



Facilities Strategy 2023-2028

Developed by Mountaineering Scotland

In partnership with **sportscotland**
the national agency for sport

Introduction

Developing the Artificial Climbing Resource in Scotland

This strategy document details the aspirations of Mountaineering Scotland to support, develop and enhance all aspects of the indoor climbing resource from facility provision, to coaching and route-setting, to safety and inspiring taking part as well as elite performance.



Mountaineering Scotland (MScot) is the only recognised representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers, mountaineers and ski-tourers who live in Scotland or who enjoy Scotland's mountains, and acts to represent, support and promote Scottish mountaineering.

We are also recognised by **sportscotland** as the Scottish Governing Body (SGB) for competitive climbing in Scotland.



Through the **ClimbScotland (CScot)** initiative established in 2015, we help inspire people of all ages and abilities to get involved in climbing, both indoors and outdoors. Thanks to financial support from **sportscotland**, our ClimbScotland team can offer free expert advice and resources to those looking to develop climbing activities, events, clubs or facilities for people of all ages including parents, schools, colleges, youth organisations and climbing walls.



sportscotland is the national agency for sport in Scotland. Their role is to make sure sport plays its part in a thriving Scotland by influencing, informing and investing in the organisations and people who deliver sport and physical activity.

Climbing Facilities

Strategic Aims and Outcomes 2023-28

Mountaineering Scotland's Strategic Framework has four main strategic pillars: **Representing, Protecting, Inspiring** and **Developing**. Each of these can be said to be relevant to the development of indoor climbing provision, but it is within the area of **DEVELOPING** where the bulk of our work in expanding facilities and working with facility providers lies. The specific aims and outcomes that are relevant to facility provision are indicated in the following Development Pillar:



The Climber Pathway

To assist in developing our new strategy, and help our members and others on their journey participating in mountaineering activities, we have set out the first phase of the pathway in the infographic below. This illustrates the range of mountaineering and climbing disciplines we represent. It indicates a pathway of gaining experience and knowledge for those who are starting out to be able to make the transition from climbing indoors to outdoors and onto challenging terrain in the mountains.

Participation

It is now usual for the vast majority of beginners to start their path at an indoor wall and the importance of this is indicated with indoor bouldering and roped climbing forming the lynch-pin in the pathway.



Mountaineering Scotland's overall strategy encompasses all the aspects of this pathway, supporting all climber's aspirations up to the elite generation of climbers at the cutting edge of adventure and sport climbing.

However, a second phase pathway is that of competitive performance, which also begins at grassroots through various competitive levels and ultimately to international level. Competition, performance and facilities (and the expertise of the workforce) combine at all stages in this pathway:

Competition

Climbing has undergone substantial changes over the past four decades and climbing wall facilities have been developing at pace with these changes. From the evolution of indoor climbing walls as a means to train in the winter, to enable climbers to perform harder outdoors, the expansion of facility provision and innovative climbing surface design have been instrumental in the growth in participation of the sport and most recently of '*Sport Climbing*' (as now defined by the IFSC as competition climbing). This led to climbing becoming an Olympic sport in 2021 and its inclusion in the Olympics seems guaranteed at least for the next two games. The specialisation into different disciplines has been mirrored in facility provision with bouldering only venues proliferating recently and speed walls being incorporated into new build venues.

Performance

Physical training for climbing has always been in existence from the early twentieth century, but it was mainly self-taught and there were no 'professional' coaches. Personal training really developed in the 1960s, epitomised by professional gymnasts taking up the sport and excelling. However, there remained no accepted coaching pedagogy specific to climbing in the UK until the National Governing Bodies (MScot, BMC, MT) started developing a Coaching in Climbing Award Scheme in the 2000s. Climbing performance coaching is therefore a recent advance and has developed hand in hand with innovative sport-specific training wall design.



Facilities Strategy 2016-2022 Review

Mountaineering Scotland's Facilities Strategy 2016 – 2022 detailed the established facilities after the previous strategy period and based on a Needs Analysis this new strategy took a regional approach with local walls feeding into bigger Hubs. It identified facilities that required upgrades and priorities for larger regional Hubs—categorised into three levels. The Strategy focused on two main areas: delivering Regional-standard Hubs (including the recognition of an International Centre for competitions) and encouraging schools to produce suitable walls.

Outcomes:

National / International: the international recognition of EICA Ratho was dependent on a world-cup standard bouldering upgrade, which was not achieved, but a Level 3 (National) Hub was given priority as essential for north Scotland and will be completed early in 2023.

Regional Hubs: progress was made against delivering on the network of Level 2 Hubs near the end of the strategy period. These are partially built or hoping to complete in 2023 / 2024 whilst an unplanned (Level 2) boulder-only wall opened in Hamilton. There were several Level 1 Hub areas given priority, two were completed and the intention for Orkney to be upgraded to a Level 1 Regional centre was partially achieved.

Several Hub upgrades were not met principally due to financial constraints.



