45 minutes away to be there for 9:00. So that's ruling more people out... People are having all these kinds of activity or session ideas, and it's going right. It's almost like writing down all the key bits of information… This is the best time, best place to host it and this is the best person to deliver it, and that's how that came about and that's why I think it's been so successful. (Delivery)**

A more all-encompassing articulation of intersectionality was offered by this respondent and reflects a recognition of identity, the limits of homogenising people based on a common identity, and how different barriers might exist for different people.

> **There's no one-size-fits-all with any person and you can't focus on if somebody is disabled or they say I've got this long-term health condition. You can't just focus right?... You find what barriers people have got, you know circumstances, and then you work with them. (Operational)**

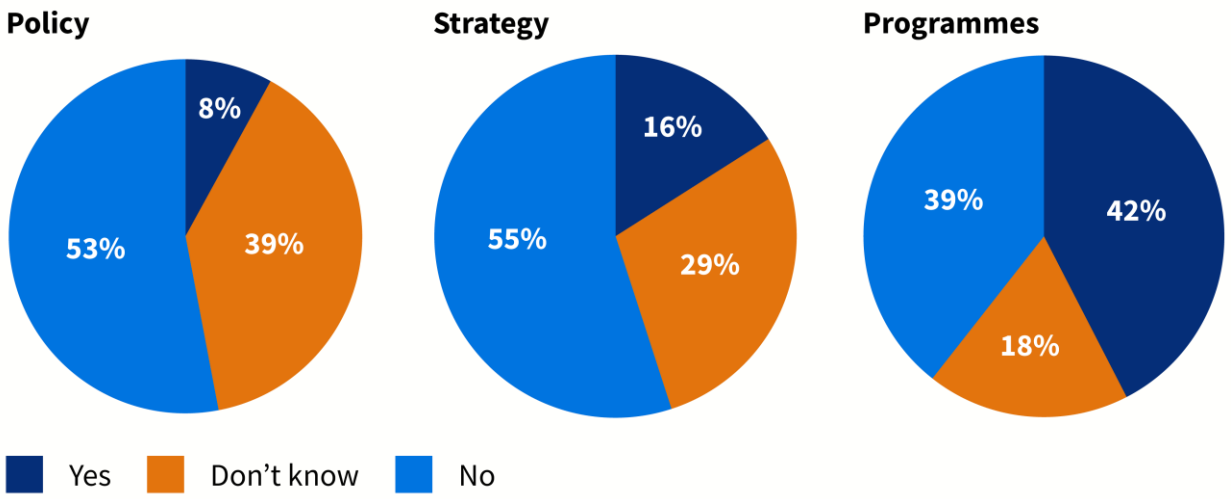
Here, whilst disability is focused upon, there is a recognition that not all disabled people are the same and this may lead to different barriers, and varied challenges to sport and physical activity participation. The idea of this 'no one size fits all' outlook is elaborated upon later (section 9.0) as a key feature, along with workforce connectivity and collaborating with others, which collectively supports a more intersectional approach.



7.0 Embeddedness of intersectionality within policy, strategy and programmes

The survey findings suggest that intersectionality does not feature extensively in organisational policy (8%) and strategy (16%). However, it is important to note here that a large percentage of respondents were not sure, opting for the 'don't know' response.

Figure 6: Embeddedness of intersectionality in policy, strategy and programmes.



For programming, survey responses indicated that the workforce were more aware that intersectionality features (42%) with less 'don't know' responses (18%). However, we offer a cautionary note here that whilst the workforce may be claiming to be working intersectionally, understandings of intersectionality are partial as discussed in section 6.0.

Notably, a greater proportion of the operational and delivery workforce indicated that they 'don't know' if intersectionality features in policy, strategy or programmes, compared to strategic leads (see Table 2). In part, this may be a consequence of limited policy and strategy referring to intersectionality, less awareness of the organisation's policy and strategy and less knowledge and understanding linked to training and CPD (see section 8.0).

Table 2: Don’t know responses to intersectional policy, strategy and programmes.			
Data collection	**Strategic**	**Operational**	**Delivery**
Policies featuring intersectionality	20%	51%	58%
Strategy featuring intersectionality	17%	33%	50%
Programmes featuring intersectionality	10%	22%	33%

The interviews highlight a number of reasons why intersectionality is not embedded extensively within policy and strategy. For many in strategic roles there was a recognition that the idea of intersectionality has only recently been adopted in national sport policy and therefore not yet filtered into more localised policy.

