Disability Landscape Survey First Edition Findings Report

Purpose

This survey was conducted to gather detailed baseline data on the participation of individuals with disabilities and/or long-term health conditions in outdoor lawn bowls.
This survey is the first of a series of surveys that will be published over the next three years. The aim is to establish the current disability bowling landscape and to track progress against the objectives set out in the four-year Disability Development Plan.

Scope

Launched February 2025, the survey remained open until April 2025, gathering responses from 131 individuals who shared insights based on their experiences within their own club environments. The data collected identified areas in need of development and provided valuable information to shape future projects and initiatives aimed at increasing participation and creating more inclusive opportunities. These findings form a key part of the Disability Development Plan, which outlines a series of actions that Bowls Scotland, in collaboration with partners and stakeholders, is committed to delivering.

If you would like to discuss this report in greater detail or have any questions, please contact:

Stuart Chesby
Disability Development Officer
E: Stuartchesby@bowlsscotland.com
M: 07907 867 026

Contents

Section1: Age and Gender Demographics

Section2: Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation

Section 3: Geographical Representation

Section 4: Disability and Characteristics

Section 5: Pathways into Sport

Section 6: Use of Bowling Aids and Assistance

Section 7: Club Membership

Section 8: Participation and Inclusion

Section 9: Travel and Commute

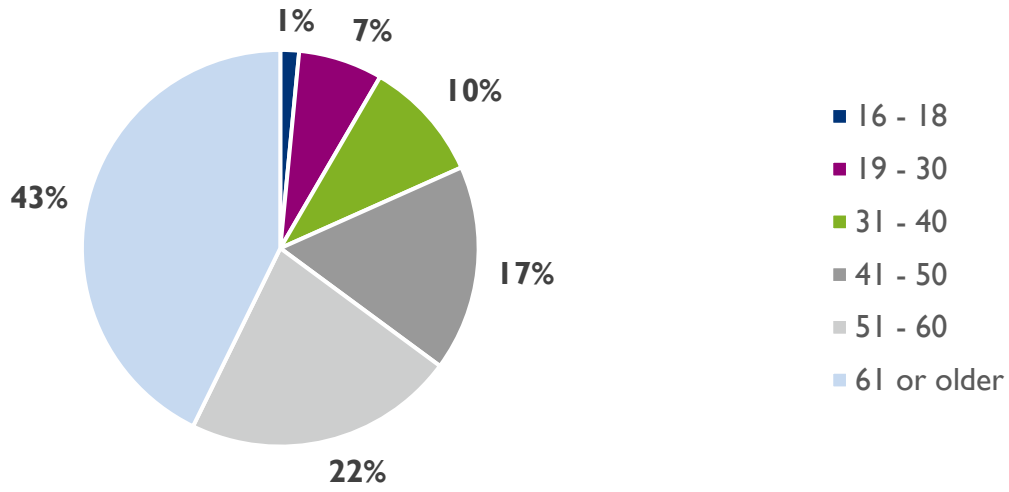
Section 10: Club Facilities and Accessibility

Section 11: Additional Opportunities and Support

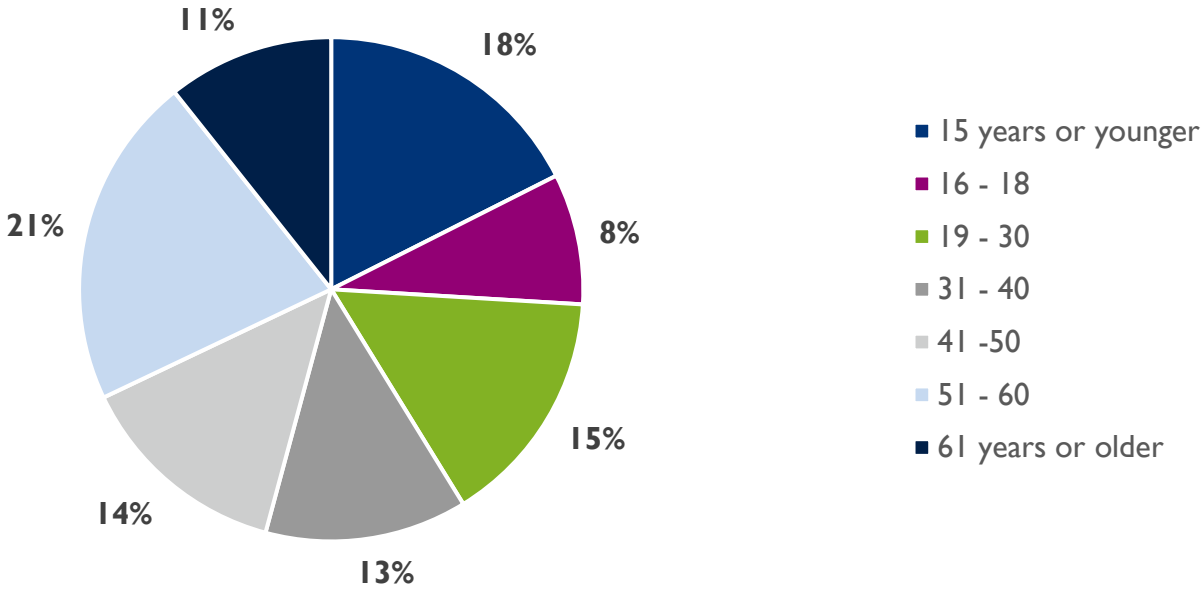
Section12: Direct Quotes from Participants

Section 1: Age and Gender Demographics

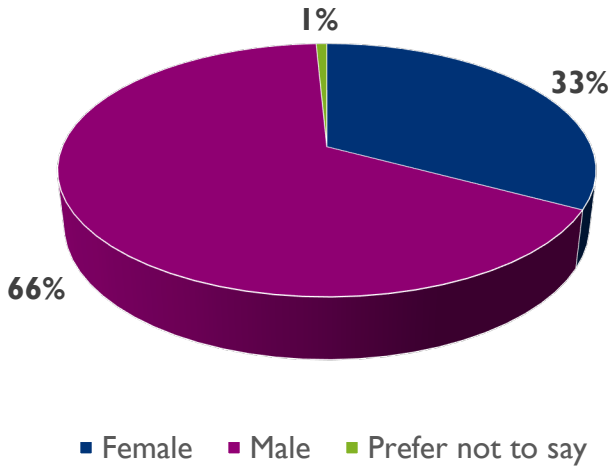
43% of respondents are aged 61 or older, reflecting broader trends across the sport that indicate lawn bowls has an ageing demographic.



Respondents were asked the age at which they started playing bowls. **25%** were 18 years old or younger. This highlights majority of people who have started playing the sport as an adult.



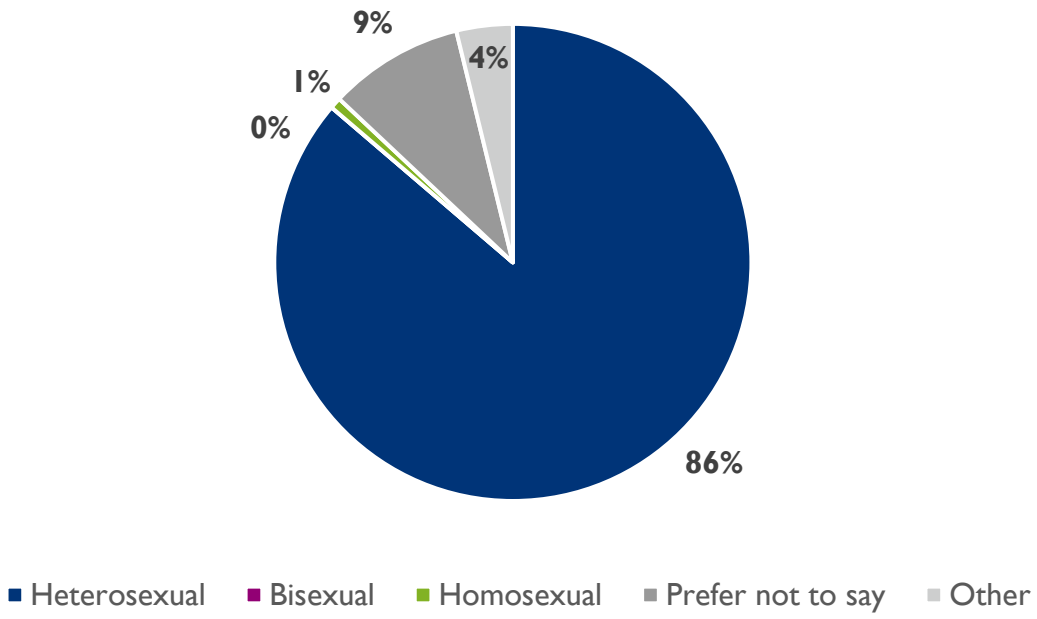
This graphic shows the gender demographic of respondents which equated to **66%** male and **33%** female. This is similar to the demographic of the sport as a whole.