2016—2022 Hub Priorities

International	Edinburgh Upgrade to bouldering required	No Progress	EICA Entry level wall was installed in 2021
Level 3 National	Inverness New. Changed to major bouldering venue	Delivered Incorporating Performance Centre	The Ledge Opened April 2023
Level 2 Regional	Aberdeen Upgrade to Bouldering required	No Progress	Transition Extreme
Level 2 Regional	Kilmarnock New Boulder & Roped	Delivered Church conversion	Above Adventure Boulder open 2021 Roped open 2023
Level 2 Regional	Fife New Boulder & Roped	Progressing Church Conversion & new build in Lochgelly	Rockgelly Building works completed 2022
Level 2 Regional	Edinburgh New Boulder Only	Delivered As Level 3 Hub	Eden Rock Opened 2018
Level 2 Regional	Stirling / Central	No Progress	
Level 2 Regional	Hamilton Unplanned Boulder only	Unplanned	HangOn Opened 2021
Level 1 Regional	Perth New college sports	Delivered	Perth UHI Opened 2017
Level 1 Regional	Dumfries & Galloway New Boulder & Roped	Delivered Opened 2021 Annan Closed 2022	Bouldover Reopened 2023 Dumfries
Level 1 Regional	Orkney Upgrade to Level 1 Hub	Progressing larger boulder room	Pickaquooy Opened 2019

LEFT: The Ledge, Inverness; National Performance Centre

RIGHT: Eden Rock, Edinburgh; National Performance Centre

PHOTOS: Mountaineering Scotland & Eden Rock



Facilities Strategy 2016-2022 Review

(outcomes continued)



Small Walls: Limited progress was made establishing new (open to the public) Small Walls to fill the gaps in some regions. At the start of the strategic period there were 21 small walls, mainly situated in leisure centres or universities. There were two which were of poor older designs and received new upgrades (Ullapool and Oban). The table opposite gives a summary of progress in this area.

A private small wall (unsupported by Mountaineering Scotland) opened in Moray in 2015 but later closed, probably due to poor design and management. On Skye, The Third Ridge facility is also a private venture, but is built and managed by resident mountain instructors as part of their business and therefore has more resilience.

School Walls: In 2016 there was fractured distribution and a huge variance in the quality of school climbing facilities across the country. There were 13 identified, of which only 3 were considered suitable for modern teaching / coaching requirements. Mountaineering Scotland partnered NICAS to indicate to schools how climbing walls could support the outcomes of the then new Curriculum for Excellence. Advice was to install bouldering as the least difficult option to manage. There were only 3 new walls established, and these were delivered with only limited MScot input.