> **You know, you see these different words come through. They then start appearing on presentations, briefings, application forms, insight and research. And then it's like it's something that then becomes part of the Active Partnership language. It's then something that is translated from coming down from Sporting England. I’m sure in the end it’ll feed into our policy but there is going to be a time lag. (Operational)**
>
> **Intersectionality is slightly more contemporary language now and by the time we do another strategic refresh, it’ll probably be another 18 months or so, so is likely to feature. As an Active Partnership, you know, we would reflect the national strategic direction. (Strategic)**
>
> **Maybe in the next policy but intersectionality wasn’t a thing at the time of developing the current policy. (Strategic)**

Others discussed that whilst the idea of intersectionality is not explicitly used in policy or strategy that it does feature implicitly in these documents.

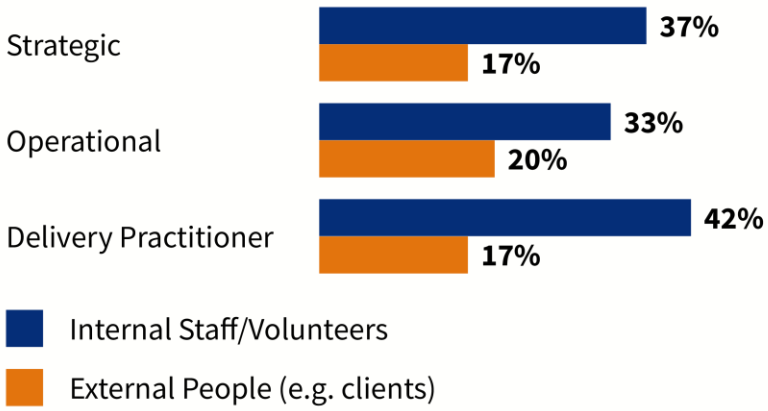
> **Intersectionality. Yeah, I think we inadvertently do work around it, but without saying the words or the term. I think if you read the strategy, you would see it woven in there. But it doesn't directly mention intersectionality. (Strategic)**
>
> **Don't set a strategy up that you're not going to follow or be guided by it. You need to be guided by that data, but informed by that local insight, empowering those communities to drive the change and put in the funding where it's most needed… Our strategy, it's not something that sits on a shelf that you describe, it's a working document. It doesn't just sit there, but it's only a working document because partners have come along with us from the beginning. I reckon it's intersectional, local insight, local need, but no mention of intersectionality. (Operational)**



8.0 Intersectional training and Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

It is evident from the survey that 36% of respondents across all roles were aware that their organisation provides intersectional resources/training to staff/volunteers. Only 18% said these resources/training were provided to people external to the organisation (e.g. to customers, clients, funders, and partners).

Figure 7: Organisational training and CPD.



Notably, the survey findings highlight these resources and training, in the main, were not explicitly intersectional. Indeed, they focused on broader Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) training, or in-house staff training days with small components focusing upon intersectionality or specific protected characteristics. The interviews also confirmed that resources and training largely focus on a number of other areas rather than intersectionality specifically: inclusive practice in sport and/or physical activity, generic EDI training, disability awareness, neurodiversity, mental health support, LGBTQ+ inclusion, anti-racism and unconscious bias training.

> **No, there isn't any intersectionality training as such, there is a lot, we have a lot of training covering topics like EDI, disability, racism. So, with all of this I'd like to think the door's opening for this intersectionality to get more traction. (Strategic)**
>
> **We haven't done intersectionality training, just more of the usual EDI. (Operational)**
>
> **I've not come across any intersectionality training, there's been nothing advertised, I'm sure there hasn't, and I'd say I would be surprised if my team had (Delivery)**

