

Parents and carers perspectives on children and young people's access to hobbies

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1. Executive Summary



This report presents findings from a short term research project conducted by Parenting Across Scotland over the Summer of 2025, exploring what parents and carers feel help and hinder children and young people's participation in hobbies. The data – collected from an online survey and focus groups – consists of the views of 577 parents and carers from 30 of the 32 local authorities across Scotland.

The findings highlighted multiple, interlinked barriers affecting children and young people's access to hobbies. Financial cost was the most significant barrier, with class fees and hidden costs making participation unaffordable for many families. Parents and carers also faced constraints, including juggling work, family structures, childcare, and safety concerns. Local availability and settings further restricted access within communities due to the closure of facilities and long waiting lists. A lack of local provision and choice found many travelling to access hobbies, but public transport was not deemed as reliable with irregular or long travel times to their chosen hobby, especially in rural and island communities.

Inclusion emerged as an important issue, particularly for children and young people with additional support needs, who often face inaccessible environments and a lack of appropriate provision. Competitive and traditionally gendered hobbies also discouraged participation. Provider challenges around funding, staffing, volunteer reliance, training costs, and access to affordable venues created issues with local provision.

Recommendations

Over 90% of respondents supported the idea of a free hobby model in Scotland, demonstrating the need for the Scottish Government to develop a clear policy framework with sets out the purpose, scope and objections of a national policy model, whilst acknowledging current government spending on hobby-related initiatives. The model must have co-production and inclusion at the heart of it to ensure it is a model that works for all children, young people and families – and helps to remove barriers arising from additional support needs, gender, ethnicity, poverty or rurality. Hobbies must be recognised as a right, rather than a privilege, and so national campaigns are needed to raise awareness of the benefits of hobbies across Scotland.



2. Introduction



“My children benefit hugely from their hobbies – I would love if all children had the same opportunities.”

(Survey respondent)

The notion that hobbies are beneficial to our lives – at any age – is not new. We know that having the chance to partake in a fun, self-chosen, activity that we enjoy in our spare time, away from the pressures of school, study, work and other environments can do wonders for our mental health, wellbeing, physical health, and social and personal development to name a few benefits. However, not all children and young people have access to hobbies, with a variety of barriers hindering access. When we speak about the barriers that children and young people face, it is important to look at the bigger picture. With the majority, but not all, children and young people living with parents or carers, it is useful to understand what parents and carers find to be the barriers for their children and young people to take part in hobbies. This report presents the findings of a short-term research project that engaged parents and carers across Scotland to understand the factors that influence their ability to support their children’s participation in hobbies.

Background

Parenting Across Scotland’s (PAS’s) vision is a Scotland where all parents and carers are supported and valued to give their children the best start in life. We work to achieve this through listening to parents and carers, influencing legislation and policy and supporting good practice in family support. PAS has been campaigning to increase children and young people’s access to hobbies since 2023. Our work has been shaped by our Chief Executive, [Amy Woodhouse’s Churchill Fellowship report](#) which explored how Iceland and Finland provide hobby opportunities for children and young people. Since publication, PAS has used this report as a foundation for our knowledge of international hobby models and has been working to share this learning in Scotland.

Context

This research is part of a wider effort to bring hobbies to the forefront of Scottish policy. In 2025 PAS established a working group consisting of other third sector organisations and funders who all believe in the positive impact that a national hobby model could have across Scotland. Alongside this research with parents and carers, Young Scot (another working group member) has been conducting a similar survey with children and young people to gather their views on hobbies. Together these studies provide a rounded view of what families need to make hobbies a reality for more children and young people across Scotland.

In terms of policy in Scotland, there are a range of measures which support children and young people’s participation in hobbies. In July 2024, Scotland introduced the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law. The UNCRC is an international agreement consisting of 54 articles which cover the rights children everywhere are entitled to – no matter where they are born. Article 31 of the UNCRC covers a child’s right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities.

The Scottish Government have also made several pledges to support children and young people, including making tackling child poverty one of their key priorities in the 2025-26 Programme for Governance. Scotland has also recognised the importance of play in children’s lives, and their right

to it, publishing the first play strategy in 2013. Earlier in 2025, the Scottish Government published the updated [Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030](#), highlighting the actions that will be taken to achieve their vision for the future of play in Scotland.

Definitions

The word ‘hobby’ means different things to us all, with every definition being valid. For this study, we have chosen to keep our definition in line with definitions used within the Finnish and Icelandic hobby models, that is:

A prolonged group activity for school aged children, undertaken outside of home environments, run by a trained adult instructor

When we talk about hobby ‘models’ in the report, we are referring to national approaches to increasing access to hobbies.



3. Methods



For this research, the main research question was:

‘What do parents and carers think helps and hinders children’s participation in hobbies?’

We aimed to find out what parents and carers felt were the barriers that stop children and young people from participating in hobbies, and what would help facilitate participation. We also sought to find out if parents and carers would be in support of the idea of a national hobby model.

Data collection

This research undertook a mixed methods approach to the data collection – using both an online survey and in person focus groups.

Survey

The first data collection method was an online survey (Appendix 1). The rationale for this was to help gather a broad sample of responses across Scotland incorporating perspectives of parents and carers living in urban, semi-rural, rural and island communities.

The survey consisted of nine short questions for participants to share their views on a range of topics including what they believed the benefits, barriers and enablers of hobbies were for children and young people. The survey was aimed at parents and carers of children aged 4-17 years. The reason this age range was chosen was to reflect the age ranges used in existing Nordic hobby models.

The survey was open for responses for two months, from the end of May 2025 until the end of July 2025 and was shared amongst Parenting Across Scotland’s members, connections, board, and promoted via social media channels, our website, and direct emails to schools across Scotland.

Following two months of data collection through the survey, 559 responses were collected across Scotland, including 30 of the 32 local authorities represented (those missing were East Dunbartonshire and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar).

Focus groups

The second method used in this research was focus groups. This provided the opportunity to have more in depth discussions about the topic, gaining more insight to answers than survey responses allowed for. The focus groups were carried out over 1.5 hours in which PAS staff introduced the topic and used a variety of activities to engage participants to share their views. The session plan mirrored the survey questions which enabled comparison of the two data sets.