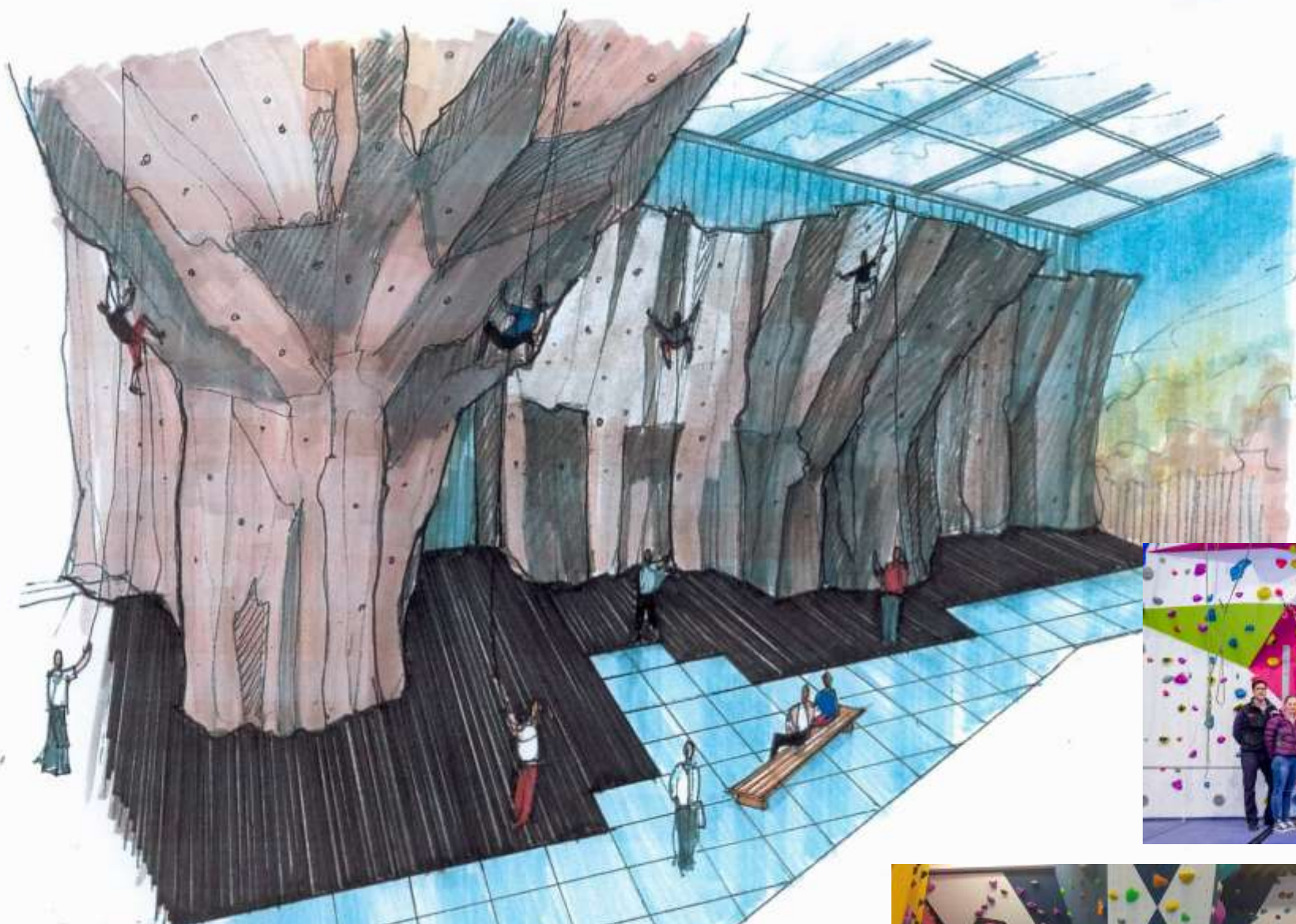
2016—2022 Small Walls & Schools

Small Wall	Ullapool Upgrade Leisure Centre	Delivered Roped Only	Ullapool Opened 2016
Small Wall	Shetland New Leisure Centre	Delivered Roped & Boulder	West Mainland Opened 2018
Small Wall	Barcaple Dumfries New build centre	Delivered Boulder & Roped	Abernethy Trust Completed 2019
Small Wall	Callander Upgrade	Delivered Roped only	Maclaren Leisure Completed 2019
Small Wall	Oban Upgrade	Delivered Boulder Only	Atlantis Leisure Opened 2021
Small Wall	Skye New Private Centre	Delivered Roped & Boulder	Third Ridge Portree Opened 2021

School Wall	Alford New	Delivered Roped only	Community Campus Opened 2016
School Wall	Inverurie New Unplanned	Delivered Boulder only	Community Campus Opened 2017
School Wall	Falkirk New Unplanned	Delivered Roped only	Larbert High School Opened 2022

Boulder Park	Glasgow New	Delivered Biggest in the UK	Cuningar Loop Opened 2015
Boulder Park	Stirling New	Delivered Playground	Buchlyvie Opened 2015

No new outdoor boulder parks were achieved in the period of the plan, but those built in 2015 remain great indicators of what can be achieved in the future.

