

Scottish Government COVID-19: A Framework for Decision Making

Analysis of the implications for the sporting system

Sport for life

sportscotland
the national agency for sport

Introduction

The Scottish Government has published [COVID-19 – A Framework for Decision Making](#) (the Framework) and a follow-up providing [Further Information](#). These important documents outline the approach and principles that will guide the Scottish Government as it makes decisions about transitioning out of the current lockdown arrangements.

This document summarises the key points of the Framework and Further Information relevant to the sport and provides an early indication of what this may mean for the sporting system. It is important to understand that the Framework sets out principles and options rather than a clear plan and any analysis of this should not be seen a definitive prediction of the future.

The Scottish Government's approach

Planning a phased easing, but no timeline yet

The Scottish Government continues to be clear that its primary driver is preventing avoidable death and is committed to being guided by data and evidence to achieve this aim. While the Framework highlights the balancing act between harm caused by COVID-19 directly and the indirect harm caused by social and economic restrictions, along with other elements of the Framework, we can expect that a cautious approach will continue to be taken to any easing of the restrictions.

The Framework acknowledges that we cannot immediately go back to how things were, but equally we cannot sustain the current 'lockdown' restrictions indefinitely. The Framework points to strong measures ('a new normal'), including elements of physical distancing, being required until either a vaccine or cure is developed. There is confirmation that restrictions will be relaxed in a phased manner, in small incremental steps. This can be read as an indication that sport will experience some level of disruption for an extended period. It should be noted that the timeline for a vaccine or cure to be developed is currently unknown.

No exact timeline is given to relax restrictions. The next review point is 28 May, with an intention to continue to review regulations in 3-week cycles, although changes may be made inbetween formal review points where the evidence allows.

While attention is turning to how and when restrictions will ease, it is important to note that the publication of the Framework should not be taken as confirmation that significant

changes to restrictions are imminent. The Scottish Government has noted the need for 'lead-in' time to any changes to give organisations the opportunity to prepare and has indicated that it intends to publish further updates ahead of the next end-of-cycle review date on 28 May.

While it may be possible to consider options for how sport might be impacted as restrictions ease, the Framework does not provide a credible basis for predicting when different aspects of sport will be able to resume.

Taking a sectoral approach

The Framework states a desire for a return to some level of normality across education, business and society. There is a recognition that sectors will have to be considered individually and this may result in different approaches being taken as to how physical distancing restrictions will apply to each sector. There is a commitment to work with each sector and an onus on sectors to innovate to find different ways to function. The Scottish Government has indicated that business support will need to continue for as long as necessary and that they will work with the UK Government to secure this.

From the perspective of sport, there are several potential implications from this sectoral approach. The Scottish Government has clearly recognised the importance of physical activity to good physical and mental health during the lockdown. However, the Framework also places significant onus on the needs of areas such as education and business. The sporting sector should recognise that the decisions of the Scottish Government which impact on sport are made in the context of the impact on other sectors as well.

It is clear schools and education will be given careful consideration as to how physical distancing can be applied in those settings. There can be no assumption that a re-opening of schools will lead to school sport and sport within the school estate immediately returning to normal.

The Framework's commitment to work with sectors provides an opportunity for sport and **sportscotland** to both innovate and engage proactively with the Scottish Government on how physical distancing restrictions can be applied to the sector in a proportionate way that continues to contain transmission while maximising the level of sporting activity that can be safely undertaken. Given the potential that sports organisations will face longer and greater restrictions than some other sectors of the economy, it is welcome news that the Scottish Government is indicating a need to maintain business support. As with physical distancing, there will be opportunities to engage the Scottish Government in a discussion about the sectoral needs of sport.

sportscotland continues to meet regularly with the Minister for Sport and Scottish Government officials. The Minister is also meeting with other sports bodies. In addition, the Scottish Government has launched a [digital platform](#) that gives people and organisations the opportunity to offer their ideas and reflections on how we should move forward.

In looking outward, the Framework commits the Scottish Government to staying aligned to the rest of the UK where possible, while retaining the right to diverge if necessary. There is also a stated intention to learn from the international community, particularly those further ahead in their pandemic curves. There is an opportunity for sport to also adopt this approach.

Options for easing physical distancing restrictions

As noted above, the Framework outlines that the easing of physical distancing measures will be managed in a phased way, with small incremental steps to deliver a staggered transition. There is also a possibility that having been relaxed, restrictions may be re-imposed, up to and including re-imposing lockdown conditions. While the aim is to avoid this cycle, there are no guarantees. This may happen more than once and at short notice. For sport, this would indicate a period of increased uncertainty, that may pose particular challenges to planning events and for the continuity of competition. The likelihood of this risk is hard to assess at this stage.

The Framework sets out that some level of restrictive measures will continue for some time, while seeking to very carefully open-up parts of the economy and society. This is likely to include continuing measures relating to physical distancing at home, on the streets and in the workplace, as well as good hand and public hygiene, and enhanced public health surveillance.