Section 2: Ethnicity and Sexual Orientation

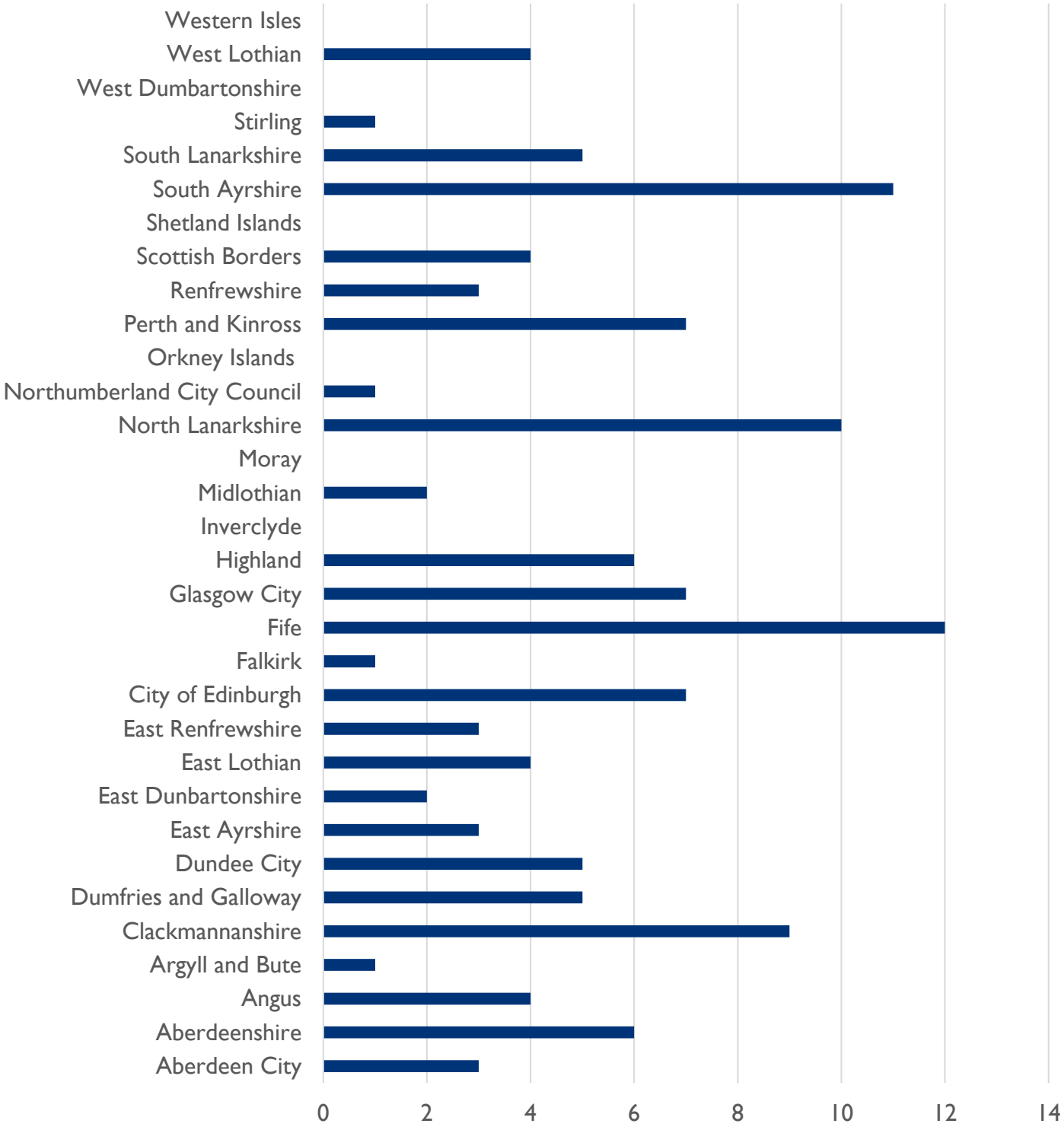
94% of respondents identify as white**.** This question helps us better understand the demographic.

86% identified as heterosexual, which is, indicating that heterosexuality remains the predominant sexual orientation within the sport.



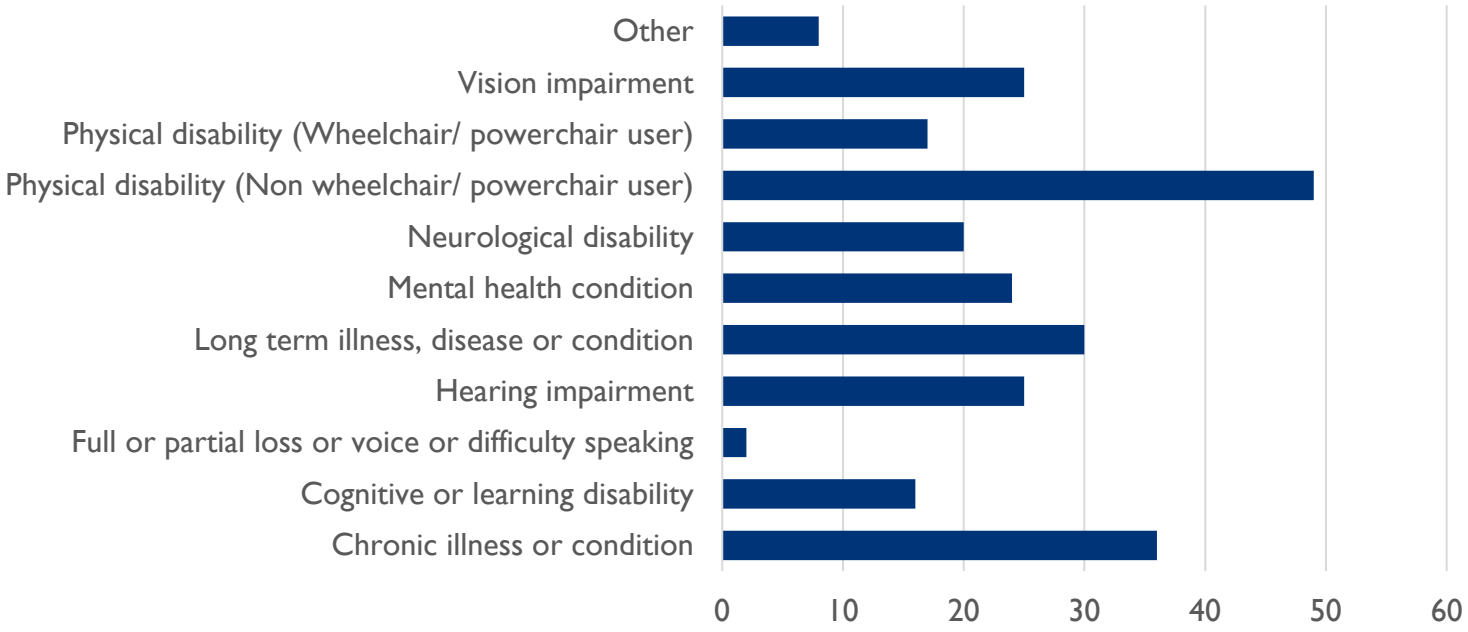
Section 3: Geographical Representation

This graphic highlights the reach the survey achieved. Only 6 of the 32 local authority regions receive no responses.