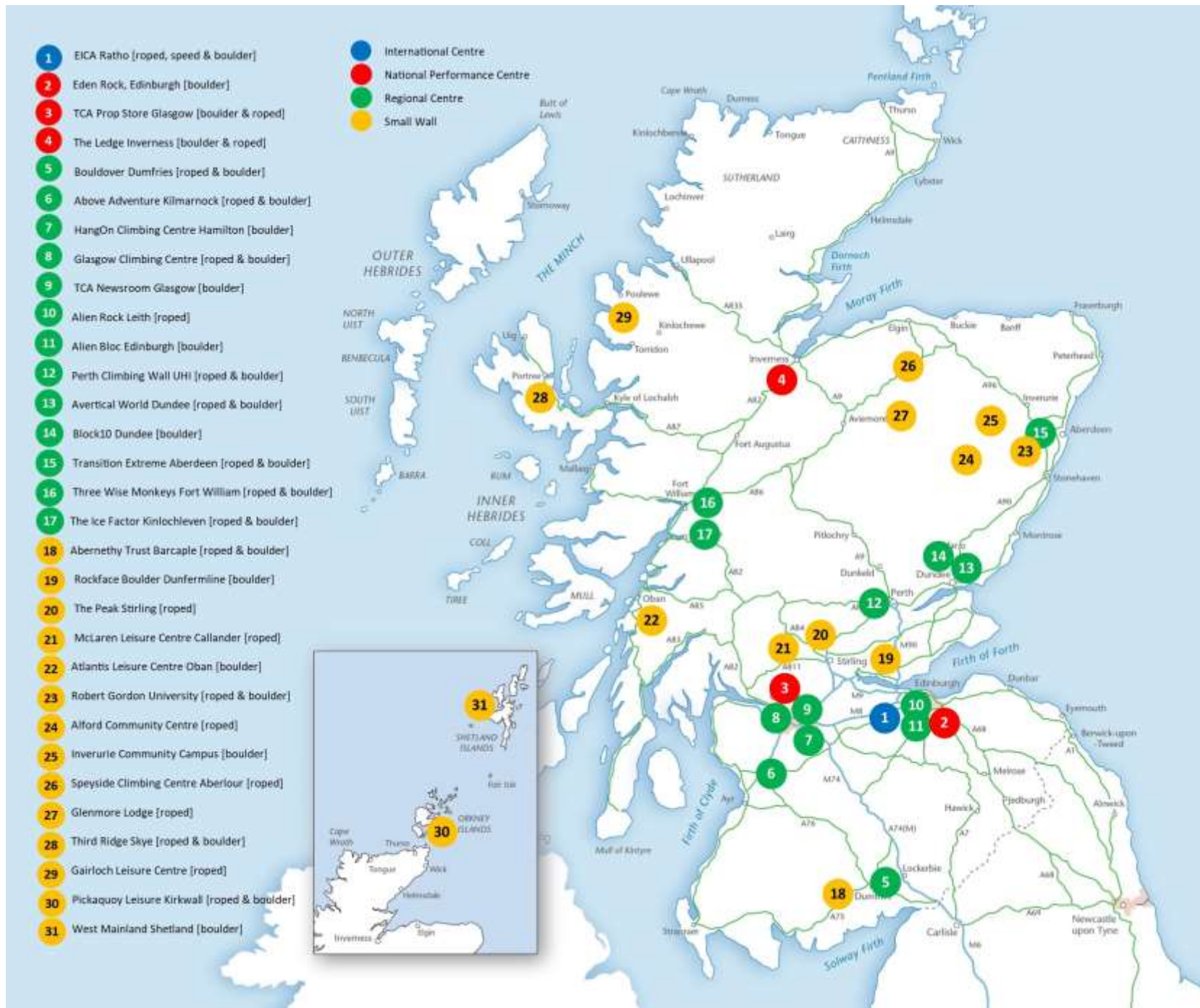


PHOTOS: Mountaineering Scotland



LOTTERY FUNDED  **sport scotland**





Current Distribution of Facilities 2023

The map indicates the distribution and the facility status of the indoor climbing walls that are open to the public.

Defining what we do - 2023 & beyond

The Mountaineering Scotland Delivery Plan for Climbing (part of the overall strategy) identifies the aspirations we have for the development of climbing and states:

*“Our activities to support the development of indoor climbing and climbing for children and young people over the next strategic cycle will continue to be delivered through the **ClimbScotland** initiative which as well as promoting recreational participation also delivers our performance and competition programmes, supported through funding from **sportscotland**.”*

Integral to this aim, is a partnership between Mountaineering Scotland and indoor climbing facilities and to identify gaps in provision that help maximise the potential of all facilities. An internal review of the successes and failures of the 2016-2021 strategy and conversations with **sportscotland** have recognised that changes in the landscape (some of which are listed below) now require a different approach.

- Covid recovery
- Sector growth & financial viability
- Funding contraction
- Olympic inclusion
- A developing GB pathway
- Sportscotland and UK Sport funding
- Developing climbing wall performance squads



Mountaineering Scotland Delivery Plan for Climbing KEY FACILITY CLAUSES 2023

The following clauses in the delivery plan indicate how Mountaineering Scotland will work with facility providers to tackle the factors identified above:

3.3 Work with partner organisations to retain workforce & build capacity for coaching & route setting

3.3.1 Work with Scottish facilities on strategies designed to retain the existing Scottish climbing workforce.

4.1 Develop our partnerships with indoor facilities.

4.1.1 Develop the Scottish Climbing Wall Network and establish strong partnerships with key walls which will support our competitions and performance pathway.

4.1.2 Work with EICA Ratho to develop its role as a national centre for excellence and international standard competition training venue.

4.1.4 Develop and deliver resources, services and toolkits to support our indoor facility partners e.g. Better Belaying programme

4.1.5 Explore the opportunity to develop more specific indoor climbing membership packages and options for walls to affiliate formally to Mountaineering Scotland.

4.2 Support the development of Indoor Facilities, guided by our National Facilities Strategy

4.2.1 Update our National Facilities Strategy ensuring future development supports our strategy to enable accessible and inclusive participation in climbing and establish performance hubs.

4.2.2 Secure funding to establish and manage a library of competition climbing holds for use by Scottish Indoor Climbing Facilities to widen access to a wide range of competition standard holds to enable International / World Cup style setting.

4.2.3 Establish an annual budget for competition hold provision.

PHOTO LEFT: The Climbing Academy: The Newsroom, Glasgow

PHOTO: TCA



Mountaineering Scotland's Workforce

Mountaineering Scotland have created a Workforce Development Plan which outlines how we aim to support mountaineering and climbing development in two equally important areas: in 'Sport Climbing' excellence of Scotland's athletes through NGB grassroots to national competitions and coaching; and in recreational excellence through the introduction of novices to **Realrock**, and on to elite climbing opportunities supported by Mountain Safety Programmes.