When recruiting focus group participants, we targeted pre-existing groups and organisations. We contacted over 40 organisations asking if they had existing groups of parents and carers of children and young people aged 4-17 who would be willing to take part in our research.

Originally, we targeted groups representing protected characteristic priority groups, and a mixture of urban and rural areas across Scotland. We note that summertime may have hindered the uptake in this offer, but in the end, we carried out three focus groups and engaged with 18 parents and carers in total across these. The groups we engaged with covered parents and carers of children with additional support needs, low-income families, single parent households, and women with experience of domestic violence. All participants received an information sheet about

the project, completed a consent form prior to participation and were given a £20 voucher as a thank you for their time.

Some of the sessions were recorded and then transcribed where permission was given, and in the cases that consent was not given, staff made detailed notes and encouraged participants to make use of sticky notes.

Analysis

In total, 577 parents and carers engaged in this study, across the survey and focus groups. Table 1 below shows the breakdown of the numbers.

Table 1: Participants in the study

	Participant numbers	Local authority
Focus group 1	4	Falkirk
Focus group 2	3	Fife
Focus group 3	11	Scottish Borders
Survey	559	
Total	577	

We received survey responses from 30 out of 32 local authority areas (93.75%). Over two thirds of responses (68%) were from Fife, West Lothian, Aberdeenshire, City of Edinburgh and Glasgow City (see table 2 below).

Table 2: Survey response distribution across Scotland breakdown.

Local authority	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
Aberdeen City	3	0.54%
Aberdeenshire	72	12.88%
Angus	1	0.18%
Argyll and Bute	26	4.65%
City of Edinburgh	56	10.02%
Clackmannanshire	8	1.43%
Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	0	0.00%
Dumfries and Galloway	1	0.18%
Dundee City	18	3.22%
East Ayrshire	2	0.36%
East Dunbartonshire	0	0.00%
East Lothian	1	0.18%
East Renfrewshire	6	1.07%
Falkirk	7	1.25%
Fife	128	22.90%
Glasgow City	37	6.62%
Highlands	2	0.36%
Inverclyde	3	0.54%

Local authority	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
Midlothian	9	1.61%
Moray	21	3.76%
North Ayrshire	1	0.18%
North Lanarkshire	7	1.25%
Orkney Islands	2	0.36%
Perth and Kinross	8	1.43%
Renfrewshire	2	0.36%
Scottish Borders	6	1.07%
Shetland Islands	3	0.54%
South Ayrshire	6	1.07%
South Lanarkshire	11	1.97%
Stirling	2	0.36%
West Dunbartonshire	23	4.11%
West Lothian	87	15.56%
Total	559	100.00%

Figure 1: Survey response rate across local authorities in Scotland.

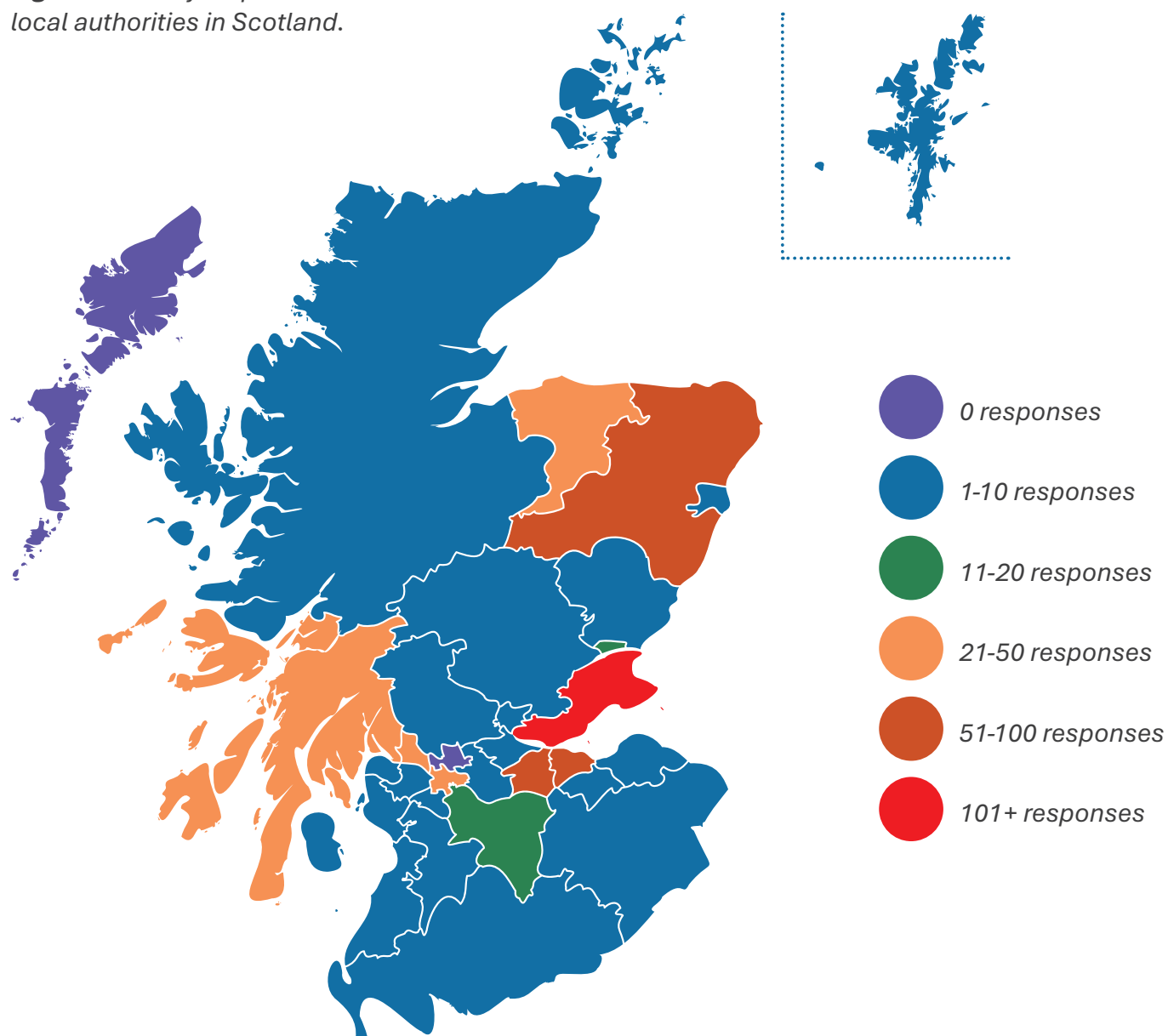


Table 3 shows how many survey respondents stated that their children or young people currently participated in a hobby. The vast majority (86.76%) indicated that their children currently took part in a hobby or hobbies. We recognise that this survey may have been more likely to attract parents and carers who were positive about hobbies and the figures should not be considered representative of hobby engagement across Scotland. However, it is useful to know that many of the parents/carers who responded can draw on their own children's experiences of accessing hobbies. We have also taken time to look in depth at the responses of parents and carers whose children don't currently take part in hobbies. Where relevant we highlight any differences in their responses to the responses received overall.