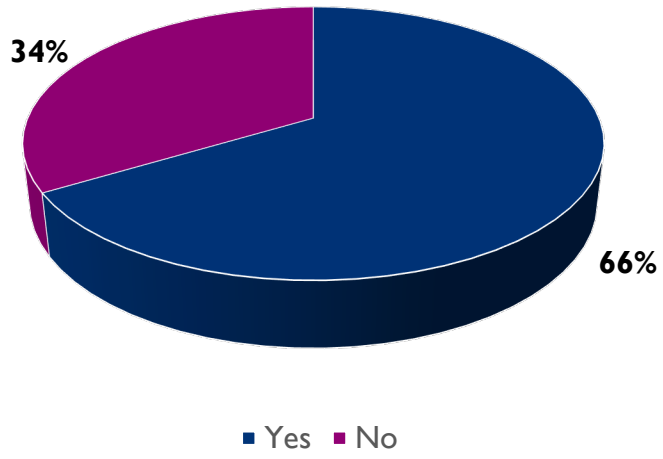


Section 4: Disability and Characteristics

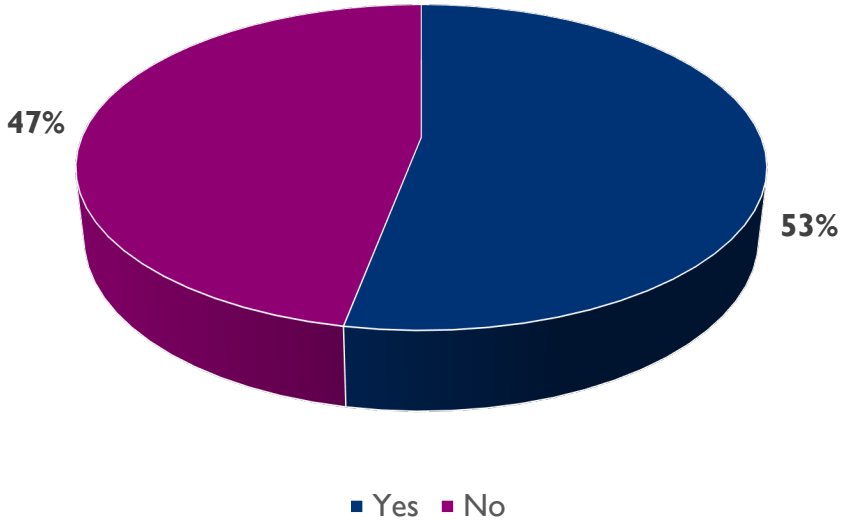
Respondents were asked to indicate the diagnosis(s) of their disability with the option to select multiple responses. The majority chose more than one, suggesting that many individuals have other disabilities or conditions alongside their primary diagnosis.



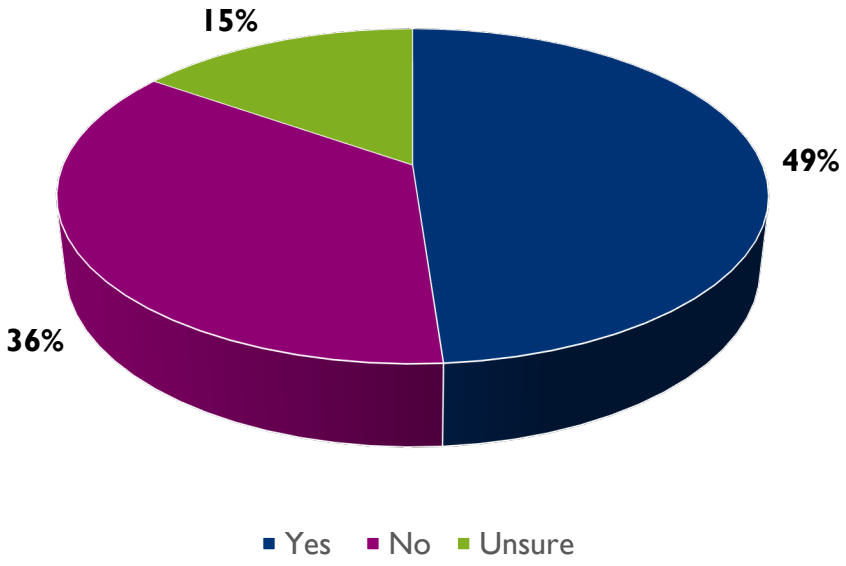
Respondents were asked if their disability is considered an acquired disability, of which **66%** answered yes. An acquired disability is a disability that develops after birth, typically because of illness, injury, or aging, rather than being present from birth or caused by genetic conditions. Examples include a spinal cord injuries, Multiple Sclerosis, Macular Degeneration, and hearing loss.



Respondents with an acquired disability were asked whether they had participated in the sport prior to the onset of their disability. **53%** answered yes to this question.

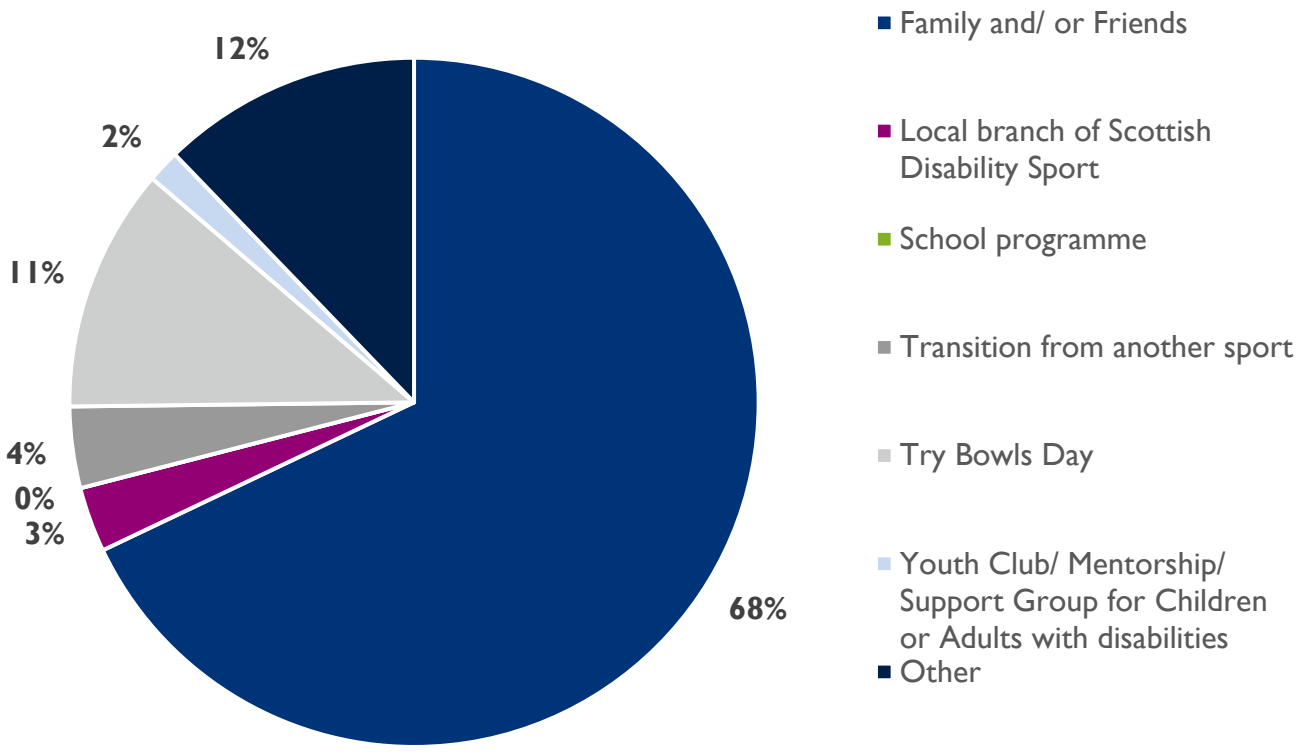


Respondents were asked if their disability was considered progressive. A progressive disability worsens over time from the point of diagnosis. Examples include Motor Neuron Disease (MND), Muscular Dystrophy, and Alzheimer's. **49%** of respondents answered yes to this question.

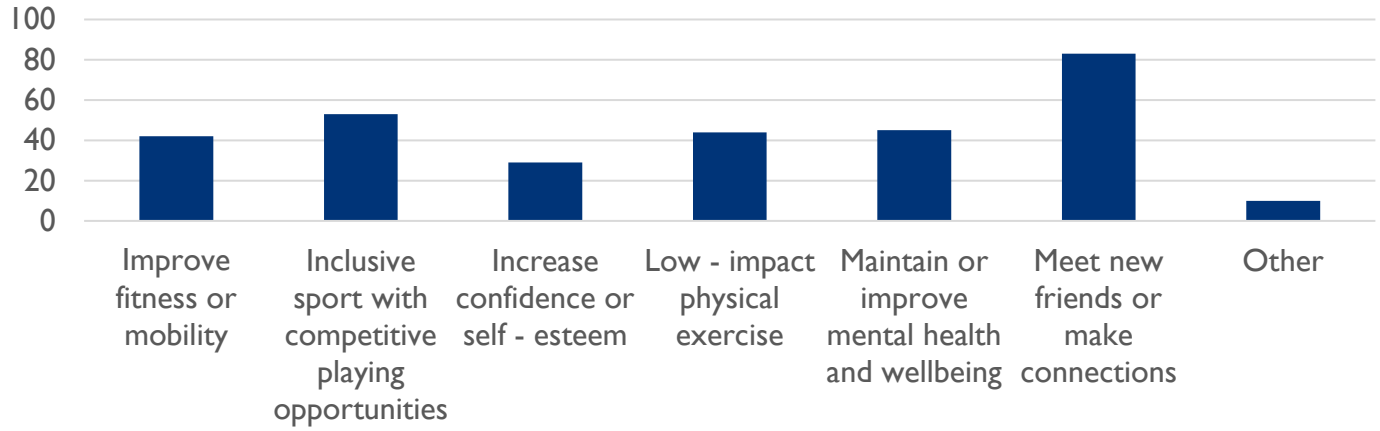


Section 5: Pathways into Sport

Respondents were asked how they first became involved in the sport with **68%** answering this question through family or friends.