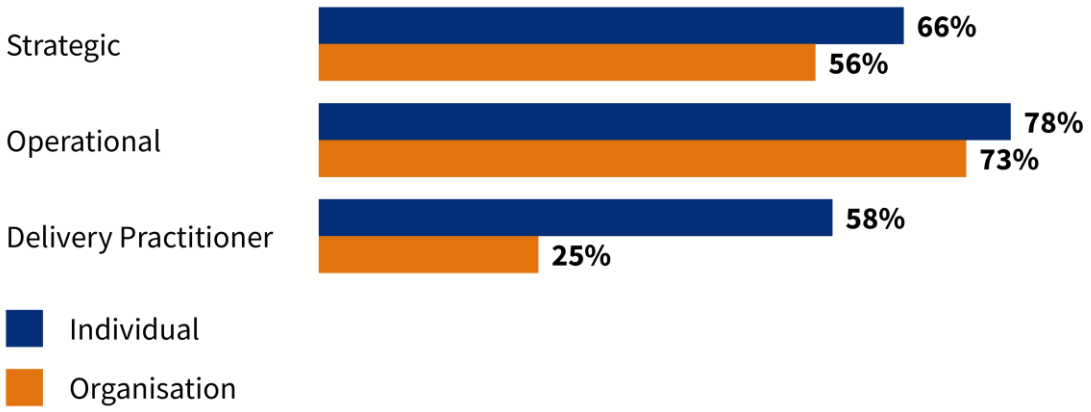
The wider desk-based scoping review of existing intersectional CPD resources within and beyond sport (see Appendix 1) also provides insight about the nature and range of resources available. From the 22 resources identified, there are only a limited number which practically support the workforce and/or specifically consider sport and physical activity.

Regarding receiving intersectionality training, the survey reveals that staff in strategic positions were more likely to have undertaken some training focusing on intersectionality compared to their operational (27%) and delivery (17%) colleagues. In part, for the strategic workforce this training is likely to have contributed to their heightened confidence in explaining intersectionality to others (see section 3.0, Figure 2).

The survey also found that 71% of respondents would benefit individually from more support focusing on intersectionality. The operational workforce is more in favour of this support, both for themselves and the organisation. In part, this can be explained by the intermediary role operational staff have, acting as a bridge between the strategic and delivery workforce.



Figure 8: Further intersectional support needed (for the organisation and the individual).



During the interviews operational staff elaborated on this need for more support around intersectional training and CPD.

> **We haven't got a CPD offer in that respect at the moment as a team, or as an Active Partnership… but I know it's something that we're keen to kind of explore a little bit further down the line. Well, and establishing what, where does, where can wider partners provide some of that support. (Strategic)**
>
> **It's certainly needed. There are times when I really do question what I'm saying, so CPD is going to help us all. (Operational)**

Regarding any future training or CPD, operational and delivery respondents highlighted this would need to be: 'grounded in real-life community examples', 'needs to make sense and relevant to my work', and 'got to get to the bottom of what intersectionality is'. There was a sense that more clarity about the ingredients needed to support an intersectional approach in place-based work are needed.

9.0 Supporting person-centred and community focused place-based work

The survey and interviews clearly show three key features driving person-centred and community focused place-based work. Individually, these features do not reflect an intersectional approach to provision or delivery. However, if collectively evidenced, there is closer alignment with an intersectional approach. These features are captured in Figure 9 and each are discussed next.

Figure 9: Person-centred and community focused place-based work.



Workforce connectivity

A key feature from the interviews was that person-centred and community focused place-based work requires workforce connectivity. As already highlighted in section 6.0, local insight seemed to be key to understanding how particular social structures and arrangements (e.g. social deprivation, transport policy and session timings) impact upon the lives of the community and opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity. Workforce connectivity was apparent through the delivery workforce being immersed within their community and a recognition that local insight from partners must be leveraged to ensure a better understanding of the community and place.

> **Workforce, to me, there's quite a few different elements to it... firstly, it's sometimes when you've got individuals that are formally qualified, whether it's through a governing body route and those qualifications, they may or may not always be appropriate for what's needed for some of the communities and groups that we're working with. So, it's needing the much softer skills, and people that have got the knowledge or experience of actually working or living in some of the communities become a real asset. (Operational)**
>
> **It's being kind of immersed in your locality and understanding what the possibilities are… Two of the community connectors live in the community, they've been there all their lives, so they just get the place and people, and are part of the community. (Operational)**
>
> **When I go to the chair based and the other stuff we're delivering, I can walk to it. I know people there, they know me, they know my mum. It's all very local. It's all hyper-local. I know what does matter to everyone. I know how to talk to people. (Delivery)**

This kind of workforce connectively is not always possible, and in these instances interview respondents discussed harnessing insights from others with local understandings.