Given that indoor climbing facilities are where the majority of people are introduced to climbing, it is key that these facilities have in place the professional workforce to facilitate and support the progression of climbers of all ages and abilities. So it is important that Mountaineering Scotland works with the key Climbing Walls Network (SCWN) partners (see page 10) in ensuring the required shared workforce and workforce skills to deliver our shared strategic outcomes.

The workforce delivery in the ClimbScotland operational areas where the Scottish Climbing Wall Network partners and the NGB roles are of central importance are:

Organisational Staff – Development Manager / Talent and Pathway Officer / Regional Development Officers / Head Setter

Volunteers – Jury Presidents / Competition Coordinators / Judges / Belayers / Marshalls / Key Club Members (CWPO, committee, climbing assistants)

External Providers – Route Setters / National and Development Coaches / Fundamental Coaching and Physical Training Workshop providers / indoor (and outdoor) Instructors



To view
the
**Workforce
Plan**,
please click
on the
image
above

Through the partnership, we will aim to develop:

- A clear performance pathway that demonstrate an athletes journey and the support they require at various stages as well as opportunities to filter into and follow progression pathways in the sector (coaching/setting/recreational etc...).
- Put in place a robust method of data collection which allows quick and accurate understanding of the workforce capacity, competency, delivery and location
- The provision of quality education and support, developing a competent, qualified and knowledgeable workforce
- Improve accessibility to quality coaching/route setting, including shared practices and language in our sport
- The provision of training and support which is local-needs led linking into a national pathway. Continue to work with Mountain Training in the development of the Coaching in Climbing Awards Scheme and support SCWN members in engaging with this workforce pathway
- Develop professional Route Setters who are able to set for the increasing standard in the NGB competitions and Scottish squad academy programme training

Climber Pathway Partnerships

Mountaineering Scotland recognises that as climbing has become an Olympic sport and its popularity has increased substantially in the past decade, and as climbing has been shown to be a life-long activity and important for mental health, there is now more than ever, a need to bring all aspects of the sport together to help take it forward.

To this end we will work collaboratively with all key bodies:



As the NGB responsible for the development and management of the outdoor and indoor and coaching award schemes, it is vital that the correct facilities are available at indoor venues to train and to deliver training and coaching of the climbers of the future. The Coaching Award Scheme is vital to train the coaches to the elite level of the climber pathway.

The ABC is the sector's association for walls in the UK. It promotes safe management practice and advises its members on risk management, management and operating procedures. As Mountaineering Scotland has a responsibility for encouraging safe practice we will continue to undertake joint campaigns and activities.



The indoor youth schemes managed by NICAS form the foundation of initial training to young people and have proven to be the best schemes to encourage young climbers to increase their skills and abilities and retain their interest. They are an integral initial part of the climber pathway.

Scottish Climbing Wall Network (SCWN)

Mountaineering Scotland will continue to expand the partnership with walls through the SCWN. As indoor venues are the most important physical aspect of the climber pathway, we will continue to expand joint working and offer advice and support, free associate membership and engage in joint advertising and publicity and to join them in campaigns and events where appropriate. The Terms of Reference of the SCWN are:

Scope

- The Scottish Climbing Wall Network is constituted to allow for co-operation and partnership working between Mountaineering Scotland and the major climbing walls in Scotland.

Aims

- To benefit members of the Mountaineering Scotland and other climbers, by providing opportunities to gain new climbing experiences, through development activities and competitions.
- To develop closer working relations with the major walls in Scotland, to enable Mountaineering Scotland to fulfill its strategic plans for climbing development.
- To enter into meaningful partnerships with the members of the network to help promote their business activities where these are relevant to the Mountaineering Scotland and its members.
- To influence government departments to gain a higher profile for climbing within health and education, through the promotion of participation in climbing.

UPPER RIGHT: Route setting CPD with the Setting Team—NGB endorsed setters from a range of different climbing walls

LOWER RIGHT: Provider Andy Swann delivering the Physical Training workshop to staff from HangOn climbing Gym

PHOTOS: Mountaineering Scotland



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

AIM: to support participation and inclusion in all climbing disciplines Indoors and Outdoors: boulder, lead, para, speed and dry-tooling

- Development and support of all recreational climbing disciplines to be embedded in all aspects of Mountaineering Scotland and ClimbScotland activities.
- Continue our development and support of climbing clubs and relevant youth groups, including: Scottish Para climbing, Scottish Speed and Scottish Dry-Tooling Clubs.
- Working with new and existing partners to broaden access to opportunities to participate in climbing and to promote Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)
- Promote Mountaineering Scotland commitment to champion equality, diversity and inclusion, embedding these values in all aspects of Mountaineering Scotland and ClimbScotland activities.
- Identify EDI gaps within Scottish climbing and champion strategies that tackle issues relating to EDI; using effective partnership working with key stakeholders to deliver targeted activities which will broaden access to climbing activity.
- Support Schools and Active Schools to more effectively use existing School climbing walls and other local play based climbing equipment in playparks.

