WINNING SCOTLAND

Positive Coaching Scotland

A LEARNING REVIEW

SCOTTISH FA

sportscotland
the national agency for sport

SCOTTISH RUGBY

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Thank you: We would like to thank our partners and particularly those involved in the interviews for sharing their time and their insights around the impact of PCS and its legacy. We appreciate their honest reflections, which have enriched this report. Thanks also to Harry Fotheringham for his contributions.

Highlights

Positive Coaching Scotland (PCS) is an education programme designed for the key influencers of children partaking in organised sport, with materials targeted at coaches, parents, teachers and club leaders. The overarching ambition of the programme was to use sport as the training ground not just for technical and physical development, but to also ensure the holistic development of a child's life skills, values and mindset.

- 456 PCS workshops were conducted reaching a total of 12,498 attendees.
- 99% of participants reported that PCS was relevant to them and their sport.
- 89% indicated PCS made them reflect on their behaviour and that of others.
- 83% said they intended to change their behaviours as a result of the workshop.
- 96% indicated they would do things differently. In a follow-up survey 87% indicated they had done things differently.

> **"PCS is a great programme, it encourages players with their own development and decision making choices, We do not need adults or coaches shouting what to do and putting pressure on the players, let the players have fun with no pressure and enjoy the game, they will learn!"**

> **"We all want our kids to grow up and develop the right way and we all want them to show respect in all aspects of life, including football. With the help of PCS our club will be able to help the kids develop their life and football skills."**

	Pre-workshop	Post-workshop
	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
I understand how physical activity can help young people achieve more in school	64%	93%
I can help young people learn from their mistakes in physical activity	33%	81%

> From a strategic point of view, the SFA embedded PCS into coach education programmes, discussions with club leaders, and volunteer information... It's what we do now... New projects have benefited from the fundamentals of PCS; they are integral to how you operate as a person.

Scottish Football Association

Scottish Rugby estimate around 75% of the content of their 'Coaching Essentials' qualification stems from PCS.

> PCS fundamentally changed Scottish Rugby's philosophy on coach education. There's been a move towards placing the child at the centre of everything. We now have a generation of rugby coaches who understand that coaching is the development of the whole child and is not just about the result on the weekend. We're seeing coaches making sure that kids are smiling in the session, enjoying their experience in the game more.

Scottish Rugby Union

> From a personal perspective, I still really, really like the PCS messages, ...it's still something that I think there's a place for. I've got two young children of my own and my boy is six and is involved in sport now and seeing it from a parent's perspective I can certainly really see the value of it, ...and really see the, to be honest, the ongoing need for it.

sportscotland

Background to PCS

Winning Scotland introduced the Positive Coaching Scotland (PCS) programme to Scotland in 2008 based on the work of the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) in America.
The goal of PCS was to change the culture within Scottish sport and beyond, by working with the key influencers in the lives of young people: coaches, parents, and teachers. The idea was to adjust the (then) predominant culture of playing sport purely to win, to an environment that emphasised the wider development of life skills and values – with a focus on children's and youth sport in particular.

Together with other approaches and organisations, PCS was instrumental in initiating, driving and embedding what became known as the 'sport for change' and eventually the 'changing lives through sport' movement in Scotland, which is now well established and indeed a cultural norm for most sporting organisations.

The core ideals of PCS included understanding the importance of effort, the building of confidence and resilience, and the development of responsible individuals.

The Three Key Principles at the heart of PCS

Three key principles
There are three key pinciples at the heart of Positive Coaching Scotland. These are critical factors in becoming an effective Double Goal Coach and ensuring that young people gain life skills which they can use in and out of sport:

1. Honour our sport (ROOTS): It is crucial to teach young people how to honour their sport and teach respect for rules, opponents, officials, teammates, and self.

2. Redefine 'winner' (ELM): We want young people to see beyond the scoreboard when taking part in their sport. True winning comes from giving your best possible effort, continually improving by learning every time you play, and maximising your potential by not being afraid to make mistakes and getting better by learning from them.