The Scottish Government acknowledges that this does not leave much scope to ease restrictions and notes it is essential we understand that living with the virus will mean continued uncertainty and changes to how we live our lives. A key driver of determining which options will be pursued is how many more people will come into contact with each other in each option. These options will also be assessed on minimising overall harm to health, economy and broader society.

While no definitive plan is presented, there are a number of indicators in the Framework of options being given serious consideration, which would have significant implications for sport. These include:

Indicator	Implications for sport
Continuation of physical distancing in premises	As premises reopen some physical distancing is said to be likely to continue to be required. This may impact on the viability of operating some sport and leisure facilities, while for other facilities they may need to operate with more limited activities or capacity than normal.
Gatherings in groups (e.g. pubs or public events) likely to be banned or restricted for some time to come	Unlike other options which are presented only as possibilities, this option is presented in the Framework as a likelihood. This has the potential to be highly disruptive to sport. Depending on the size limits on groups and the nature of events covered it could impact primarily on spectator sport and mass participation events, or it could rule out almost all team sport and all but the smallest events or competitions.
Tailoring options for specific geographies	While this may suggest that sport in some parts of the country might be allowed to a greater degree at an earlier stage, it is also likely to pose challenges for sporting activity that involves an element of travel across the country, either for fixtures or events. This may make some sporting activity impossible. It could also lead to participants travelling to regions where restrictions have been relaxed to participate in activity. In extremis the Scottish Government may impose some level of travel restrictions, either by distance or between regions.

Indicator	Implications for sport
Tailoring options for specific sectors	At a micro-sector level this may mean different sports face different restrictions. At a macro-level this could mean for instance that school estate sport facilities and other stand-alone sport and leisure facilities face different restrictions. This could lead to challenges for sports that use both settings and increased pressure where only a limited stock of facilities has been re-opened for sporting use.
Treating outdoor and indoor activity differently	Clearly this suggests potential differences for sports undertaken outside or indoors. It may result in a need for indoor sports to use outdoor spaces, potentially with adjustments to their sports, if they want to deliver activity. It may also result in increased pressure on the capacity of both formal and informal outdoor sport facilities.
Tailoring options for specific groups in society	Restrictions may be applied in a different manner to different groups (this is already happening with shielding for high-risk groups). For sport this may mean that some individuals may not be able to participate, potentially impacting on the viability of teams or competition. It could also mean that activity aimed at particular groups may be more or less viable. It cannot be assumed that groups identified will only reflect the current groups identified as 'high-risk'. For example, it could be that different restrictions are imposed on children and adults. This differentiation by group could also have implications for availability of staff, coaches, volunteers and officials.
Self-isolation and contact tracing	Those displaying symptoms of coronavirus are likely to continue to be required to self-isolate. It appears the Scottish Government also intends to implement 'contact tracing', identifying those that have been in contact with a confirmed coronavirus case and requiring those people to also self-isolate. This could be disruptive to sport, with individual participants, staff, coaches, officials and volunteers unexpectedly unavailable at short notice. Where a confirmed case is within a sports organisation, club or team, there is potential for a large percentage of that group to be required to self-isolate. That scenario could lead to significant disruption for an organisation, competition or event. The level of disruption this will cause is likely to be linked to the level of community transmission.

The Further Information document outlines how these options might be applied to five themes as initial changes. While this can be interpreted as what a 'first phase' of easing could look like, again these are options being considered rather than an approved and definitive plan. The considerations potentially most relevant to the sport sector are:

Theme	Implications for sport
Advice to stay home	Considering if and how we could make changes to allow people to leave their home more often and/or for longer. Advice would continue to be to 'stay local', stay within household (or possibly slightly expanded groups – see next point), physically distance from others, and maintain good

	hygiene. They may also consider whether restrictions can be eased on certain outdoor work activities.
Visiting other households	Considering adopting 'bubble' approach, where people can "meet with a small number of others (the number is under consideration) outside their own household in a group or 'bubble' that acts as a single, self-contained unit, without connections to other households or 'bubbles'."
Business that are restricted or closed	Initially likely to focus on construction, manufacturing and retail, where less work can be done remotely, as well as elements of outdoor and rural work, where transmission risks are likely to be lower. Restrictions are likely to remain in place for some business activity for some time, especially where safe working is harder to achieve. Changes already adopted in many sectors, for example working from home and the use of digital technology, are likely to be part of the 'new normal'
Pupils to return to school	The Scottish Government does not consider it likely that schools will reopen fully in the foreseeable future and are not yet certain that they can re-open at all in the near future. However, if they do it will be in a phased way that will see some year groups returning before others. It is also likely to involve a blend of in-school and at-home learning, potentially with attendance in blocks for a few days or a week at a time to allow for deep cleaning between groups.

It is important to stress that the options above and application of these to themes are only presented as options within the Framework that the Scottish Government has indicated it will consider. We do not know either the mix of options that will be adopted or the timeline for adoption. It is also not possible to fully predict all the implications for sport of every option – we do not know what we do not know. In some cases, options may interact with each other in unexpected ways. Sport is also not separate from wider society and the nature of restrictions on wider society will also have implications for sport (potentially both positive and negative).