Table 3: Survey responses of participants with children and young people currently participating in hobbies

Response	Total number of responses	Percentage of responses
Yes	485	86.76%
No	71	12.70%
No response	3	0.54%
Total	559	100.00%

Gaps and limitations

One limitation of this research was the lack of detailed data on participants' personal circumstances, such as family structure, income level, ethnicity, or whether children had additional support needs. While some respondents shared this information voluntarily, it was not systematically collected, meaning we could not fully explore how these characteristics influence access to hobbies. This methodological decision was taken to keep the survey short and accessible.

Future work should ensure that families with diverse needs – including those living in poverty, single-parent households, ethnic minority families, and those caring for children with disabilities – are captured in the data.

We also recognise that, as most responses came from the central belt, the experiences of rural and island families are less well represented in the data. Finally, as acknowledged earlier, we recognise that the survey has attracted more responses from parents and carers whose children already take part in hobbies, than those whose don't, and that this will influence the findings.

Despite these limitations, we believe this survey provides valuable insights into the barriers and enablers of hobby participation from a parent and carer perspective, offering an important foundation for future research and policy development.

4. Findings



Do hobbies matter?

To get participants thinking about hobbies, we first asked parents and carers what they felt the benefits of hobbies were, in both the survey and focus groups. We wanted to ensure the research reflected their views. Survey respondents were able to mention as many benefits as they liked and were given an open box to describe the benefits in their own words, whilst focus groups used sticky notes. A total of 544 responses were collected from the survey for this question which were coded under six key themes, as outlined in table 4 below. Focus group notes were coded similarly. The following section briefly explores the benefits that respondents mentioned under these six key themes, whilst noting the strongest numerical trends within the survey.

Table 4: *Survey responses on the benefits of hobbies for children and young people*

Responses	Responses	Percentage of respondents
Personal development/learning	420	77.21%
Social engagement	415	76.29%
Physical health	241	44.30%
Fun	145	26.65%
Mental health	144	26.47%
Prevention	71	13.05%



By far, the most cited benefits of hobbies were personal learning/development (77.21%) and social engagement (76.29% of respondents). For the focus groups, the themes that created the most discussion were fun, personal development and learning, and mental health factors.

It should be noted that many responses covered several themes which could have knock on effects on each other e.g. increased socialisation building confidence and mental health. In our coding framework, 'confidence' was coded under personal development, and it is worth noting that it was one of the most cited benefits: **"...it increases my children's confidence and independence and allows them to realise the world has different opportunities."** (Survey respondent). Confidence was discussed in terms of confidence within children themselves and being confident around others.

Many parents/carers also highlighted the importance of socialisation, with hobbies allowing their children to engage with those outside school or family to broaden social circles and to mix with different personalities and cultures. However, it is interesting to note that this was the least mentioned theme in the focus group with parents and carers of children and young people with additional support needs (ASN). Despite agreeing that hobbies do help with socialisation, parents/carers felt that **“for the majority of our kids who have some sort of diagnosis, their age group and peers are the problem”** due to bullying and lack of inclusion. This would indicate that there is some work to be done to ensure that hobbies (and other areas of life) are safe and supportive spaces for all children and young people, including those with ASNs.

One range of benefits that feel particularly timely at present, were those coded under the prevention theme. This code included keeping children and young people away from screens and social media, alcohol, the streets, or from developing bad habits. Given the growing concerns about digital harms, it is worth highlighting that hobbies were thought to offer an opportunity to steer children and young people towards healthier, less harmful activities, **“...reminding them there is more to life than screens.”** (Survey respondent). There was also a nod to hobbies, particularly those involving exercise, being able to prevent extra stress on the National Health Service (NHS):

“...Building a lifelong habit of physical activity will help the NHS and the person far into their lives and positively affect them into senior age.” (Survey respondent).

Another benefit that was mentioned in relation to prevention and personal learning was hobbies providing children and young people with the chance to learn about taking risks within a safe environment. During the focus groups, some parents/carers spoke candidly about their experiences when they were young and the importance of being able to take risks and having the chance to learn some life-saving skills such as swimming. One participant shared their own childhood experiences of adrenaline fuelled activities with an instructor. They felt these activities allowed them to safely try things and expel energy, which without, could have led to more risky behaviour from them.

Finally, it was reassuring to see that fun was viewed as a benefit of hobbies – although it was perhaps slightly lower in popularity among respondents than anticipated. It was interesting to see responses and additional comments from both the survey and focus groups reflecting on hobbies being about fun and enjoyment, away from the traditional school environment and worries about being graded. One parent/carer stressed how important this had been for their son:

“My son has been a beaver, a cub, a scout and is now an explorer. He is miserable at school, the environment really doesn't suit him. He's had multiple absences. We await a neurodevelopment assessment. He will leave school as soon as he can. Scouting has been a lifesaver, he never misses it. He has friends, has learned independence and practical skills, is a young leader and has been on many camps. It is likely when he leaves school his qualifications will not reflect his capabilities, but he will be able to demonstrate commitment, ability to work hard and have good references from Scouting.” (Survey respondent).

Barriers and facilitators

This section will bring together the findings from both the survey and focus groups on the key questions around what hinders and helps children and young people's participation in hobbies from a parent and carer perspective. As mentioned, the same coding framework was used on all responses so they will be presented together under the key themes.

Tables 5 and 6 show the most common barriers and facilitators to hobbies identified by survey respondents (focus group data could not be easily quantified). There was a total of 552 responses provided for the question on barriers, and 514 for the following question on what would help overcome barriers.