3. Fill the emotional tank (E-TANK): Young people need to feel appreciated no matter what their ability within their chosen sport. As a Double Goal Coach it is crucial to fill the E-Tanks of young people by ensuring we encourage, teach, appreciate, provide non-verbal support and know how to praise.

PCS placed the emphasis on the adults involved in youth sport. Coaches' and parents' actions and attitudes are fundamental to young people's experiences and development in sport.

From 2008-14, PCS was delivered by partners such as sportscotland, the SRU and the SFA. 80,000 adults were trained, impacting approximately 500,000 young people.

Following feedback on potential improvements for the programme, in 2015, Winning Scotland created their own positive coaching material, based on the original PCS content but contextualised fully for Scotland, which they called PCS Plus.

This involved an amicable exit from the existing PCA licensing agreement, and investing in research to fully understand and address need in the Scottish context. PCS Plus became the content used by partners from then on.

In the period 2018-19, Winning Scotland licensed all PCS materials free of charge to its core partners, sportscotland, the SFA and SRU, to achieve a shared ambition to integrate the values of PCS into the culture of youth sport.

Beyond 'formal' sport

The person-centred approach of PCS and its messages can be of particular value to young people and those with additional needs or facing challenging circumstances, especially regarding the life skills, growth mindset, and mastery elements. With PCS using sport as the vehicle for creating a more positive environment, it could be adapted to better support these young people. E.g. the 'emotional tank' idea could be used to appreciate that each individual has come from different circumstances in life.

Indeed, in 2019 Winning Scotland piloted PCS with a group of organisations that delivered sport as part of a broader programme of community, educational or charitable work, rather than for the sake of sport itself.

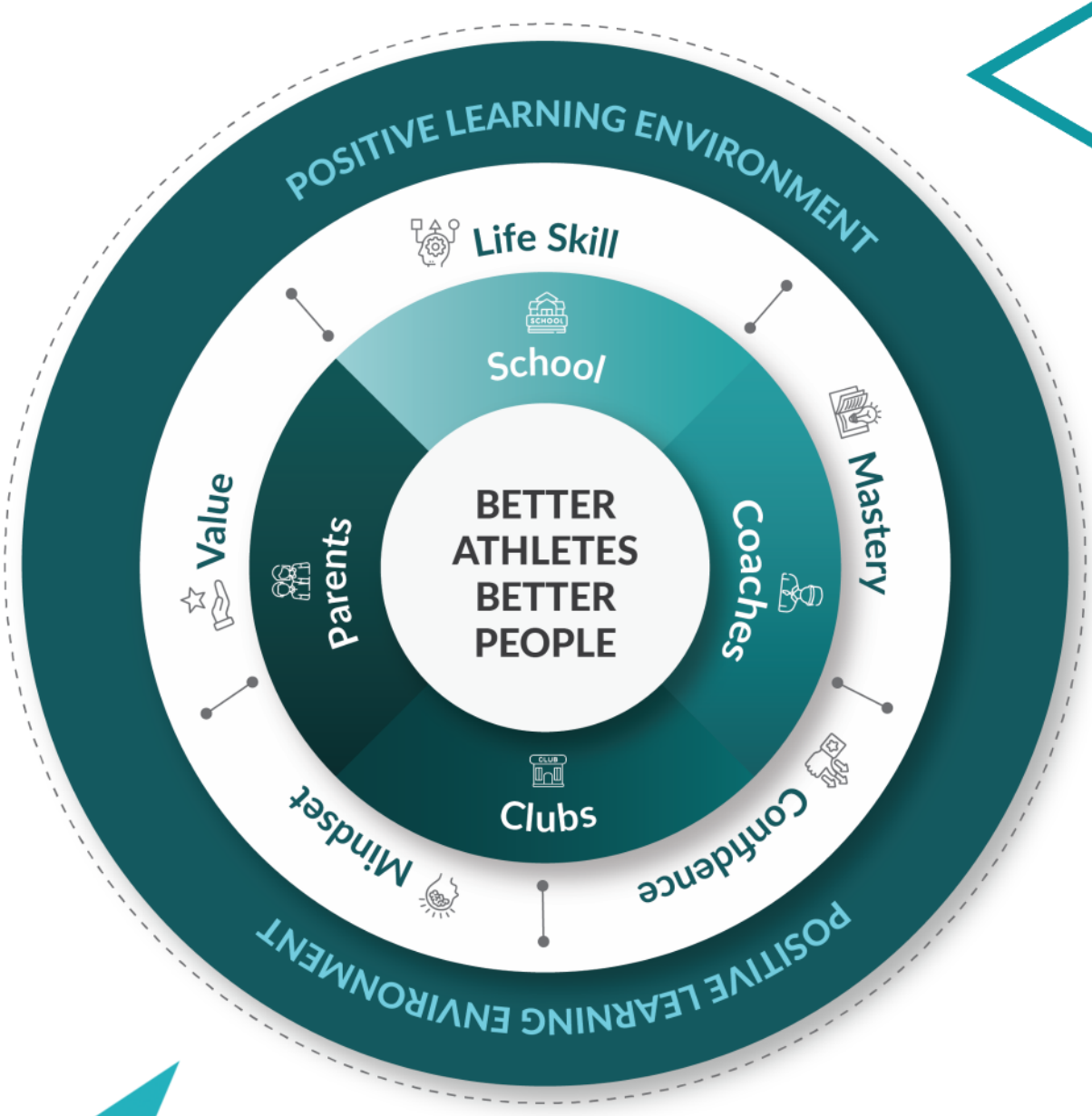
119 coaches, teachers and volunteers across seven organisations, many of whom support young people from marginalised groups, received the PCS Plus training:

- **Trust Rugby International –** an organisation using rugby to support young people with learning difficulties.
- **Kibble –** A specialist provider of services for young people facing adversity or trauma.
- **PEEK –** an organisation focussed on enhancing possibilities for young people across Scotland
- **Bike for Good –** an organisation focussed on promoting cycling as a mode of transport
- **Fetlor Youth Club –** a community group aiming to build young people's confidence, fulfil their potential and play a positive role in society
- **Glasgow Ansar –** aiming to provide a multi-cultural sporting platform from Glasgow's Southside.
- **Coach My Sport –** a multi skills programme, run in a non-competitive climate to teach and develop life skills

Aims of PCS

The PCS programme consisted of workshops and supporting materials designed for four key influencer groups in children's and youth sport: coaches, parents, teachers, and club leaders. Its aim was to support these key influencers to teach children and young people to:

- Appreciate the value of effort and learning;
- Improve personal performance;
- Foster a competitive, but fair, sporting mentality;
- Deal positively with mistakes.



Impact and Legacy

For the purposes of this report, we have differentiated between the immediately felt impact and longer term legacy effects.

Impact

Multiple studies into the impact of PCS were conducted between 2008-17, as below:

Winning Scotland and Glasgow Caledonian University, 2008-10

Evaluation of pilot programme

- 456 PCS workshops were conducted reaching a total of 12,498 attendees.
- 80-90% of attendees expressed a high degree of satisfaction with key concepts.
- The qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods applied established that PCS was beginning to change the attitudes and behaviour of key influencers in sport.
- Focus Group feedback showed that exposure to PCS led to coaches considering and/or adopting PCS core values and tools.
- 65% of workshop attendees expressed that they intended to put PCS principles and tools into practice.