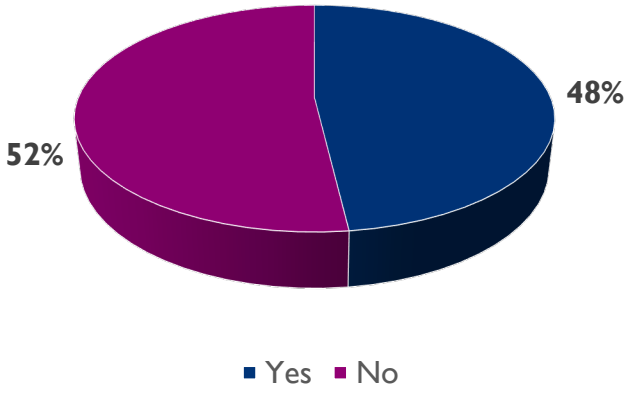


Respondents were asked what attracted them to the sport. Multiple answers were permitted. **83** people answered to make new friends or make connections highlighting our sports ability to assist with reducing social isolation and associated mental health impact, which is more common among people with a disability.

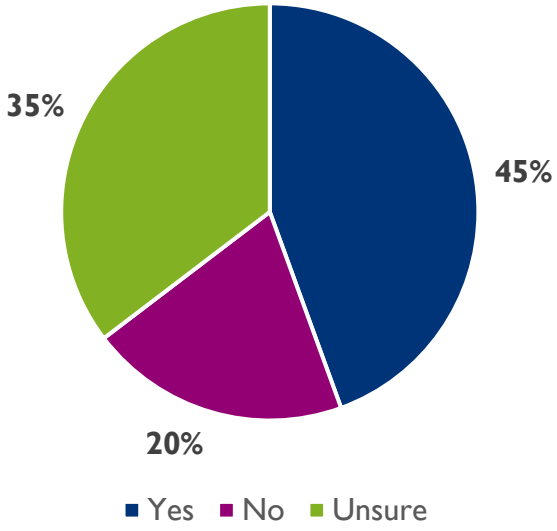


Section 6: Use of Bowling Aids and Assistance

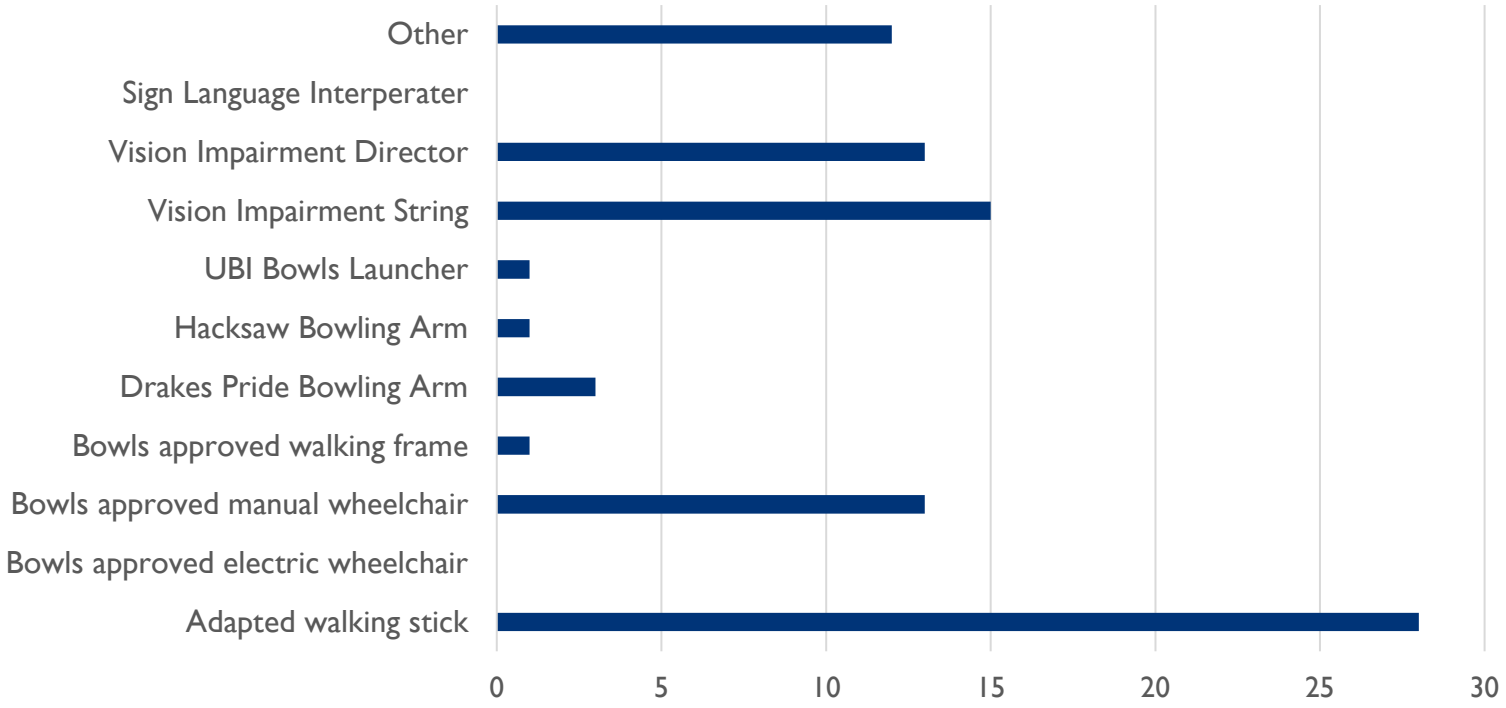
Respondents were asked if they used any bowling aids or required assistance, which is essential to allow them to participate. **48%** answered yes.



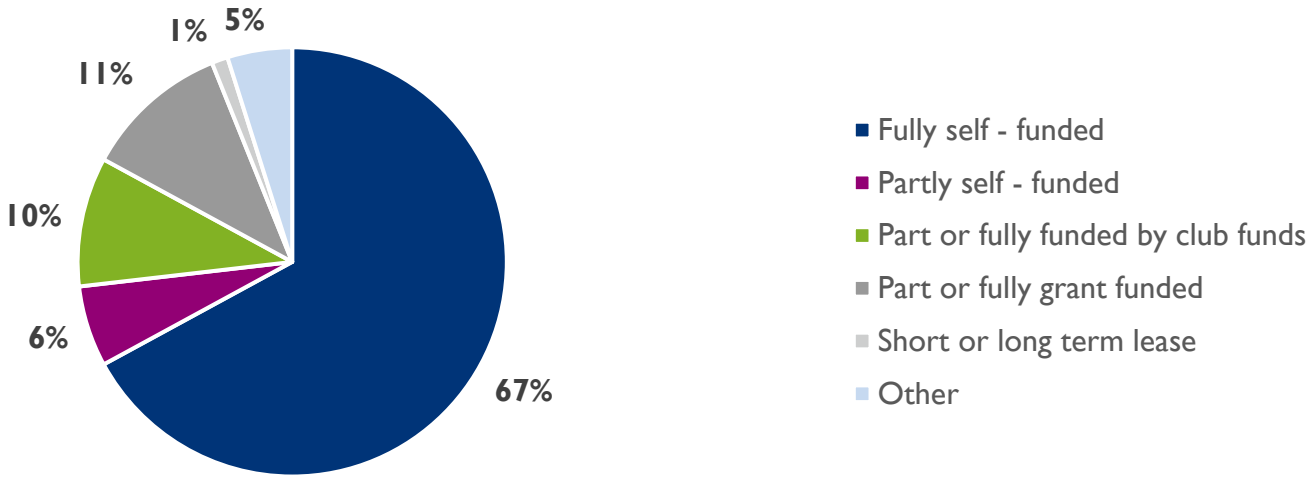
Respondents with a progressive disability were asked if they anticipated needing the use of a bowling aid(s) or assistance at some point in the future. **45%** answered yes.