Table 5: Thematic coding responses for question: ‘As a parent or carer, what do you feel are the main barriers to your child participating in hobbies?’

Theme	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
<i>Financial</i>	380	68.84%
<i>Parental needs</i>	213	38.59%
<i>Local availability and settings</i>	165	29.89%
<i>Children and young people considerations</i>	78	14.13%
<i>Transport and travel</i>	72	13.04%
<i>Choice</i>	19	3.44%
<i>Promotion</i>	15	2.72%
<i>Provider needs</i>	9	1.63%
<i>Screens</i>	9	1.63%
<i>Hobby nature</i>	7	1.27%
<i>No barriers</i>	18	3.26%

The most common barrier was financial, with 68.84% of respondents suggesting barriers that could be coded under this theme, followed by parental needs (38.59%) and local availability and settings (29.89%) (Table 5). Hobbies facilitators were closely linked to barriers, with the most common responses received addressing financial barriers to hobbies (55.45%). This was followed by local availability and settings (23.35%) and parental needs (17.32%) (Table 6).

Table 6: Thematic coding responses for question: ‘What do you think would help overcome these barriers?’

Theme	Number of responses	Percentage of respondents
<i>Financial</i>	285	55.45%
<i>Local availability and settings</i>	120	23.35%
<i>Parental needs</i>	89	17.32%
<i>Choice</i>	73	14.20%
<i>Children and young people considerations</i>	59	11.48%
<i>Provider needs</i>	49	9.53%
<i>Transport and travel</i>	37	7.20%
<i>Societal views</i>	23	4.47%
<i>Promotion</i>	17	3.31%
<i>Planning</i>	11	2.14%
<i>No barriers / nothing</i>	23	4.47%

Theme 1: Financial

It is not surprising that the top theme for both barriers and facilitators to hobbies related to the financial costs of hobbies. Over half of respondents who cited their children do not currently take part in a hobby (54.93%) noted cost as a barrier.

“I have two children, I can't afford to spend £15 each for a weekly 30 minute swim class.”

(Survey respondent)

On top of the payments for classes being an issue, many also cited the additional and hidden costs to hobbies:

“...and many have attached costs such as travel, equipment, and spectator costs, over and above the regular fees, making them cost prohibitive in a cost of living crisis.”

(Survey respondent)

We know the last five years have been hard on families with COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis. The additional costs of hobbies could therefore make or break participation for some families – even if the costs of classes are affordable.

We did however receive positive examples of how some hobby providers had worked to keep costs low for families. One respondent shared that Scouts has been a manageable activity for their child as their local group had kept the membership fee at £80 per year, with no additional costs for weekly meetings and a uniform bank to help make uniforms affordable. However, there were still substantial costs for summer camp trips abroad.



The varying costs of different hobbies were also highlighted by respondents. Interestingly, one parent/carer felt that sports hobbies were often more affordable than other types of hobbies, which they believed was down to **“so many people interested in sport volunteering and school tie-ins it’s cheaper to provide”**. (Survey respondent).

Understandably, free access to hobbies was cited as the main way in which participation could be supported, ensuring more equal access to all. However, there were also other ideas suggested, such as government subsidies. Across focus groups, discussions arose around entitlements and distribution if a national model was to be implemented.

For example, some participants gave their views on how the money for hobbies could be physically distributed. This included:

- A voucher type system like Best Start Food vouchers
- Put money onto a card, specifically for hobbies, so that it is only able to be spent on children
- Use of Young Scot Cards.

It was raised several times that parents and carers would want the financial entitlement to be provided through some system that ensured that the money was earmarked for hobbies and could not be spent on anything else.

There were a variety of views on whether financial entitlements to hobbies should be available on a universal or targeted basis. Some thought the entitlement should be income-determined, similar to the free school meal programmes in Scotland. This was suggested both by families who were struggling financially and in a more comfortable position:

“We earn a reasonable wage, I would not expect to receive financial help for hobbies”
(Survey respondent)

One survey respondent also raised the importance of ensuring that any entitlement was available to parents and carers who had no recourse to public funds. As well as addressing an issue of inequitable access, this suggestion also highlights hobbies’ potential role in supporting children new to Scotland to feel welcome and at home.

There were, however, also calls for a more universalised approach:

“Free access or reduced fees for all not just those on benefits!!”
(Survey respondent)

“Please please help parents who are squeezed in the middle. We get no help from the state but want our children to access sports and hobbies.”
(Survey respondent)

Those ‘squeezed in the middle’ views were also echoed in focus groups by some who were either just above the threshold to receive benefits or in a position where once their mortgages and bills were paid each month, there was very little left at the end of the month for anything else.

One interesting idea that arose about entitlements were whether some hobbies should be prioritised. For example, **“swimming is an important life skill and in my honest opinion a non-negotiable for learning as there could be a time where this skill could be lifesaving. But it is very expensive.”** (Survey respondent). During focus groups, there was discussion in one group who lived near water about their strong belief that their children should learn to swim but cost alongside waiting lists and local availability made it difficult to access.

Theme 2: Parental needs

The main barriers identified by parents and carers in terms of parental needs included:

1. Work-life balance and time
2. Juggling multiple children's hobbies / childcare issues
3. Family structures e.g. lone parents, not having family nearby to support
4. Safety concerns.

Juggling work alongside family life and children and young people's schedules emerged as the most significant barrier for those citing answers within this theme. One survey respondent explained that while their children took part in a lot of activities, it came at the expense of their work and mental health, leaving them exhausted. Times of activities seemed to be a real issue with parents and carers, particularly when activities were scheduled during the working day or too close to them. As one parent noted, it is ***“difficult to fit into evenings once parents are finished work, when the children need to go to bed by 7.30/8pm and have dinner!”*** (Survey respondent). These challenges were even greater for single parents and carers, those without family or community help, and families with multiple children.



“This should be looked at holistically with how to support working parents by... creating activities that children enjoy which can fit into modern family constraints and schedules.”
(Survey respondent)

To support participation, many highlighted the need for flexible family-friendly working and better childcare to allow parents and carers to be able work around children's activities and needs, alongside activity schedules that reflect the reality that most parents and carers work. Respondents also requested year-round provision, not just term time, and more after school activities which would allow parents and carers to work longer hours and reduce safety concerns about children getting from school to their activity. However, it is important to remember that although staying in school to partake in activities might work for some parents, carers and children and young people, not all children and young people are in education. This will be discussed more in the settings section.