Edinburgh Napier University, 2012

Focused on PCS in professional football

- 93% of the players thought they would show more respect to their opponents
- 93% thought they would show more respect to the officials
- 92% thought the Positive Coaching principles would help their commitment
- 92% of parents thought they would show more respect to the officials
- 87% think Positive Coaching goes beyond football
- 79% felt they should praise their child more often for positive performances

University of Stirling, 2013

Independent evaluation following national roll out:

- 99% of participants reported that PCS was relevant to them and their sport.
- 89% indicated PCS made them reflect on their behaviour and that of others.
- 83% said they intended to change their behaviours as a result of the workshop.
- Participants showed an increase in growth mindset and reported changes in behaviour.
- 96% indicated they would do things differently. In a follow-up survey 87% indicated they had done things differently.

Edinburgh Napier University, 2012

Focused on PCS in professional football

- 87% of respondents said that changing youth culture was one of their organisations key drivers for delivering PCS.
- 74% of respondents believed PCS had positively impacted on this culture.
- The majority of respondents perceived PCS to have positively impacted on improving practice and behaviour of coaches (68%), young people (55%) and parents (57%).

Case studies

A series of case studies were developed over the duration of the programme.

> The biggest impact we have seen is in our local primary football league... changing the structure within the league with less focus on only one trophy. Oral feedback on this has been extremely positive.

PCS Manager, Fife

> Working with schools has worked really well and we have a number of schools embracing the principles as a whole school and also as individual classes.

Active Schools Coordinator, Orkney

> PCS is a great programme, it encourages players with their own development and decision making choices, We do not need adults or coaches shouting what to do and putting pressure on the players, let the players have fun with no pressure and enjoy the game, they will learn!

Active Schools Coordinator, Orkney

> PCS will help us create an environment where players can develop as good people and footballers.

North Merchiston FC

> We all want our kids to grow up and develop the right way and we all want them to show respect in all aspects of life, including football. With the help of PCS our club will be able to help the kids develop their life and football skills.

Kelso FC Juniors

The following attitudinal shifts were shown when the training was delivered in community settings

	Pre-workshop responses			Post-workshop responses		
	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Other	Strongly Agree	Moderately Agree	Other
I understand how physical activity can help young people achieve more in school	64%	32%	4%	93%	7%	0%
I can help young people learn from their mistakes in physical activity	33%	41%	26%	81%	15%	4%
I understand the difference between fixed and growth mindset	22%	41%	37%	81%	15%	4%

Legacy

Ongoing use of PCS

> From a strategic point of view, the SFA embedded PCS into coach education programmes, discussions with club leaders, and volunteer information... It's what we do now... New projects have benefited from the fundamentals of PCS; they are integral to how you operate as a person.

Education Professional - Mindset in Education

For the SFA, the legacy of PCS is in how its fundamentals have been embedded into their coach education programmes, staff development, and overall values of the organisation. They state how PCS has impacted their general working environment on top of positive work with coaches, volunteers and parents.

At Scottish Rugby, 75% of the content for the the first level qualification for aspiring coaches, 'Coaching Essentials' stems from what was originally PCS.

> PCS fundamentally changed Scottish Rugby's philosophy on coach education. There's been a move towards placing the child at the centre of everything.

Scottish Rugby Union

Additionally, PCS is cited as establishing the foundations for other projects at Scottish Rugby, sportscotland and the SFA. In particular, the 'mindset' element (based on Carol Dweck's research into growth/fixed mindsets) of PCS is regarded as highly influential.

For example, the SFA's 'Let Them Play Campaign' has echoes of PCS and was mentioned to have been partly inspired by it. The campaign, like PCS, encourages grassroots coaches 'to provide an environment where young players can thrive, allowing them to play freely, make decisions, solve problems, and be creative.' Similar to PCS, the campaign seeks to ensure the first stage of the football pathway (for children aged 6-9) is focused on enjoyment of the game, before there is a focus on any outcome related goals.

Scottish Rugby meanwhile have developed a blueprint with whole 'cogs' dedicated to ideas that, at least in part, originate from PCS, particularly 'brain skills' (growth mindset' and giving/receiving feedback).

This includes their 'values ambassador' programme, helping to build a positive culture in clubs. It is used as a means to helping clubs and schools set and maintain their values and make it a welcoming place for everyone, and the benefits from being part of it.