> **We don't necessarily know the target groups as much as some of the partners in the room… So, an example being within the schools, we work closely with the School Sports Partnership. They know those contacts in the schools and those contacts in those schools know those children… You have to do this digging. So, as opposed to us, you know, making assumptions about how they feel. (Operational)**

Whilst respondents highlighted that it takes time to develop workforce connectivity, there was also a recognition of the value this brings: 'important insider knowledge', 'they'll care and will be personally invested', and 'you get a credible picture of the community'.

It’s not ‘one size fits all’

A key feature also evident from the interviews concerns the recognition that a ‘one size fits all’ approach is limiting and does not account for individual and community needs. Instead, respondents talked about the importance of ensuring activities reflect community needs, facilities and locations are accessible to all, scheduling of activities considers individual circumstance, and those who lead activities connect with participants and have an inclusive delivery ethos. For example, in relation to a cycling programme a respondent emphasises how an inclusive and flexible delivery ethos ensures people with childcare responsibilities can participate in the sessions on their terms.

> **I think one of the things they've learnt is that they can't be sort of completely detailed and scripted. Like, we run this session, on this day, at this time. You must be there… they're cycling on a Wednesday, and it has people drop in and out because they might have childcare responsibilities. So, they come for whatever they can really. So even if somebody gets 15 minutes out of the hour, at least they've got involved, they're not expected to be there start to finish for instance. (Delivery)**

Similarly, finding facilities and activity spaces that participants feel comfortable accessing was considered an essential ingredient to attracting people to begin and continue to participate in sport and physical activity.

> **The people we want to target won’t go to that leisure centre, they won’t go. It’s about knowing where [they will go], the community centre, church hall, community cafe, pub, park, you know. Where’s comfortable? Where’s familiar? You know, is it safe? (Operational)**

More broadly, there was also an acknowledgement by some respondents that community needs will change over time. This may be as a result of changes to the local economy and employment opportunities, availability of facilities and broader demographic shifts. Here, a strategic lead talks about demographic changes.

> **You can’t have a static view of our communities. Year-on-year, what’s changing, what’s staying the same? You need to understand why this is happening. If you think about intersectionality and you think about some of those life characteristics that potentially create barriers for you … You know, in [names area] we are predominantly White. If, for example, over the next 10 years we had some migration from the city of families from South Asian heritage that moved in, I think this would need us to relook at our priorities and provision. (Strategic)**

Overall, it was evident from the interviews that the workforce is attuned to the need to avoid a ‘one size fits all’ approach when planning and delivering programmes or activities.

Collaborating with others

Another key feature evident from the interviews concerns a recognition of the benefits of collaborating with others to facilitate activities or programmes. Utilising the expertise of others was identified as the main benefit of collaborating.

> **We didn't have all the expertise, so going to [the local disability group] and getting them involved, asking them to partner, means we've been able to get a walking group going. (Delivery)**
>
> **You're trying to work across multiple sectors, you're trying to work with health, you're trying to work with transport, planning, VCSE sector. You almost need people with that experience and those perspectives to come in and do this work. It's not always about having the sport specific knowledge. (Operational)**
>
> **The sport has a role to play, but it's also place, it's also transport, it's also VCSE… I think it's recognising that there's so many others to work with. (Operational)**

Interview respondents also offered a few examples of where stakeholders worked collaboratively to support multi-service programmes. For example, wellbeing drop-ins had been used to establish local people's activity preferences, and this insight used to develop and offer new sessions. At the same time, other services were also on hand to offer support and advice on a variety of other interconnected issues, reflecting a more holistic approach.

> **All I've been asking people is 'what would you like in your local area? What do you want?' You know, people say, 'I'd love to be able to do Tai Chi. I'd love to be able to do chair based or something low impact.' So, we've got these going. We've been there, the police have been there, blood pressure checks, they've had housing there for people to speak to, a housing officer in case they've got any issues, a homeless charity. There's no going to a, b, c. People are dealing with different issues in one place. You haven't gone for blood pressure and then you're there doing the check. (Operational)**

The more collective engagement with these three key features driving person-centre and community focused place-based work, the more likely this will be reflective of an intersectional approach to sport and physical activity planning and provision.