Mountaineering Scotland shall work with SCWN partners to help deliver the above aspirations, to expand inclusion within the facility network by ensuring necessary wall design, staff training and promotional strategies.

Facilities Position Statement 2023+

"We will seek to influence the development of an integrated framework of indoor/artificial climbing facilities across Scotland, which will meet our strategic aims for 2023 and beyond"

This position statement links the participation pathway to facility requirements and maps these requirements against current and future provision.

Through this process, **ClimbScotland** will aim to increase accessible opportunities to participate in climbing, creating a more inclusive and diverse sport, including supporting performance and progression across climbing disciplines at all levels.

Scope

This position statement supports aims that:

- Provide advice and guidance to developers of indoor climbing facilities
- Identify and prioritise gaps in provision for consideration by funding bodies when assessing funding opportunities through our scoring system
- Support the aims of, and relevant actions defined in, our strategy

This position statement links facility requirements to the pathway taking account of:

- An overview of current provision taking account of the diversity of ownership and management of current facilities and those in the future (private enterprise, charitable and community / local authority)
- A Needs Analysis or facility review which identifies gaps in provision at both a strategic and individual facility level
- A definition of facility specifications that should be supported to enable delivery of our strategic aims as stated in the current Strategic Plan



[Click the map to view current facilities](#)

This webpage resource details all climbing centres that are open to the public across Scotland. It is kept up to date with any changes, closures and new facilities.

PHOTO OPPOSITE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CScot Para Climb at EICA, CScot Youth Lead Champs at EICA, Scottish Dry Tooling Comp at EICA, CScot Speed Champs at EICA, CScot Youth Boulder Champs at Eden Rock

PHOTOS: Mountaineering Scotland



Development of Climbing Disciplines

As the Scottish Governing Body (SGB) for Competition Climbing in Scotland, Mountaineering Scotland has a responsibility for ensuring all disciplines are provided; for training, coaching and coach education, and competition. These are:

Boulder

Boulder walls were the 'bread and butter' facilities in the early years, but the appetite for roped walls meant that until 2016 most new walls were roped.

But as recreational bouldering becomes far more popular and bouldering is easier to manage, indoor boulder-only venues are now the biggest growth area in the sector.

However, Scotland has no IFSC standard bouldering walls either for training or for hosting competitions. This is therefore a priority target.

Speed

Speed walls are a relatively new development in the UK with the first (and first 15m IFSC Standard) speed wall incorporated into the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena (EICA) in 2008.

This led to the Scottish Speed Team (the first in the UK) and to International speed standards achieved by Scottish climbers.

It is important that speed walls are available in other parts of Scotland, but it is recognised that the 15m height requirement creates severe limitations. More innovative solutions may be required.

Lead

The first permanent 'Competition Wall' was at EICA in 2003. But the IFSC standards changed and an additional wall was built to meet the required standard in 2008 : **The Hanger Wall**. The Hanger Wall is still the only such wall for hosting IFSC events in the UK and considering world financial prospects, will remain so through the period of this strategy.

Paraclimbing

National and IFSC Paraclimbing competitions are roped and use venues that are set specifically for the relevant categories. Venues should ensure they have suitable access and amenities to those with ASN.

Dry-tooling / Ice Climbing

Dry-tooling competitions have a long history in Scotland. The only dedicated Dry-tooling club in the UK is based in Glasgow. The GB Ice Climbing team is predominately Scottish and Scotland hosted a round of the UIAA World Cup in Glasgow in 2023. The establishment of dedicated venues for training and a national performance centre needs to be a priority to support athletes as well as host National and UIAA events.



Facilities Strategy 2023-2028

The new strategy will cover the period of the current and next Olympic Cycle and will now outline the style and scale of climbing wall provision in order to develop regional networks based around the following facilities:

- Grass-roots: (outdoor) Play Parks
- Grass-roots: Primary, Secondary School and inclusion/support services
- Small Wall: Community
- Regional (indoor) Hubs (roped and boulder)
- Regional (outdoor) Boulder Parks
- National (indoor) Centres
- Performance Centres (GB Level training)
- International (indoor) Centre
- Facility Enhancements
- Competition and Performance hold and volume provision

Regional Distribution

Defining the Facility Landscape

The previous strategy focused on defining a set of 11 regions and developing a standardised model with a set number of school walls, small walls, and regional hubs in each region.

As a guiding principle, the new strategy should help develop the network of climbing facilities in order to maximise access to the Climbing Pathway but will be based on the need at a local level in tandem with the overall need to have the correct type of facility across the country.

This will take account of the fact that it is not always possible to expect a higher level Regional Hub in each area but a varying number of different facilities in each area.