Sportscotland have similarly integrated PCS into their online learning platform which is available free of charge to sport coaches, parents and others interested in how they can improve their skills and better support their young athletes.

Common language

Despite the language brought over from American PCA programme being perceived as not suitable for Scottish culture, it inherently stuck. From the interviews, it has been understood that messages such as 'the emotional tank' of children, which PCS urged adults to 'fill' with meaningful praise and encouragement, advanced the way in which young people were being coached.

One major issue football used to confront was the overzealous behaviour of people involved in youth football – parents, coaches and players – taking the game too seriously and becoming abusive towards others parents, officials or opponents. This is something PCS addressed through an approach called 'Honour Our Game'.

PCS, therefore, provided a common, relatable language and a label for something the SFA had only called 'touchline behaviour' prior to the programme.

> **It's allowed us to have a common language and call it something, before it was just 'touchline behaviour' and we didn't really know how to brand it or call it or package it up.**

Development of young people

PCS helped coaches and other adults realise that each child was attending sport with different circumstances at home or at school, so they needed to adopt a more person-centred approach. A major point with regards to legacy, therefore, is that PCS messages and principles have stuck around and are visible in today's coaching norms.

> **We now have a generation of rugby coaches who understand that coaching is the development of the whole child and is not just about the result on the weekend. We're seeing coaches making sure that kids are smiling in the session,enjoying their experience in the game more.**

Personal development

Similarly, the partners, particularly sportscotland, felt that the language of PCS had a personal impact on them. They find themselves applying PCS key messages in everyday life, whether it be with their children playing sport, or in the workplace.

> **From a personal perspective, I still really, really like the PCS messages, ...it's still something that I think there's a place for. I've got two young children of my own and my boy is six and is involved in sport now and seeing it from a parent's perspective I can certainly really see the value of it, ...and really see the, to be honest, the ongoing need for it.**

This is a major legacy point for PCS as the messaging living on is much more important than the programme being specifically profiled.

> **PCS has been a big part of my journey in sport... I used to love delivering the positive coaching workshops... one of the highlights of my career... nothing will probably beat that... PCS gave me the language to use so it made me a better coach.**

Case Study: Shetland

Shetland is an example of a region that still delivers PCS workshops, approximately once a year. The biggest reported impact of PCS in Shetland is the improved communication between all those involved in sport, from the local council to club coaches to parents.
Newer coaches in particular say their confidence has been enhanced by PCS. They feel more comfortable talking with parents about what is best for their child, as PCS offers a common language which parents are receptive to.

A key reason for the success and continuation of PCS in the region is the fact that the messaging, language, and approach is delivered universally, rather than just upskilling a few people. This means they are not reliant on one person to deliver workshops and have the capacity to potentially reach the majority of the community.

There is general agreement that PCS messaging is embedded into the coaching culture of Shetland. However, certain clubs push it more than others. For example, within girls' sports such as football and rugby there is greater acceptance of and willingness to develop themselves more and, therefore, they have more engagement in PCS type activities. Some clubs are also better at promoting PCS messages and sharing messages with parents than others.

There are two main aspects that Shetland feel could improve their implementation and roll out of PCS:

1. There is a disparity between which clubs actively pass on PCS information to parents and which do not. They feel more resources could be given to them so that the message expands beyond coaches and volunteers more effectively.

2. They could benefit from more of a push nationally to ensure the message is constantly surrounding them, and need governing bodies to push it more, to support with this.

Learnings and Opportunities

Audience

A major focus of PCS delivery was tutor-training – creating a network of PCS experts across the country who in turn trained coaches, clubs and parents on PCS.

There was a general feeling amongst those who took part in interviews that the focus was too heavily weighted towards training as many PCS tutors as possible, rather than on the quality of support of those people implementing the changes in the longer term.