10.0 Conclusions and key recommendations

The research sought to understand how intersectionality is integrated into local systems that drive place-based working across sport and physical activity. This research adds to the body of knowledge outlined in section 2.0 by shedding light on how the workforce is grappling with thinking about and working intersectionally. This report concludes by revisiting the project's research questions and summarises the key findings relating to each of these (see Table 3). After this, a series of evidence-based recommendations are provided to guide future place-based intersectional work in sport and physical activity.

Table 3: Key findings.

Research question 1: How does the place-based workforce understand intersectionality?
• Intersectionality is largely understood as identity-based, with less acknowledgement of the ways in which the wider environment (policy, context, beliefs and assumptions, relationships) can create barriers and inequalities. • Over half of the workforce do not use the term intersectionality. • A number of reasons were identified for not using the term intersectionality including too academic, jargon, a buzz word, and not community friendly. • The delivery workforce does not use the term intersectionality as much as those in operational and strategic roles. • Alternative terms used instead of intersectionality include diversity, inclusion and person-centred. • For all workforce roles, understanding of intersectionality is higher than confidence in explaining the term intersectionality to others. • Those in strategic roles are most confident in explaining intersectionality.
Research question 2: How do place-based organisations and the workforce apply intersectionality in policy and practice?
• Survey responses suggest that the explicit idea of intersectionality does not feature extensively in organisational policy and strategy. However, a large percentage of respondents were unsure whether intersectionality features in policy and strategy. • Strategic leads were more aware of whether intersectionality features in policy and strategy, as opposed to the operational or delivery workforce. • Reasons offered why intersectionality does not explicitly feature in policy and strategy were linked to its more recent emergence at a national level. • There was more awareness that intersectionality features in programmes. However, this is based on partial understandings of intersectionality.

- Some of the operational and delivery workforce adjust language depending on the context, colleagues and/or activity participants. Sometimes intersectionality is explicitly used, and at other times alternative terms are adopted.
- Whilst delivery practitioners tend not to use the term and are less confident in explaining it to others they felt most confident embedding intersectional thinking into their work. This was largely because they are grounded within communities and understand community needs.

Research question 3: What is working well in terms of the place-based workforce embedding an intersectional approach in place-based work?

- Workforce connectivity was critical to beginning to support an intersectional approach. This includes the immersion of the delivery workforce within the local community and enhanced partnership working.
- There is an acknowledgement that workforce connectivity requires a time investment. This is considered time well spent and highly valuable as it ensures community needs are recognised and met.
- Respondents were clear that adopting a 'one size does not fit all' approach is critical to effective place-based working.
- Acknowledging the flexibility, responsiveness, willingness and open-mindedness needed to meet the different needs within the local community contributes to an intersectional approach.
- Collaborating and using the expertise of others is key to offering support and advice on a variety of interconnected issues, reflecting a more holistic outlook more akin to an intersectional approach.

Research question 4: What are the gaps and challenges in supporting the workforce to embed an intersectional approach into place-based work?

- Intersectionality has not yet become a golden thread in organisational policy or strategy.
- The tendency to understand intersectionality in terms of identity-based with less acknowledgment of the wider environment (policy, context, beliefs, relationships) and how these create barriers and influence inequalities.
- There is a lack of training and resources around intersectionality within and beyond sport and physical activity.
- When intersectional training is offered this is usually a small part of other training or broader EDI training.
- There is a desire from the workforce for more support and training focusing on intersectionality.
- Future training or CPD needs to be: grounded in real-life community examples; relevant to place-based sport and physical activity settings; and with clarity about the ingredients needed to support an intersectional approach.