There were also calls for support for families with multiple children, such 'sibling discounts' and more co-location of activities so that siblings could participate in their different hobbies without parents and carers needing to travel between different venues.

Within focus groups, there was also some discussion over parental anxiety and mental health, and safety. One participant shared how being a young mum made her feel like an outsider and made her stop taking her child to a group. Others discussed how other parents posting their own safety concerns of hobbies or providers on social media discouraged them from letting their children take part.

Theme 3: Local availability and settings

Local availability links strongly to the theme of ‘choice’ discussed later. Analysis suggests that issues with hobby availability arose largely due to the lack of facilities for hobby provision, increasing closures, and reduced accessibility to hobbies in rural areas. 30% of those who stated their children did not currently partake in a hobby cited local availability as a barrier, with no local provision available to them.

Within the data, there were many references to activities not being available locally, which created additional barriers such as the need to travel to another town or local authority for their children to take part. This, as mentioned earlier, could prove impractical due to work commitments, finances, other children’s needs, and limited public transport.

Oversubscription was another issue, with long waiting lists restricting participation:

“My daughter is desperate to do gymnastics. We’ve been on the waiting list since she went into primary 1 and she’s just gone into primary 4 and she’s still on it.”

(Focus group respondent)

Demand for the hobbies within an area was a significant issue, and some parents/carers talked about their children ‘ageing out’ of the group before reaching the top of the waitlist.



Better access to facilities was a recurring theme. Participants urged councils to keep community facilities open to retain local services and amenities. They mentioned the closure of local community halls, swimming pools or other community services, meaning their child could no longer access the hobby, saying ***“a two hour round trip after school, plus the time taken for the activity is just not possible for us.”*** (Survey respondent).

Schools were frequently mentioned as potential settings for hobbies. They were felt to offer convenience for families, existing facilities, and a safe environment.

However, not everyone agreed with schools being the best setting for a hobby model to be based on and it was recognised that they may be more appealing settings for parents and carers than children: ***“...while convenient for parents and safe, is less attractive to kids as they already spend most of the day in that building, so they crave a change of scenery and/or being outdoors.”*** (Survey respondent).

Focus group participants suggested that taking part in hobbies straight after school could be too much for children who require some downtime after school. One focus group also raised the issue of those who do not feel safe or a sense of belonging in school and how they would be included in a school-based model. This question would also be important for children and young people who were not attending school for whatever reason. Focus group participants also highlighted concerns that school-based hobbies would reduce children and young people's social circles to those within their school community.

Focus groups reflected on the role of youth clubs had played in their own youth:

“Youth club was a good open space that you could probably do twenty-odd hobbies within it, but you were in a safe space and that was the main thing. Your parents would drop you off with 50 pence and you were able to enjoy various hobbies as well as building social skills.”

(Focus group respondent)

Participants of focus groups engaged in interesting discussions about the use of youth clubs and community centres when they were young. Parents recalled these hubs, and other community venues such as churches, libraries and leisure centres as financially accessible and well-advertised within the community.

The overwhelming message from the data was that hobby provision needed to be community based, with people able to reach different hobbies easily from their home. Parents and carers want better investment to keep local facilities open, ensuring that all communities benefit.

Theme 4: Children and young people considerations

There were a range of personal factors connected to children and young people which parents and carers felt acted as barriers to hobbies, with common themes including inclusion and factors relating to children and young people's confidence and willingness to participate.

By far the most commonly raised issue in this thematic area was inclusion in relation to those with additional support needs (ASN).

“Tolerance to ASN is incredibly limited.”

(Survey respondent).

This was a dominant theme, with many citing how those with ASN were not often catered for and that hobby providers did not understand nor have the patience or skills to support the involvement of children and young people with ASNs. Some common barriers included:

- Sessions being too busy and overwhelming for children
- Sensory needs not being considered (e.g. noise levels or types of uniforms)
- Limited activities that meet needs of children and young people with ASNs
- Lack of 1:1 support
- Feeling pressure to compete
- Lack of accessibility for those with physical disabilities – e.g. wheelchair users, hearing and visual impairments, skin conditions.

There was a widespread call for inclusivity to be at the heart of hobby opportunities. Of the respondents whose children did not currently take part in hobbies, 29.58% of responses cited this theme as a barrier. Deeper analysis showed significant mention of disabilities and neurodivergence, as well as individuals own confidence and anxiety. Hobby environments did not support those with ASNs, particularly those who struggle with big groups, loud noises, and some

hobbies were simply inaccessible to those with disabilities who required things like British Sign Language and Deaf Aware Clubs.

As one parent/carer mentioned:

“We must make it more normal to include and make adaptations. A lack of a ramp shouldn’t exclude a child. But many halls etc are not accessible.”

(Survey respondent)



Other improvements that were suggested included having smaller group sessions to avoid overstimulation, greater understanding of ASNs among session leads and specialised staffing where required, considered timings such as not first thing or last thing in the day so children and young people are not as tired, having 1:1 support where needed, and encouraging participants to be more welcoming to others. Although these suggestions were mentioned in relation to supporting those with ASNs, many of them would be beneficial for all children and young people, ensuring a more inclusive approach for everyone.

Confidence was also a large barrier, with respondents saying their children had been too scared to try something new or were worried about not knowing other people in hobby groups. Some stated this was more difficult if they were starting a new hobby in the teenage years and hadn’t experience of it as a younger child. There was also a fear of bullying. Taster sessions were proposed to help children and young people try out new hobbies, particularly if it was a hobby they had never heard of before. This, it was felt, removed pressure for children, and financial pressure for parents and carers, to commit to a certain number of weeks.

Other comments related to children and young people’s own self-determination, with a few survey respondents citing a lack of willingness, self-discipline or procrastination as barriers for participation. Some suggested that having good role models would help improve this.