> **Original plan was to train as many tutors as possible, but not everyone is a tutor, or wants to be a tutor. In some ways that was a challenge but did mean there was a large workforce.**

The 'coalition of the willing' approach is working well at sportscotland via their Professional Development Award but in Shetland there was mention that training their whole team was beneficial – it helped with capacity and flexibility around delivery of PCS, as well as all being on the same page in terms of messaging and ways of working.

Similarly, in some areas, tutors were often Active Schools Coordinators who had to juggle competing priorities and who perhaps saw PCS as something additional to their job, rather than as a tool to inform how they did their job.

At the same time, there was agreement that it would have been useful to have involved technical officials (referees, umpires etc.) in the PCS workshops too, so that on competition days when negative behaviour was apparent (e.g. coaches or parents being aggressive or abusive on the touchlines) parents, coaches and officials would have demonstrated the messages of PCS in a unified way.

> **If I were to make a small tweak to the original model, I would have added referees into it. They were always our eyes and ears on gameday and had different thresholds to what was acceptable and unacceptable. It would have helped implement 'this is what we do here' on matchdays.**

There is recognition that a programme targeting coaches, just one key influencer in youth sport, is likely to have limited impact. That in order to achieve cultural change PCS should connect with all those involved in sport: Policy makers, national and local organisations, club leaders, coaches, officials, and parents.

Where PCS is working there is strong support at strategic and operational levels within the delivery organisation and a desire to integrate PCS values and messages with current activities. In the instances where progress has been slower, there is either a lack of engagement and/or commitment at senior level, a lack of understanding of the scale of the programme, or a lack of ownership in the implementation of plans.

Sportscotland evaluation 2013

Timing

In many ways, this work was ahead of the curve and could have been more effective if it was a message children and families were hearing in other areas of their lives at the same time.

For the SFA, a major appeal of PCS was the opportunity to boost player numbers in football. Yet, they realised that for there to be a genuine, positive uptake in football across the country, there needed to be a cultural change beforehand. They felt as though the messages that they were trying to push were not being echoed elsewhere in the young peoples' lives.

> **The schools aspect links into it because, if we were 'double hitting' a young person through school and also through their sporting progress, then the impacts may have been greater.**

For instance, it was only after PCS's inception that schools bought into growth mindset, a key component of PCS, meaning a cultural change was harder to bring about at that time, as there was less consistency for young people in terms of messaging from other influential adults, like teachers and parents.

Technology

Technology was not widely used for learning and there is agreement that online and e-learning would have been a useful addition to the implementation of PCS Plus. sportscotland are now using e-learning for PCS delivery, as part of their Coach Education and Development Support offering.

> **I think one of the benefits that came on later on that we would maybe utilise more now, would be online and eLearning as a way of getting the message out and reach out to everyone, because I think that mass message is important.**

Generic or specialised?

The original roll out of PCS was a 'one-size fits all' approach, where the aim was to reach as many people as possible. Looking back, given that each club, partner, and organisation had different issues, needs, budgets, and staffing capacities, some partners believed a more bespoke and tailored approach would have made more sense.

There was also an acknowledgement however that there are benefits to the 'cross pollination' effect of PCS – creating a level of consistent practice across multiple sports.

Furthermore, PCS messaging could be of particular value to young people who face additional challenges and barriers, e.g. those with care experience and/or additional support needs – using the emotional tank and a person-centred approach, as well as focusing on mastery and life skills could be highly beneficial to these young people.

This could be a separate strand of the programme for young people themselves, or widening the current programme for adults to be more inclusive, to more explicitly lay out the benefits for all young people, including those facing additional barriers and challenges.

Measuring Change

PCS could have been measured more effectively, with a greater focus on quality and depth. Perhaps measures such as pre and post comparisons, or at least some sort of baseline measures to compare and note the changes against would make it easier to gauge the genuine impact, rather than just how many people potentially heard the message.