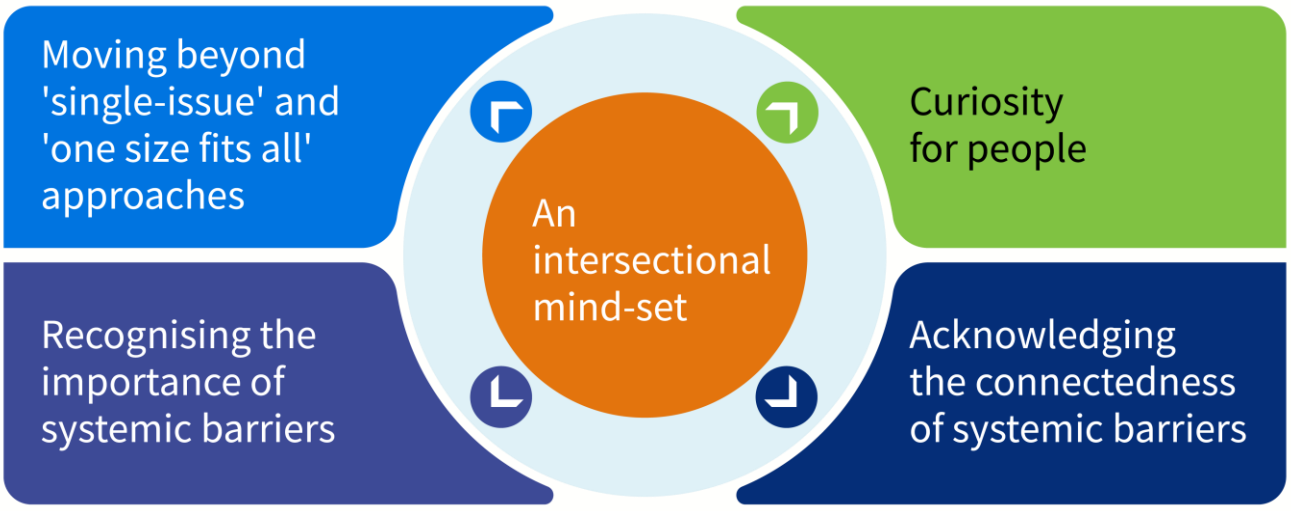
Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided to guide future place-based intersectional work in sport and physical activity.

1. Development of CPD and related resources focusing on sport and physical activity

Develop a more comprehensive programme of CPD and related resources that encourages an intersectional mind-set for the workforce. Within this CPD a number of key ingredients underpinning intersectionality in place-based work should be foregrounded to help to clarify the essence of an intersectional approach. These ingredients are outlined in Figure 10. Any CPD training and resources must include real-life examples of where an intersectional approach is being adopted in policy, strategy and programme design, and where this is being translated effectively into practice. This will ensure intersectionality becomes more relatable to the workforce at all levels.

Figure 10: An intersectional mind-set.



- This intersectional mind-set in sport and physical activity encourages a move beyond single-issue thinking, and a recognition that a 'one size fits all' outlook is limiting.
- An intersectional mind-set encourages curiosity about people (activity participants, volunteers and the wider workforce) to find out about their experiences, needs, and challenges, rather than making stereotypical assumptions.
- An intersectional mind-set recognises how systemic barriers can create a series of challenges for place-based work within sport and physical activity, and how these challenges will be experienced differently by different individuals.

- An intersectional mind-set acknowledges the joined-up nature of these systemic barriers (e.g. education, health, employment) and how they collectively impact on a person's broader life and their ability to engage in sport and physical activity.

2. Review current usage of the term in policy, strategy and programmes

Undertake a review of current organisational policy, strategy and programmes to establish if consideration is given to:

- Which people feature and why.
- How reflective these groups are of the demographics within local communities.
- The compounded barriers created by people's intersecting identities and physical activity.
- Which elements of the environment are contributing to these systemic inequalities within and outside sport and physical activity settings.
- How partnerships with organisations in other sectors (e.g. health, education, social care) can be better utilised to leverage support and reduce some of the systemic barriers.

As part of this review consider if the language of intersectionality needs to be more prominent. This will require the workforce being more knowledgeable and feeling more confident in using the term, linking back to the need for more CPD training and resources.