Respondents who currently use bowling aids or assistance were asked to list all they currently use. Multiple responses were accepted. For example, a bowler with a vision impairment that uses a vision impairment string may also have a Director competent in the clock system. A bowls adapted walking stick is the most common among respondents.

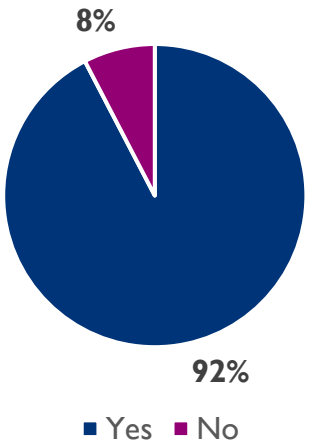


Respondents that currently use a bowling aid(s) were asked how they were funded. **67%** of which are self-funded, for example using their own money to purchase their bowling aids. This highlights the additional costs attributed to participating in sport with a disability.

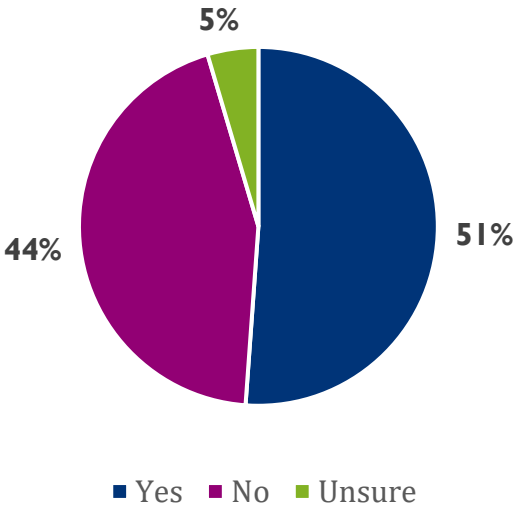


Section 7: Club Membership

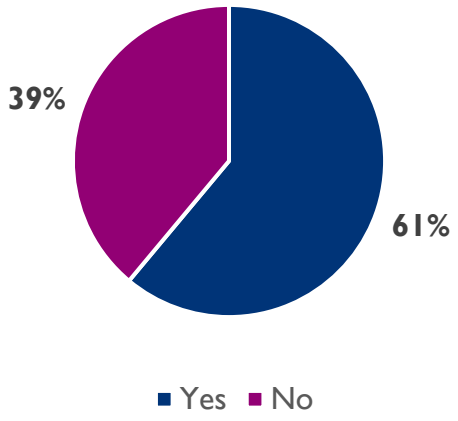
We asked respondents if their bowling club was in the same local authority area in which they live. **92%** answered yes to this question.



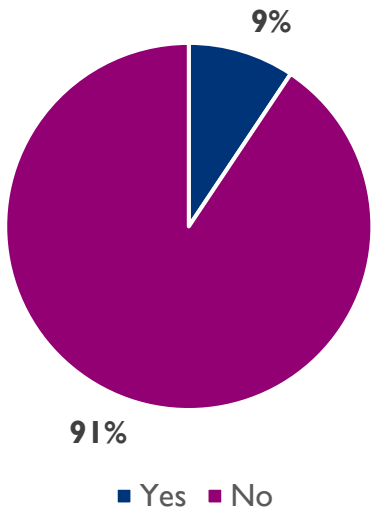
We asked respondents if the bowling club they a member are of is the closest to their home. **51%** of respondents answered yes.



Respondents were asked whether they had been a member of the same club throughout their involvement in bowls. **61%** confirmed they had been a member of the same club for the duration of their time in the sport.

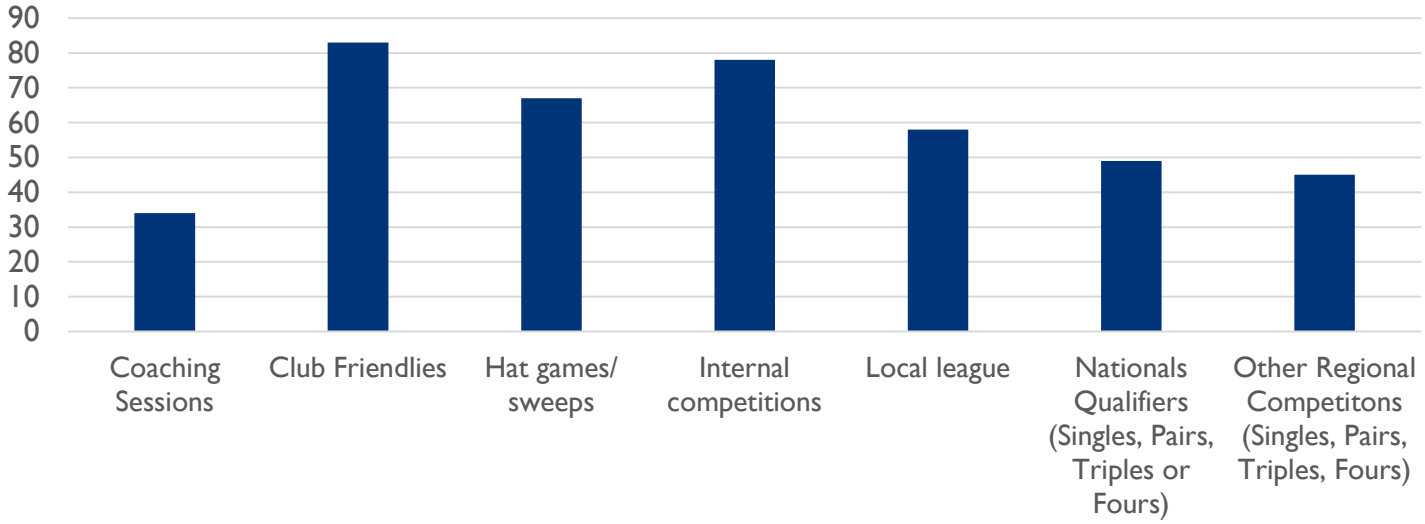


Respondents were asked if they had ever had to move clubs due to circumstances related to their disability both real and perceived. For example, club facilities/ amenities no longer meet their needs or feel unsupported within the club. **9%** of respondents confirmed that they had moved clubs for this reason.

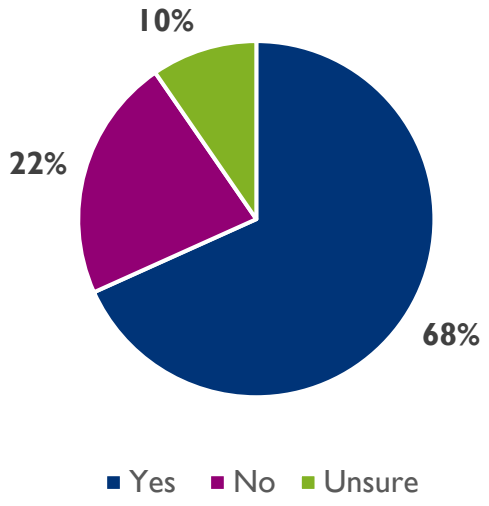


Section 8: Participation and Inclusion

Respondents were asked which playing opportunities they participate in at their club. Multiple responses were permitted. Club friendlies were the common answer.