Theme 5: Transport/Travel

Access to a car was ultimately a big factor in supporting parents and carers to access hobbies as it not only allowed for the ability to travel when needed, but was the only form of transport for some, particularly those living in rural or island areas where no public transport was available. And where public transport was available, there was no guarantee it was reliable or ran in accordance with timings of hobbies. Many cited reduced bus and train schedules, or timings not working around working hours. The use of public transport could also be very complicated and laborious:

“I don't currently have a car and so activities are 45mins+ by bus. I also have 2 children at different school that finish at different times, and I work, so trying to get to an after school activity can mean one child having to get there by bus alone, then me collecting the other child, finishing work from home, getting a bus to the nearest town with my younger child to collect my eldest, waiting for a bus home and it can be a late night – it's very very hard to do.”
(Survey respondent)



There were calls made for more investment into public transport links, including fuller timetables, more reliable services, and family-friendly services including better spaces for prams and buggies. Those living in rural areas had the most suggestions about things that would help, including transport schemes being introduced including carpools or shared transport between parents and carers. One parent/carers from the survey suggested that free ferry travel could help support children and young people on the islands to access more hobbies. Transport issues could also be overcome for some depending on where the hobby was taking place, e.g. in schools, as discussed in the settings/local availability section.

When chatting in the focus groups about whether anything has helped so far, some mentioned the use of free bus travel for under 22s in Scotland, made available via the Young Scot Card. This view was echoed by some in the survey: ***“free bus transport also helps a lot so should be maintained”*** (Survey respondent).

However, one focus group cited that the free travel isn't as easy for those with ASNs as they find buses can be overly stimulating, they can be unable to take a bus by themselves or find it an anxiety provoking thing to do.

Theme 6: Choice

The key barriers relating to choice identified by parents and carers included the lack of diversity of options, activities not being suitable to all ages, extensive waiting lists, and difficulty finding activities around niche hobbies.

Lack of diversity of options was the greatest barrier of choice across the research. This was mentioned particularly among those living in rural areas where the range of hobbies available was narrower than urban settings, and among families whose children have less interest in dominant options such as sports, linking closely to the section on the nature of hobbies.

“We've also found it difficult to find hobbies that are really suited to my daughter's interests – she is very creative and does attend an art class but is keen to take up sewing classes which we cannot find locally. She also attends a drama class but is more keen to learn the backstage aspects such as costume design, scenery design, stage makeup etc. but again we cannot find classes for these interests. My son is sporty and it has been far easier to find hobbies to suit his interests!”

(Survey respondent)

By far the biggest change that was suggested by parents and carers to improve hobby choice was to offer a broader range of hobbies. We note that the Finnish Hobby Model includes a survey of children and young people to identify the activities they most want to pursue.





Theme 7: Provider needs

Despite small numbers within the survey citing ‘provider needs’ as a major barrier to participation, there was some interesting discussion within focus groups about what could be done to support hobby providers and those wishing to teach hobbies.

Unsurprisingly, a lack of access to specialist training for staff and volunteers was the most mentioned barrier, alongside staff turnover and a lack of volunteers. One focus group discussed the heavy reliance on volunteers by many hobby providers and noted that this approach is increasingly unsustainable given societal changes that require more people to work for longer, and later in their life. One participant had an idea of incentivising those who have the time to volunteer for hobby provision, by taking away the cost of them having to pay for qualifications:

“What if there was funding for parent groups to easily access coaching, like football coaching badges or first aiding... so that parents can go forward to get qualifications and training badges... it would encourage parents who are sitting thinking ‘I could actually teach kids music or how to cycle, how to knit, but there’s no encouragement to do that.’

(Focus group respondent)

They felt that by taking away the cost of achieving the necessary qualifications and safeguarding requirements e.g. Protecting Vulnerable Groups scheme (PVGs), it would encourage those who cannot afford to do this to share their knowledge and skills. Others in the survey stressed the need to reduce reliance of volunteers – who are often undervalued – and to ensure hobby provision is supported by fully trained and paid staff. There was clear awareness that a robust funding model was needed to help providers cover the cost of establishing themselves and paying for essential costs such as wages, training, electricity and venue hire. It was interesting to see some geographical difference in this theme, with those in small rural communities suspecting they were more dependent on volunteers than urban areas who have may have more access to professionally run groups/facilities.

One point that links to the settings, and which we touched upon in that section, was hobby providers use of local facilities and the need for councils to encourage their use by reducing hire costs. This would in turn help to keep many facilities such as community halls open: ***“It would also support local community facilities (village halls) with their financial sustainability as they would be used more.”*** (Survey respondent).

Theme 8: Societal views

An interesting theme that arose in the research was about how we frame hobbies within society and the importance we give to them. There were several calls to take inspiration from Nordic countries in raising the importance of hobbies in our lives and society:

“I think we need to adopt loads from Nordic countries. Children should be playing for longer than our country sees as acceptable. I hate that there is a societal dislike for childlike behaviour. We should all be playing and having more fun. It is the easiest way to learn.”

(Survey respondent)

There were also calls for hobbies to be moved up the political and educational agenda:

“Hobbies should be part of the curriculum.”

(Focus group respondent)

“An education system which sees children as developing and needing more than academic success.”

(Survey respondent)



Across the responses, there was a clear desire for Scotland to embrace a national understanding of the benefits of hobbies, placing children’s wellbeing at the heart of this shift.

Several respondents noted that hobbies are often perceived as uncool by children and young people, which can discourage participation. A national approach that normalises and celebrates hobbies could help reduce this stigma and make hobbies more accessible and appealing.

Focus groups also highlighted the need for broader societal change, including less judgement and more understanding and inclusion of those with additional support needs, and less stigma towards families in receipt of benefits, in poverty, or with multiple children.

Theme 9: Promotion

A small number of parents and carers cited poor communication and advertisement about local hobby opportunities as a barrier, noting that information is often shared primarily on social media which not everyone uses. To address this, respondents suggested better networking amongst parents and clubs, creating hubs of local information outside of mainstream social media, and improving outreach to parents/carers through nursery and school newsletters and health visitor services.

One focus group also reported being unaware of settings that carers could access free with their child. Many only discovered these opportunities through word of mouth and once informed, some were able to take their children swimming for free.

Theme 10: Planning

The complex landscape of hobby provision led to some calling for better planning involving parents, carers, local authorities, and hobby providers. A recurring theme across survey responses and focus groups was the need to work alongside parents and carers to find out what support was required to help facilitate participation, and to involve children and young people in shaping the types of hobbies offered. This mirrors the Finnish model where children and young people are surveyed to find out what they want to do, rather than having options imposed on them by adults. Research participants also emphasised the importance of inclusive planning processes, that actively involve marginalised and excluded groups, including those representing children and young people with additional support needs.