3. Intersectionality as an ongoing and mainstream concern

The previous two recommendations note the importance of offering CPD and resources around intersectionality, and the need to review existing practice. This final recommendation emphasises the necessity for both these activities to remain an ongoing and mainstream concern. Due to the constantly changing environment within which we live, organisations need to continually take stock to ensure the effectiveness of placed-based working. For example, communities, the people within them, and their immediate and wider environments are constantly changing. International and national policies on immigration, changing job markets, investment, and the lack of, in particular industries, (un)employment, the cost of living, local government prioritisation of spending, funding for health and education, are constantly shifting. These changes, in combination, influence people's individual circumstances, and their ability to engage in and sustain sport and physical activity. To this end, adopting an intersectional approach needs to become embedded in place-based work and become a part of the ongoing process of review.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Review of intersectional CPD and resources.								
Organisation	**Training/ CPD**	**Setting**	**Weblink**	**Type of resource**	**Approx. time to engage with resource**	**Open access or cost**	**Date publication**	**Main focus /themes**
British Athletics/ England Athletics	Equality and Diversity in Sport course	Sport/PA	**England Athletics website**	Training (online)	Self-paced (unknown)	£4.50	Unspecified	Equality and Diversity in Sport course includes information about the Equality Act 2010 (and the 'protected characteristics'). The course also considers barriers to equality, such as discrimination, prejudice, etc.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
Newcastle University	Navigating Intersectionality & Public Involvement	Education	**Newcastle University website**	Unspecified	Unspecified	Unspecified	Unspecified	Only open to people and organisations based in North East/North Cumbria (with specific organisations on link). Learning outcomes of course include: Understand Intersectionality; and Being to power, positionality, and safety.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
Newcastle University	Intersectionality	Education	**Newcastle University website**	Webpage	5-10 minutes to review webpage with drop-downs (links to other resources)	Open access (webpage)	Unspecified – Further training only available to Newcastle University staff or students via University portal	EDI toolkit webpage that covers introduction to intersectionality (with video) and then examples of intersectionality (i.e., gender AND disability, race AND sexual orientation, and so on). Webpage also provides links to other intersectional resources, such as videos, podcasts, journal articles, and media articles.
Newcastle University	What is Intersectionality	Education	**Newcastle University website**	YouTube video	2:49 minute video	Open access (YouTube)	9 years ago	Short video including introduction to intersectionality.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
Liverpool John Moores University	Intersectionality and language	Education	**Liverpool John Moores University website**	Webpage	2-minute to review webpage (links to other resources)	Open access (webpage)	Unspecified	Short webpage covering basics of intersectionality and links to intersectional resources such as books, journal articles, websites, and videos.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
High Speed Training	Intersectionality in the Workplace	Training / CPD provider	**High Speed Training website**	Webpage (& EDI training link)	5-minute to review webpage. EDI training self-paced	Webpage = Open access. EDI training = £31 plus VAT	Webpage = August 2024. EDI training = Unspecified	Webpage covers introduction to intersectionality, why intersectionality is important in the workplace, examples of intersectionality in the workplace, and how to put intersectionality into practice in the workplace. Webpage also includes links to further resources (note these are less intersectional, more EDI based). EDI paid link also provided as an infographic.
Learning for Justice	Intersectionality 101	Education	**Learning for Justice website**	YouTube video	3:03 minute video	Open access (YouTube)	9 years ago	Short video including introduction to intersectionality. Includes examples of people's identities (e.g., Jerry, Fatimah, and Greta).