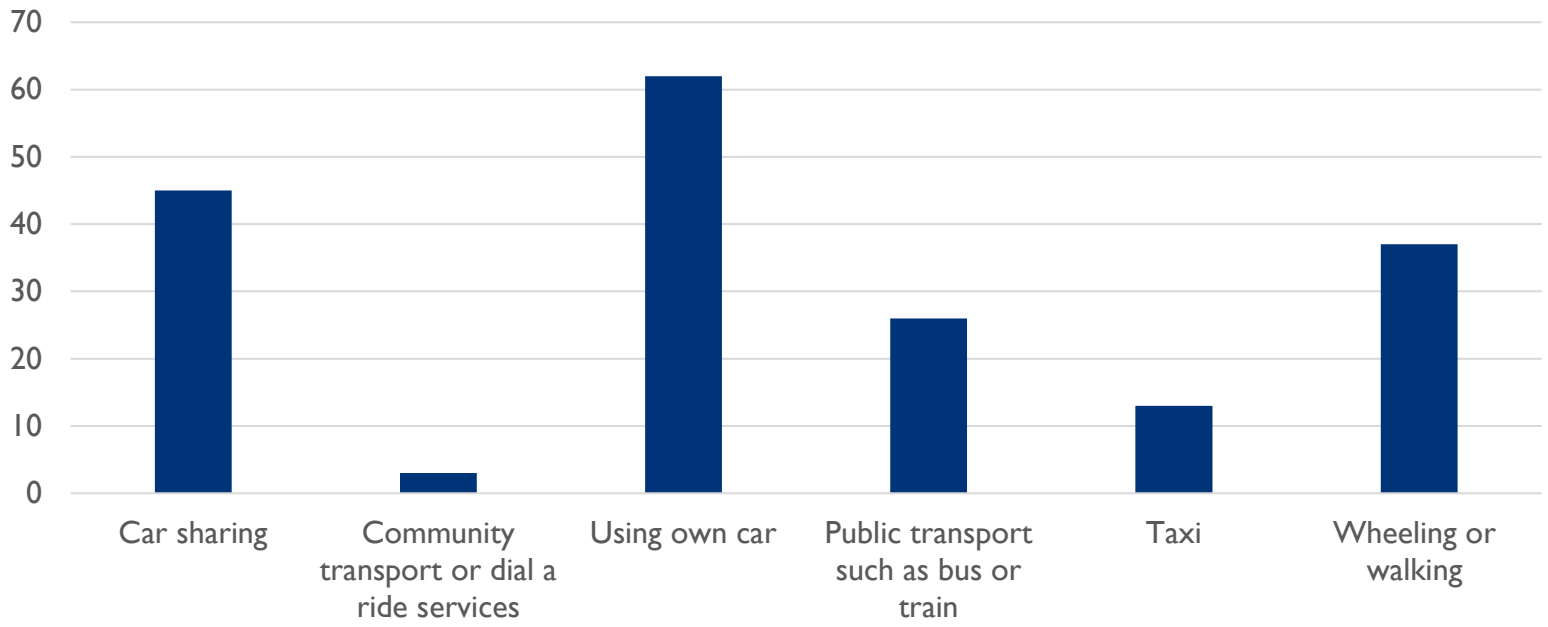


We asked respondents if they believe playing opportunities are equally available to all members of their club, regardless of disability. **68%** selected yes to this question.

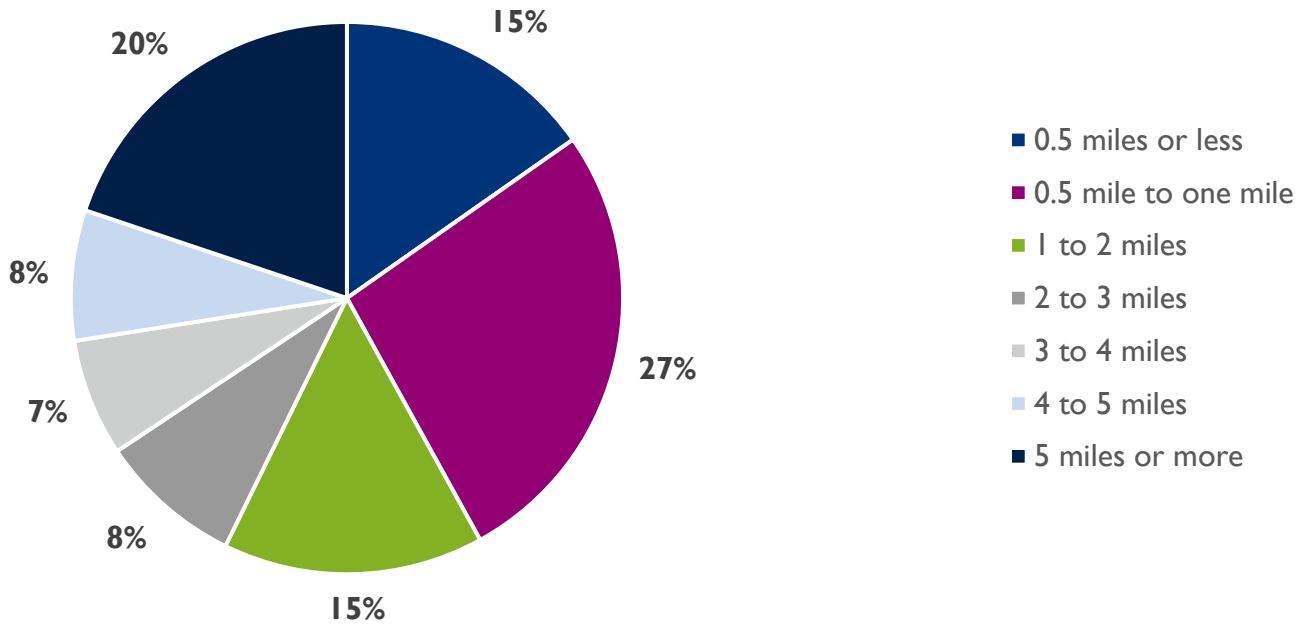


Section 9: Travel and Commute

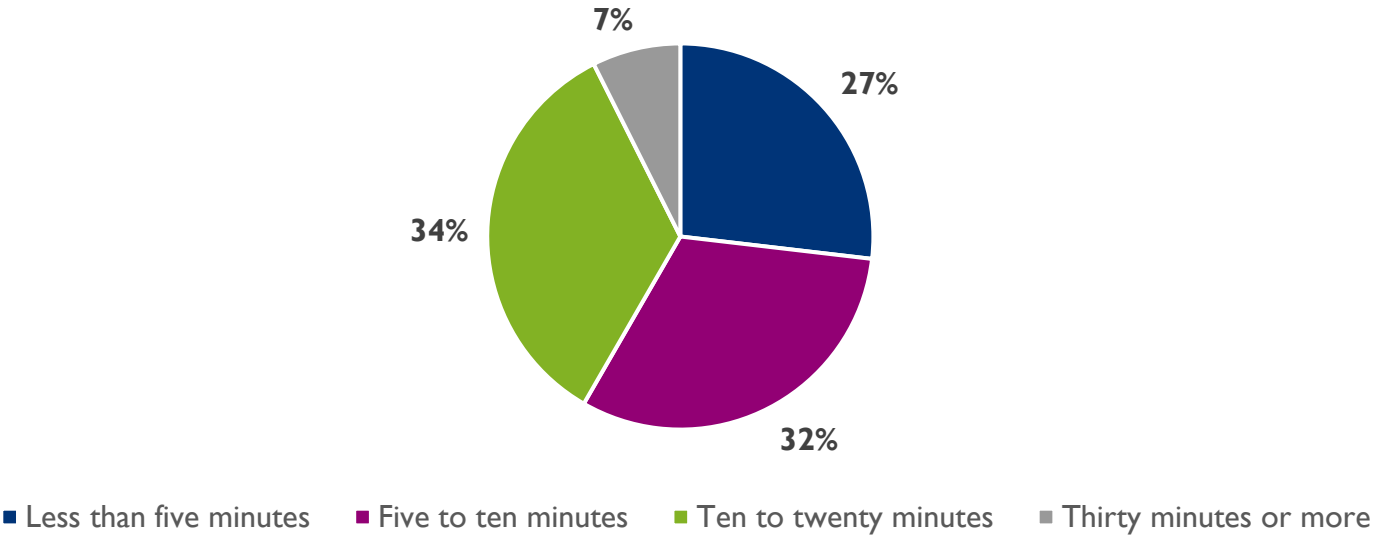
We asked respondents about the methods of travel they would typically take on a journey to and from their club. **52%** are travelling by car either independently or by car sharing.



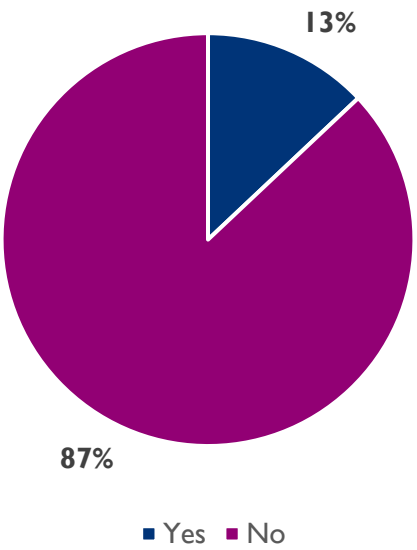
We asked respondents how far the journey is to their bowling club. **20%** travel five or more miles to their bowling club.



We asked respondents about the length of a typical journey to their club. **7%** travel for thirty minutes or more to their clubs.