There was also a call for better venue planning and design to ensure that children and young people have access to safe, welcoming spaces and a diverse range of accessible clubs and activities within their local areas.

Theme 11: Screens

Parents and carers highlighted the benefits of hobbies as a way to reduce screen time and social media use. It was also interesting to hear screens being cited as a barrier to hobbies for children and young people, with one respondent mentioning how **“screens have unfortunately taken over hobbies.”** (Survey respondent). The challenge lay in defining the boundary, as many activities on smart devices (such as gaming, coding, or digital art) could be considered hobbies. Despite this, respondents across the study raised concerns about the toxic and addictive nature of social media and how the current generation had a very different view of digital versus non digital spaces:

“When we were younger, if we did something wrong, we were told we weren’t allowed to go out and that was a punishment whereas nowadays, it’s a punishment to be made to go outside.”

(Focus group respondent)



Theme 12: Hobby nature

One survey respondent felt making hobbies less gendered would be beneficial for children and young people and gave an example of their son taking part in and enjoying contemporary dance lessons. Others called for parents, carers, hobby providers, schools, and national bodies to stop making hobbies, particularly sport, so competitive and accept that **“...sometimes kids just want to try something new and have a bit of fun.”** (Survey respondent). There were calls for all clubs to run competitive and non-competitive teams so that there were options available for all.

“My son has been put off all team sports due to participating in football teams where dad's and coaches took it far too seriously at such a young age. He now won't participate in team sports.”

(Survey respondent)



“National sports bodies would have inclusion policies for teens that are not on performance elite pathways. Schools also, they are so elitist about sport and music. Teachers want reflected glory. They should be working with all young people equally.”

(Survey respondent)

Focus group discussion reflected survey comments that children missed out on activities (particularly sporting ones) because they were not interested in competing. Parents/carers of children and young people with additional support needs spoke about how their children were often excluded as other children wouldn't want them on their team or pass to them in sports. As one parent/carer stated, **“participation is better [than competition], I just want them to try new stuff.”** (Focus group respondent).

Theme 13: None

There was a very small number who reported having no barriers to their children and young people accessing hobbies, nor did they need any support to overcome any.

5. Should Scotland introduce a national hobby model?



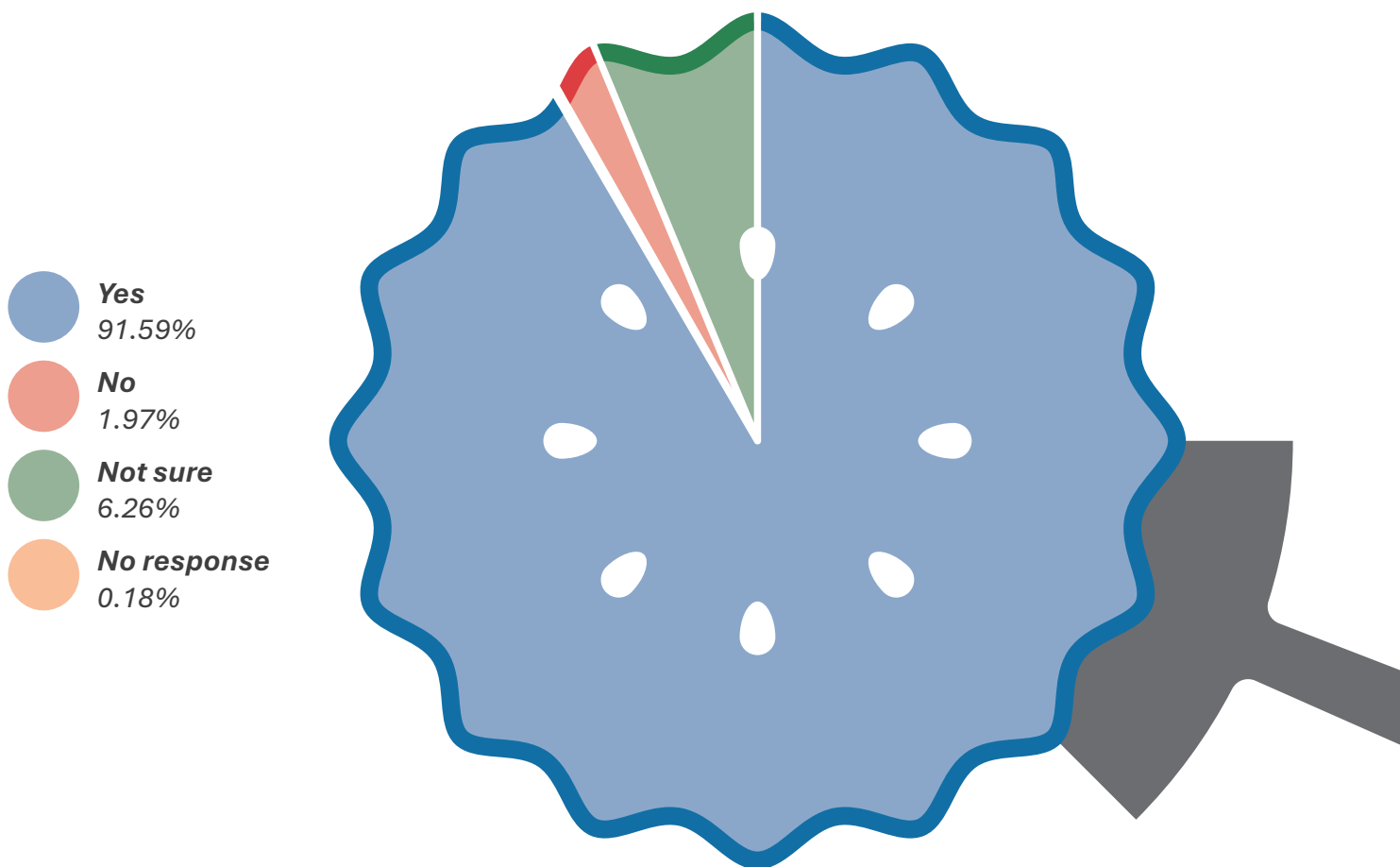
After asking participants to think about the benefits, barriers, and facilitators of hobbies, we finished up the survey and focus groups with this question:

Do you think it would be a good idea for Scotland to have a free hobby provision model?