Hence, the new strategy will be pragmatic in defining each area taking account of the following criteria:

- Population centres
- Long-term financial sustainability
- Conurbations vs remote populations
- Recognised travel expectations vs catchment areas
- Need for North / South Scotland parity in coaching and competitions
- Need for Talent and GB Level (performance) facilities
- Ability to host different level competitions and parity of access across Scotland
- Grass-roots facilities (schools and playparks)

As a result, Mountaineering Scotland have reviewed the previous regional approach and based on the criteria above have now defined 6 Regions for the period of this strategy as shown in the diagrams on the opposite page.

● Population between 15,000 — 30,000

● Population between 40,000 — 80,000

● Population of 100,000 — 600,000

Conurbation Size:

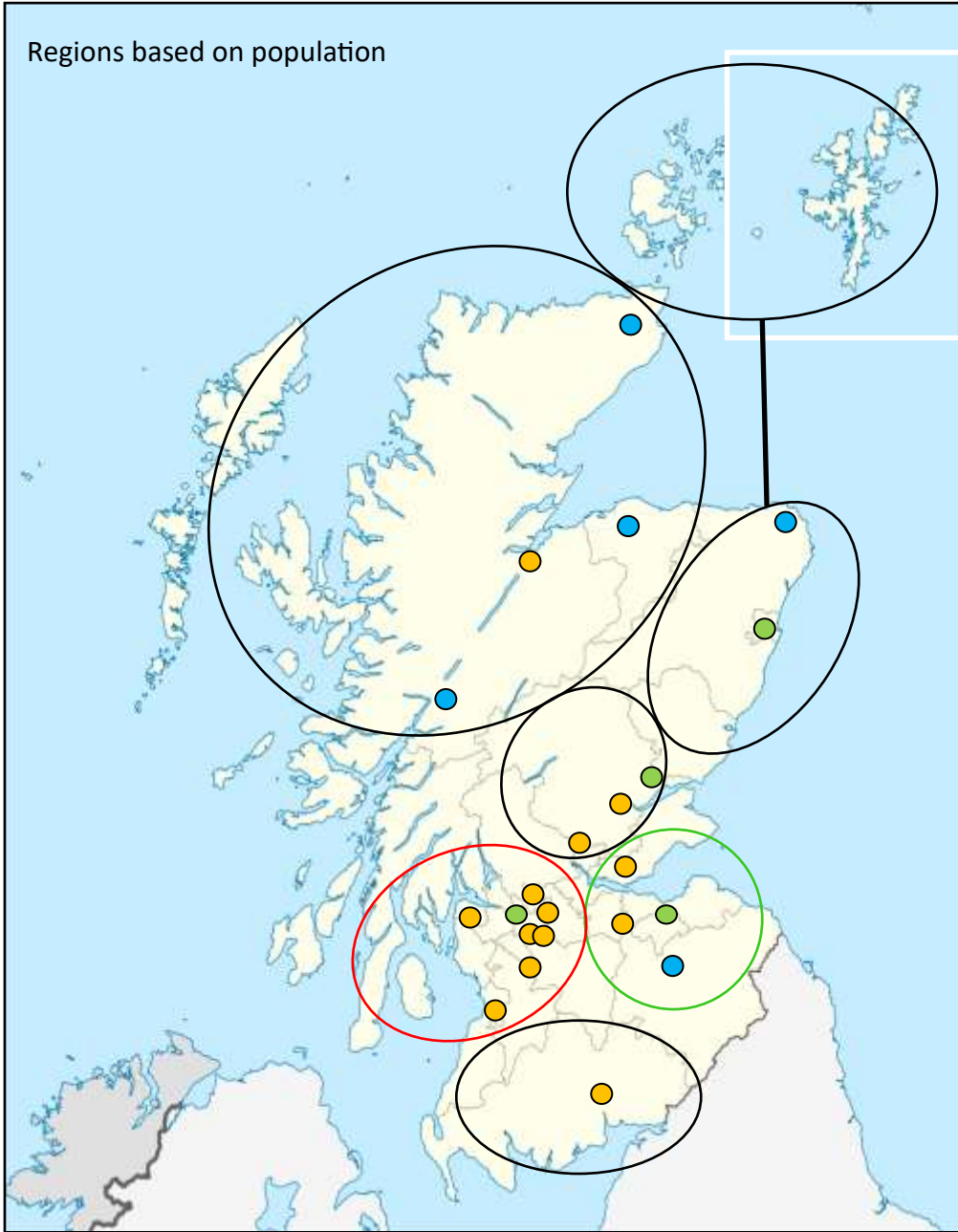
○ Greater Glasgow Urban Area 1.2m inhabitants