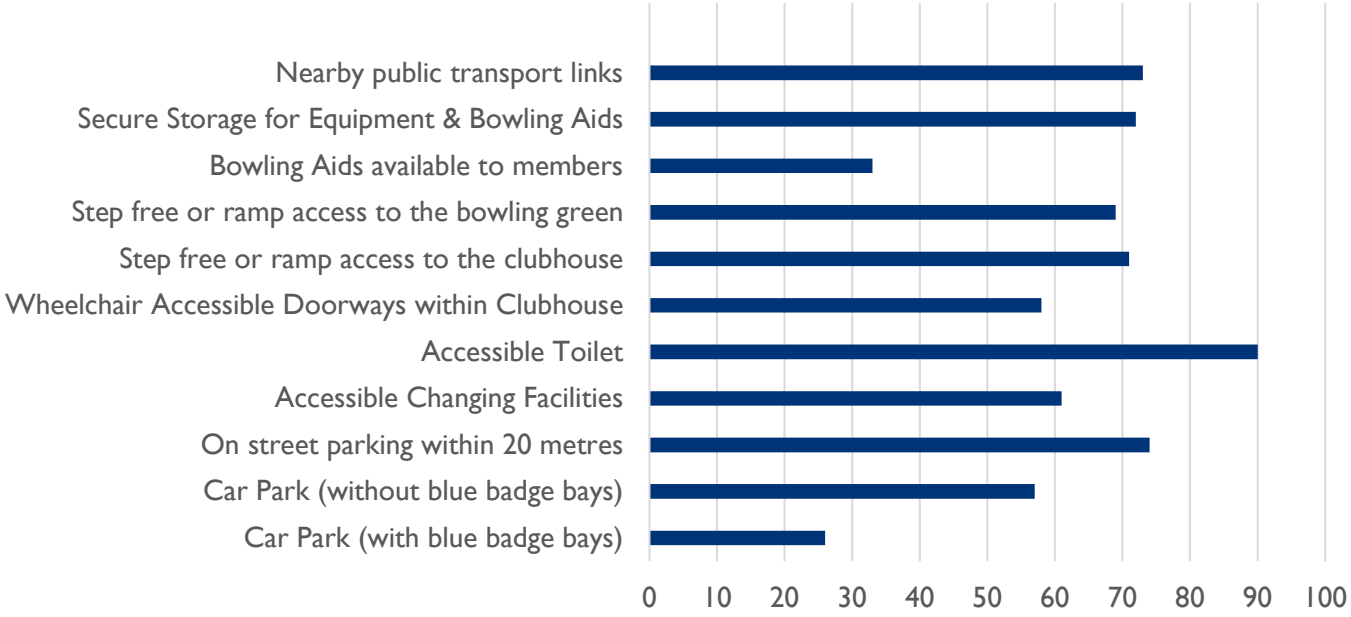


We asked respondents if they face any challenges during their commute to their bowling club. **87%** of people answered that they do not face any challenges.

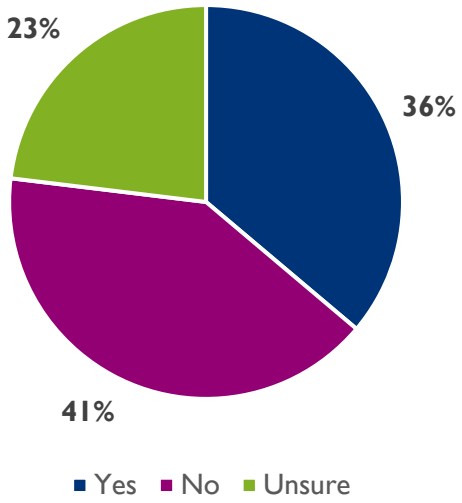


Section 10: Club Facilities and Accessibility

We asked respondents about the facilities and amenities available at their club. Multiple answers were permitted. **90** respondents noted their club had an accessible toilet.

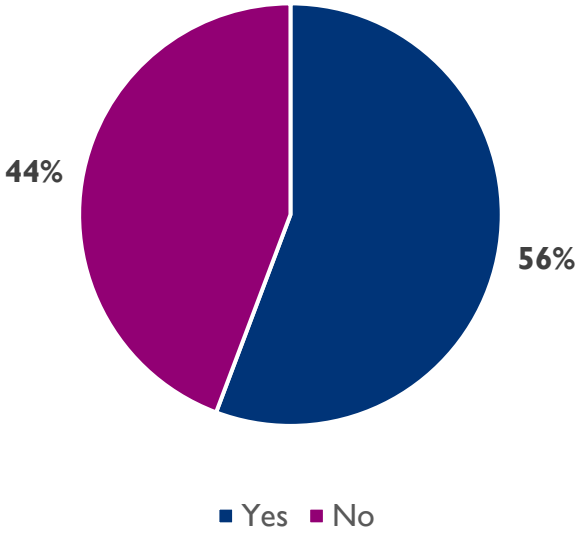


We asked respondents if their club had previously made, or in the process of making adaptations to improve accessibility. For example, widened doorways, upgraded change or toilet facilities or the installation of ramps. **41%** of respondents answered no to this question.

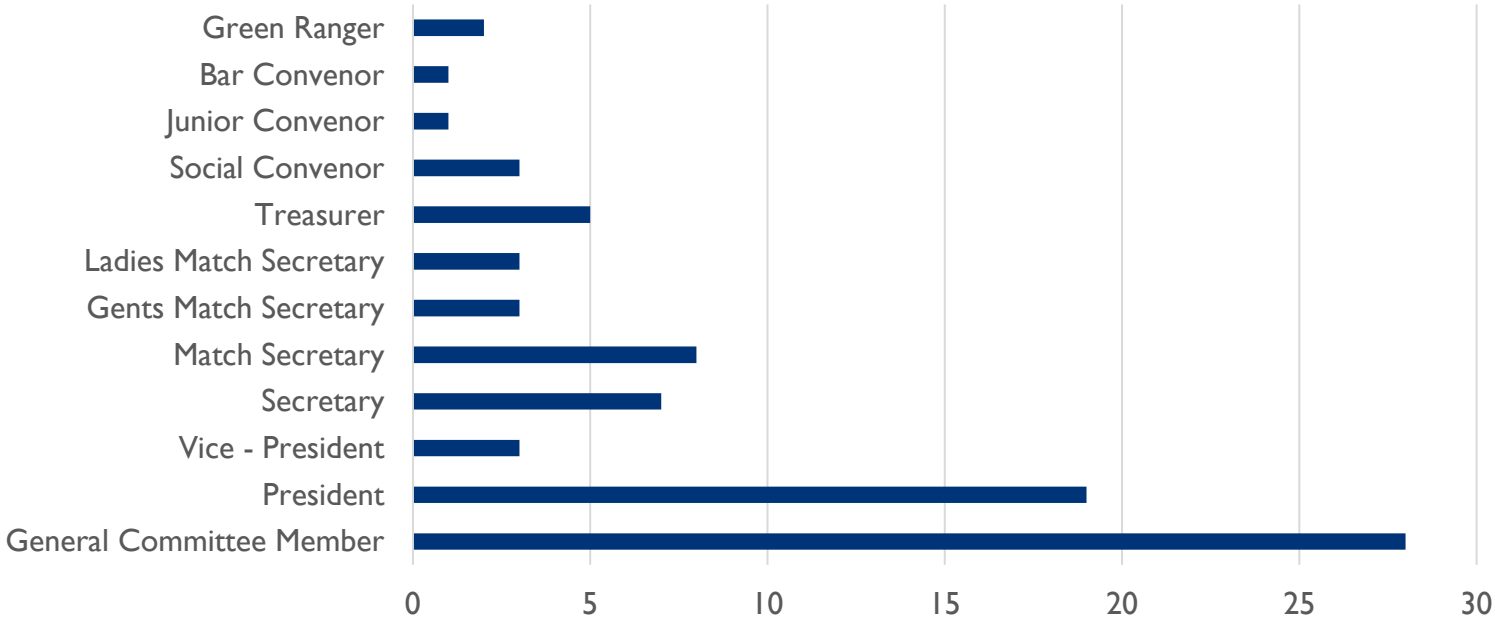


Section 11: Additional Opportunities and Support

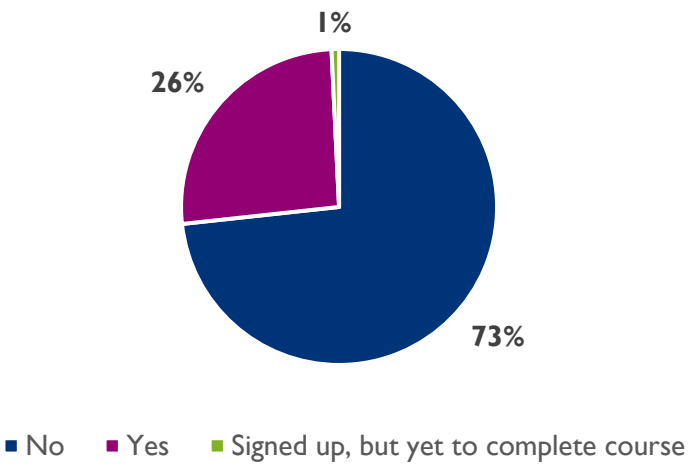
We asked respondents if they had been or were currently a member of their clubs committee. **56%** of respondents confirmed that they had experience of being involved in their clubs committee. This is a crucial step to ensure that people with a disability engage in the decision-making process, and their skills and expertise are utilised within club development opportunities.