We had given participants some context within the introduction, explaining that Iceland and Finland have policies in place which support children and young people to access a hobby of their choice. Due to time constraints we didn't go into too much depth about the different models and so the results should be read with this caveat in mind. However, it was a good opportunity to ask parents and carers their initial views on this topic.

There was overwhelming support for a national hobby model to be introduced in Scotland. The chart below shows responses from the survey.

Figure 2: Survey responses to whether parents and carers feel it would be a good idea for Scotland to have a free hobby provision model in Scotland.



The breakdown of the responses are shown below (Table 7).

Table 7: Survey responses to whether parents and carers feel it would be a good idea for Scotland to have a free hobby provision model in Scotland

Response	Total number of responses	Percentage of responses
Yes	512	91.59%
No	11	1.97%
Not sure	35	6.26%
No response	1	0.18%
Total	559	100.00%

As one respondent reflected, if Scotland were to implement a national hobby model:

“It will be a great privilege for all children irrespective of age and ethnic, race and immigration status to have access to engaging with something they enjoy doing.”

(Survey respondent)

Focus group respondents also largely supported the idea in theory but had some questions about how the model would work in practice.

The most common question posed to us was, ‘*Where is the money going to come from?*’ – a valid point given ongoing pressures on public finances. We will explore this question further in the discussion section. There were also some concerns among survey respondents that a national hobby model could be misused, as a form of free childcare:

“Worried it would be used as free childcare and kids wouldn’t really want to be there.”

(Survey respondent)

Some argued that a model would need parent/carers buy-in to stop it from becoming just a childcare service.

Other key questions and points raised by parents and carers included:

- The need for a hobby model to have a clear and concise purpose
- Whether there would be different models for different regions
- Whether children would be able to swap hobbies if they didn’t like their original choice.

We will explore some of these questions and points in the discussion section below.

6. Discussion, conclusions and recommendations



This research highlights the strong support among parents and carers for hobbies as an integral part of children and young people's lives. Parents and carers highlighted a range of benefits associated with taking part in hobbies, including personal development, social engagement, and improved mental health. However, despite these advantages, significant barriers to participation remain. Financial constraints were the most cited obstacle, followed by parental barriers and limited local availability. These findings reflect broader societal and economic challenges, including the cost-of-living crisis and the closure of community facilities. While it is unrealistic to provide every hobby in every area, more needs to be done to promote and deliver hobbies within communities, giving children and young people the opportunity to participate.

The idea of a national hobby model received overwhelming support in principle, but questions were raised about funding, geographic equity, and inclusion. Making the financial case for a national hobby model is clearly important and a strong argument in favour of a hobby model is its potential as a prevention measure, supporting better mental health and wellbeing in children and young people. This could reduce demand on services and generate long term savings. It is also worth noting that the Scottish Government already invests significantly in hobby-related initiatives through organisations and programmes such as Active Schools, Sport Scotland and Creative Scotland.



Parents and carers of children with additional support needs were particularly concerned that existing barriers around accessibility would persist. Parents and carers living in rural communities also highlighted the barriers they faced in terms of access and choice of hobbies. However, it is also clear, that if implemented correctly, supporting access to hobbies could foster inclusion for a whole range of children currently excluded, such as those with additional support needs, from refugee families or not in school. This underscores the need for a model that is both inclusive and adaptable to Scotland's diverse geography and population.

A recurring theme in the research was the importance of co-production. Parents and carers emphasised that any national approach must involve families and children in shaping provision, ensuring that hobbies reflect local interests and needs. International examples, such as Finland's national survey, provide useful models for participatory planning.

Finally, parents and carers emphasised that societal attitudes toward hobbies require a shift. Hobbies should be seen not as luxuries but as rights, aligning with Article 31 of the UNCRC, which recognises children's right to play and leisure. Embedding hobbies within policy frameworks could help normalise participation and reduce stigma, particularly for children who feel excluded or lack confidence.

Conclusions

- Parents and carers believe that hobbies deliver wide-ranging benefits for children and young people, including improved wellbeing, confidence, and social skills.
- Parents feel that access to hobbies in Scotland is unequal, with financial barriers, parental barriers, and geographic disparities limiting participation.
- There is strong parental support for a national hobby model, but its success depends on clear purpose, sustainable funding, and inclusive design.
- A co-produced approach, informed by local surveys and engagement, is essential to ensure relevance and equity.
- Inclusion must be prioritised for all children and young people, including the removal of barriers arising from additional support needs, gender, ethnicity, poverty or rurality.

Recommendations

1. Develop a National Hobby Framework

The Scottish Government should establish a clear, concise policy framework outlining the purpose, scope, and objectives of a national hobby model.

2. Secure Sustainable Funding

The Scottish Government should conduct an economic analysis of current government spending on hobby-related initiatives (e.g., Active Schools, Sport Scotland, Creative Scotland) and explore options for resource reallocation.

3. Embed Co-Production

The Scottish Government should involve children, young people, parents, and carers in decision-making to identify priority hobbies and co-produce delivery models.

4. Prioritise Inclusion

The Scottish Government, local authorities, funders and hobby providers should ensure hobby provision is accessible to children with additional support needs by investing in staff training, adaptive facilities, and inclusive practices.

5. Address Geographic Inequity

The Scottish Government should ensure that any national hobby model is response to different urban, rural, and island contexts, leveraging community facilities and schools while maintaining choice.

6. Promote Awareness and Cultural Change

Children and family organisations should launch a national campaign to raise the profile of hobbies, challenge stigma, and position hobbies as a right rather than a privilege.

7. Monitor and Evaluate

The Scottish Government and local authorities should implement robust monitoring systems to track participation, identify gaps, and measure the impact of hobby provision on wellbeing and social outcomes.

7. Appendix 1: Online survey questions

1. Before beginning, please confirm you are the parent of a child aged 4–17 and that you are happy for your ANONYMOUS responses to be used in Parenting Across Scotland's report.
2. In which local authority do you live?
3. Does your child or children currently take part in a hobby or hobbies?
4. What, if any, do you think are the benefits of hobbies for children and young people?
5. As a parent or carer, what do you feel are the main barriers to your child participating in hobbies?
6. What do you think would help overcome the barriers?
7. Do you think it would be a good idea for Scotland to have a free hobby provision model like in the Nordic countries mentioned previously?
8. Any comments?





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