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
African American Policy Forum	Intersectionality Matters!	Education	**African American Policy Forum**	Podcast	74 podcast episodes (and counting)	Paid subscription (including Spotify, Apple podcasts)	Est. 2019 onwards	Podcast series with Professor Kimberle Crenshaw (including a number of special guests).
UN Women	Intersectionality resource guide and toolkit	Education	**Intersectionality resource guide and toolkit**	Booklet/ Resource	55 pages	Open access	2021	Intersectionality toolkit that provides an introduction to intersectionality, various intersectional 'enablers', examples of intersectionality in practice, and several 'tools'.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
Disability Rights UK	Inclusion and Intersectionality: An online resource to support Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs)	Education	**Disability Rights UK website**	Webpage	Detailed webpage – approx. 30 mins to review	Open access	Unspecified	Includes a range of sections, including: Introduction – Understanding Intersectionality; History: DPO's, the Disabled People's movement and Diversity; Definitions; Being Intersectional; Examples of ways to start being intersectional; Activities for Intersectionality; Additional Online Resources.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
Canadian Women and Sport	What is intersectionality?	Sport/PA	**What is intersectionality? Infographic**	Infographic	1-page infographic (2-3 mins to review)	Open access	Unspecified	Infographic includes a brief introduction to intersectionality and provides an example (a Muslim, disabled woman – showing how they experience barriers in relation to religion, ability, and gender).
UK Coaching	A guide to diversity	Sport/PA	**UK Coaching website**	Webpage/ Article	Detailed article – up to an hour to review	Open access	Unspecified	A very detailed article that begins by covering what diversity is. Intersectionality is then considered by considering what it is and why intersectionality is important in coaching. Offers activities and reflection prompts to engage the reader.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
Paralympics GB	Karé Adenegan breaks down the intersectionality of race, disability and gender	Sport/PA	**Paralympics GB website**	Video	10 minutes 15 seconds	Open access (YouTube)	April 2023	Video featuring wheelchair racer Karé Adenegan and their experiences of being excluded from school sport and in every day-to-day life as a Black, disabled woman.
The Open University	Diversity and inclusion in the workplace	Education	**The Open University website**	Training (online)	Short section of a broader diversity and inclusion course	Free online course	Unspecified	A short video provides an introduction to what intersectionality is. Six ways organisations can 'improve' on intersectionality in the workplace are then offered. Finally, another video is provided alongside an interactive activity.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
University of Exeter (via Future Learn)	Introducing intersectionality	Education	**Future Learn website**	Training (online)	Short section of a broader 'understanding gender inequality' course – overall course over 4 weeks with 3 hours of weekly study	Unspecified	Unspecified – course currently not running	Section draws on Crenshaw's theorising of intersectionality and covers how multiple oppressions can influence an individual's experience. Section also includes a short video on intersectionality.
ARC Scotland	Disability, Equity and Intersectionality	Education	**ARC Scotland website**	Training (in-person)	1 full day (6 hours)	£1,150 per organisation (16 attendees maximum)	February 2026	In-person training course that covers the Equality Act 2010 and aimed at people in a customer facing role to become a 'true ally' to people with disabilities.
Scottish Disability Sport	Kaukab Stewart Importance of Intersectionality	Sport/PA	**Video of Kaukab Stewart MP**	YouTube Video	1:44 minute video	Open access (YouTube)	May 2025	MSP, Minister for Equalities talking to Scottish Disability Sport about intersectionality.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
Australian Sports Commission	Australian Sports Commission goes all in for intersectionality	Sport/PA	**Australian Sports Commission website**	Webpage /article	Short webpage linked to wider ASC strategy	Open access	January 2025	Intersectionality forms part of this strategy - ASC's Roadmap: An all inclusive approach to governance and leadership in Australian sport.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
Future Learn	Sport for Sustainable Development: Designing Effective Policies and Programmes	Sport	**Future Learn website**	Online training consisting of videos, articles, polls, exercises, audio, discussion	8 week programme	Open access – need to register	Not specified	Comprehensive week by week breakdown covering: sport for development; sport and sustainable development goals; sports policy; human rights and inclusion; programme design and management; monitoring and evaluation; communication and advocacy; and making decisions. Intersectionality is one article in week four so makes a brief appearance.

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
NSPCC	Podcast: intersectionality in social work practice	Social Care	**NSPCC Learning website**	Podcast	1 podcast episode	Paid subscription (including Spotify, Apple podcasts). Maybe able to listen for free?	August 2021	Podcast episode includes: what intersectionality is; why intersectional thinking is important in safeguarding; the impact of not taking an intersectional approach when working with children and young people; how you can apply intersectional understanding to your work and develop your social care practice.

OurWatch (AUS)	Diversity and Inclusion in Sport	Sport	**OurWatch website**	Webpage and toolkit (pdf)	Variable - Six page document	Open access	2020	PDF that is to assist in embedding an intersectional approach when implementing the Equality and Respect in Sport Standards to prevent violence against women. Offers series of questions to encourage critical reflection at each key step of implementation: Step 1 - Getting Started. Step 2 - Prioritising and Planning. Step 3 - Taking Action. Also offers examples for each of the standards (Commitment, Conditions, Culture, Support, Our business).

Organisation	Training/ CPD	Setting	Weblink	Type of resource	Approx. time to engage with resource	Open access or cost	Date publication	Main focus /themes
Inter Alia	How to use the intersectional lens? Non-formal education practices and exercises for youngsters	Education	**How to use the intersectional lens?**	Resource booklet	50 page booklet with various exercises amounting to approx. 20 hours	Open access	Nov 2021	Resource booklet with exercises for youth workers and professionals working with young people to introduce them to intersectionality and an appreciation for diversity.

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