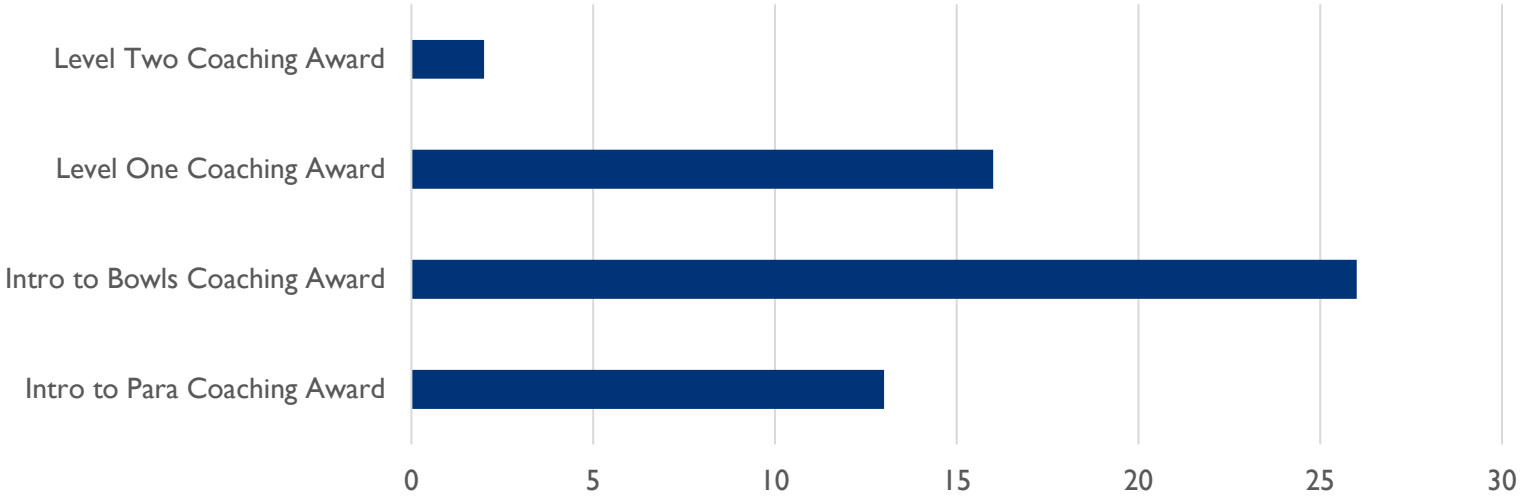
The following chart is a breakdown of roles that are currently or have previously been held by respondents. Some respondents may have held multiple roles. **21%** of respondents have been a general committee member.



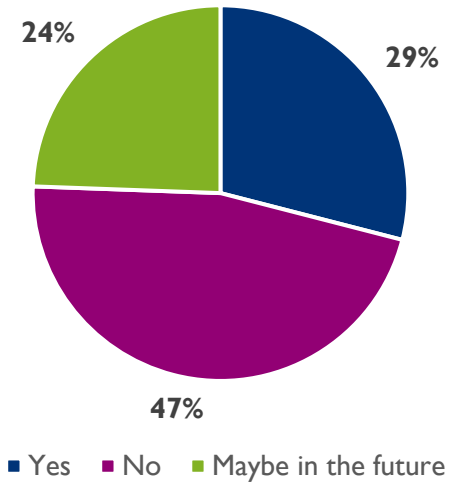
We asked respondents if they had completed any of Bowls Scotland's Coach Education courses. **73%** of respondents answered no to this question.



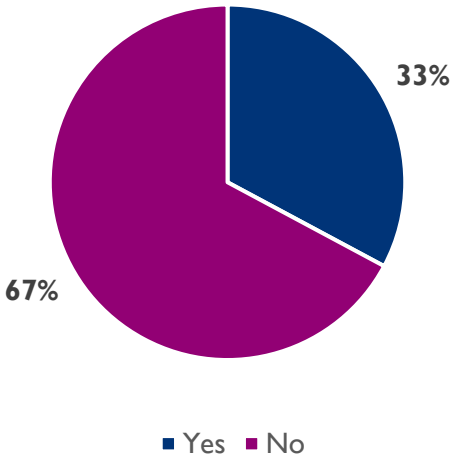
The chart below is a breakdown of the Coach Education courses respondents have completed. Some respondents may have completed multiple courses.



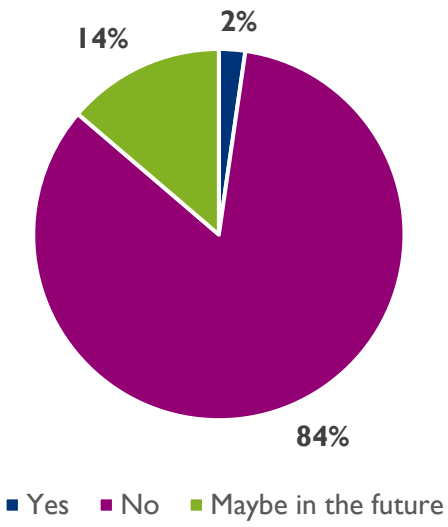
We asked respondents if completing a Bowls Scotland Coach Education course was of interest to them. **47%** answered no to this question.



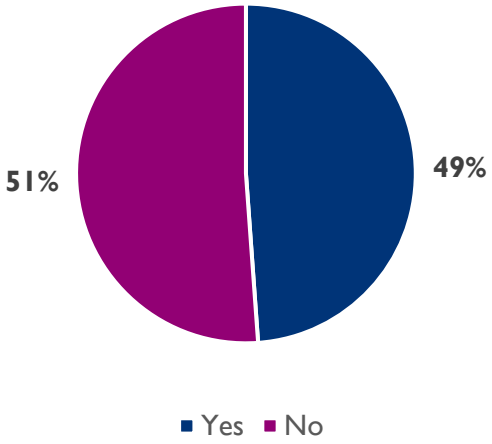
We asked respondents if they were aware of the Bowls Scotland Coach Education Subsidy which is available to people in underrepresented groups including people with a disability. **67%** answered no to this question.



We asked respondents if they have completed a Scottish Bowls Umpire Association training course. **84%** answered no to this question.



We asked if respondents were aware of the appointment of a Disability Development Officer in March 2024. The aim of this role is to break down barriers, both real and perceived, boost participation at all ages levels, and support clubs as well as bowlers with a disability or long-term health condition across Scotland. The role also focuses on creating welcoming environments, building strong networks, and helping clubs attract and keep members. **51%** answered no to this question.



Section 12: Direct Quotes from Participants

- "Our club is extremely inclusive and welcomes all players of all abilities."
- "The club has limited mobility access, no wheelchair access to the green, no special equipment for sight, hearing impairment."
- "Match selectors within my club often have a tendency to select friends and family over other members which can cause tension."
- "Our club, one of the few fully accessible clubs in the area, has always supported disabled players."
- "Using public transport, often at rush hour due to the timing of bowling games, produces its own challenges."
- "We are a small club where all members know each other and support one another."
- "Most clubs have no adaptions, and a lot of the ones who do only have a ramp onto the green."
- "Disabilities do not necessarily mean an inability to carry out decision making and development opportunities."
- "The fact the club were prepared to make me their President demonstrates its inclusivity."
- "Many long-standing members are quite set in their ways. Hard to crack inner circle."

Conclusion

The Disability Landscape Survey has provided a helpful overview of how people with disabilities and long-term health conditions engage with outdoor lawn bowls across Scotland. While many respondents shared positive experiences, the findings also highlight areas where further support and development are needed, particularly around accessibility, awareness of resources, and involvement in club decision-making.

While an ageing demographic may be seen as a concern by some, it also reflects a unique strength of the sport: its ability to welcome participants of all ages. With access to essential equipment and support, lawn bowls offer opportunities for continued physical activity, social connection, and community involvement well into later life.

These insights will help guide the next steps in future Disability Landscape Surveys, in conjunction with the Disability Development Plan, ensuring that ongoing efforts are shaped by real experiences and focused on making the sport more inclusive and accessible for everyone.