PCS is a prime example of a cultural change programme and, for cultural change to be achieved, the project needs to be generational and multi-faceted in approach, involving parents/carers, volunteers, and wider stakeholders, supported by national and local level agencies who are all on the same page.

> **It's how we do things here.**
>
> **Jim Thompson, founder of Positive Coaching Alliance**

Any potential avenues for PCS work in the future would benefit from gathering more baseline and post-intervention data, for greater comparison purposes. Collecting both quantitative and qualitative measures would also help strengthen the case for any potential impact that may occur.

What Next?

> **I wish PCS was still as big a thing as it was back then, ... we're hearing a need for it now as much as we ever have.**

It is evidence that PCS continues to play a role in the ongoing training and support provided by the original partner organisations. This research has found an appetite for PCS, or similar, today. From low levels of physical inactivity among young people (particularly those from poorer backgrounds),behavioural issues in sport and on the touchline, and of the recent series of scandals relating to abuse, bullying, athlete welfare and discrimination in a broad range of sports including football, rugby, cycling, swimming, gymnastics, cricket and ballet, the work started by PCS plus is not yet finished, and perhaps, will never be.

> **We've definitely noticed the need to refresh each new generation of coaches and parents on a four-to-six year cycle, revisiting the core principles.**

Conclusion

PCS has had an impact on everyone involved in it. Whether it be at ground level with the coaches, children, and parents, or at the top with tutors and project coordinators for various organisations and agencies, the programme has interwoven itself into several sports, professions and general lives.

One of the major legacy points of PCS is the way that the language has been embedded within these organisations. Perhaps originally perceived as too 'Americanised', PCS messages surrounding growth mindset and the emotional tank and are still recognisable in the sporting sector today.

PCS is embedded into the fabric of these organisations, and elements of it are instilled into all their coaches through their education programmes. With football in particular, PCS gave the SFA the appropriate evidence and materials to change cultural issues that plagued the game at every level, whilst laying the foundations for projects of the future that strive to implement similar messages.

> **"Did the approach change? In a number of ways yes. A good thing about PCS is its inherent in the message: you learn from your mistakes... from developing a project perspective, there was a lot of learning and a lot of changes. The project group of Winning Scotland, sportscotland, the SFA, and the SRU all fed into that and worked really well as we shared learning with each other."**

Naturally, approaches to the implementation of PCS have evolved over time and there needs to be investment to ensure that the benefits are fully realised locally and nationally.

While all three core partners have maintained the lessons of PCS to a varying degrees, we should also be cognisant of broader change in the sector.

For example, there are third sector organisations also working in a similar space which may be well placed to revitalise this work. Both Heriot-Watt and Edinburgh Napier Universities are conducting research related to values and character, and wider social/community development in football.

And Winning Scotland are working to roll out Planet Youth in Scotland, an evidence based approach to improve the lives of young people by, in part, ensuring that they are taking part in structured sport with healthy and positive role models.

> **PCS brought cohesion to sport's governing bodies. Culturally, we'd be seven or eight years behind where we are now without it.**

About this Report

In a series of interviews during 2023 and 2024, key stakeholders from sportscotland, the Scottish FA and Scottish Rugby were asked about the impact and legacy of PCS, to see how they view the project some 5-6 years since it was delivered systematically. It is important to note that for some of the interviewees, it has been close to 10 years since they worked directly on PCS. Yet, the majority still work in some capacity for these partners, and so, are valuable for understanding the legacy of PCS.

Interviews were also held with two people involved with PCS from a club/local level perspective.

Example of interview questions:

1. Who and what changed as a result of PCS? How do you know this? How was this measured?
2. Why and how did these changes occur? What was done?
3. What helped and what hindered the delivery and impact of PCS? What were some of the challenges you encountered?
4. What, if anything, would you do differently were you to start again? What lessons have you learned?
5. How has PCS and your involvement with it impacted you, personally and professionally?
6. What is your favourite thing about PCS, and why?
7. What do you see the legacy of PCS being?
8. Where do you see PCS going forward?