○ Edinburgh & South East Scotland City Region 1.3m inhabitants

Figures From Scotgov 2023

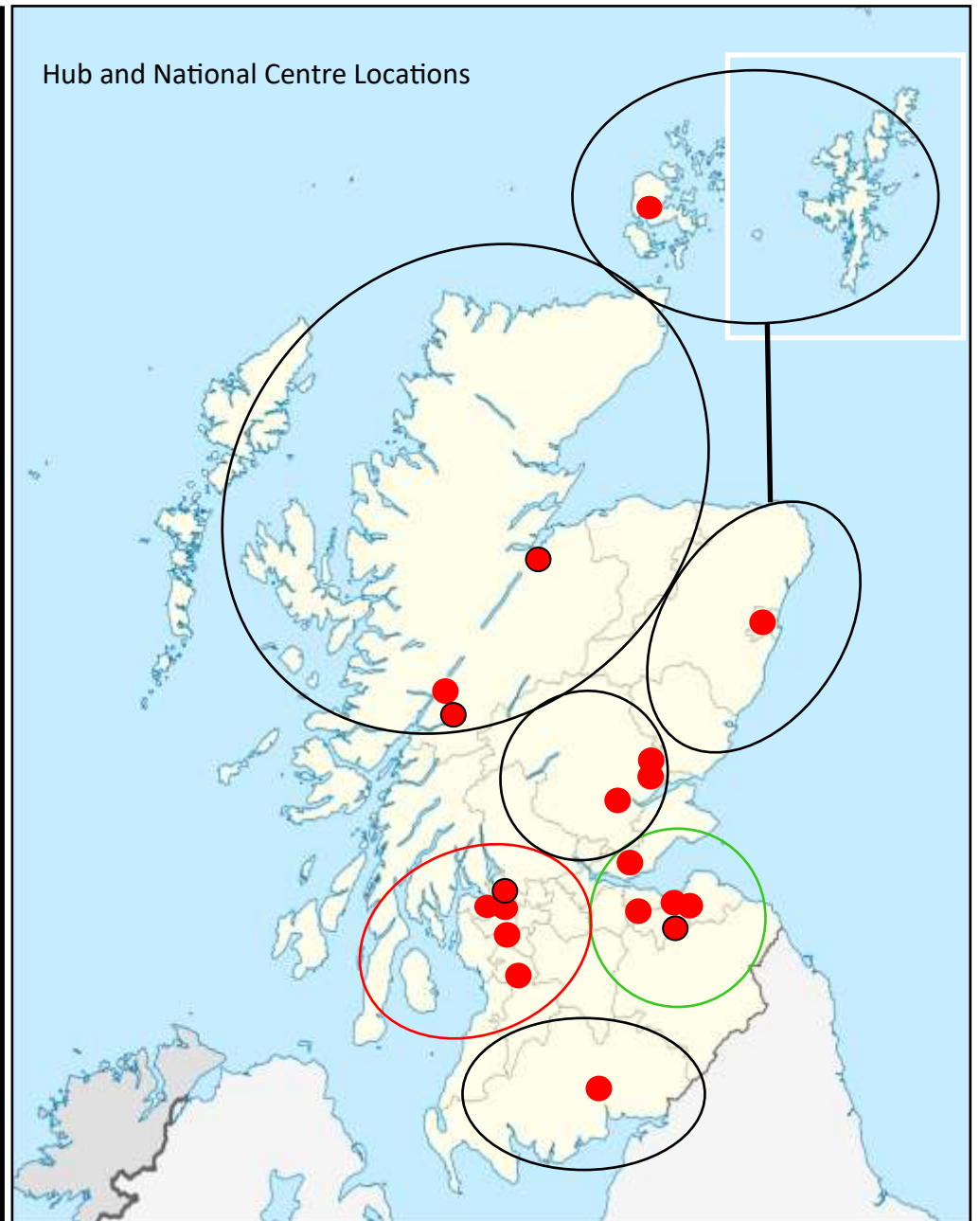


Regions based on population



Population of larger cities and towns in relation to the new targeted Facility Regions

Hub and National Centre Locations



Regional Hub Locations 2023 (incl. those due to open) ● Indicates National Centres

Outdoor Boulders

Free-to-access bouldering facilities:

Climbing frames and other play park apparatus encourages young people to play imaginatively and face challenges that allow them to learn, manage and assess risks – a vital life skill, all in a relatively safely environment. The benefits are recognised as:

- **Boost confidence and develop social skills**
- **Develop physical strength and agility**
- **Encourage problem solving**
- **Promote an active life style**
- **Learn independence, risk-taking and survival**
- **Develop logical and creative thinking**

However, climbing-specific apparatus (artificial boulders) can easily be integrated into parks helping children better understand climbing movement and technique at their most developmental age. They are an important next-step from play to climbing prowess.

In addition, boulders are excellent facilities for older children and adults to get climbing active and train in conurbations where outdoor climbing is absent and remote.

Aim:

The current provision of boulders within urban areas is extremely limited and fragmented. Mountaineering Scotland will support the building of more suitable free-to-access outdoor boulders catering for a range of ages and abilities. Support will be given on the basis of population size within easy access, and regional requirements, identified as:

1. **Play Parks:** suitable small boulders at children's play parks to enhance the existing activities offered and provide new challenges
2. **Adult Boulders:** in medium sized urban populations, adult-suitable larger single or multiple boulders should be established on a regional basis where natural outdoor bouldering is not available and/or easily accessible
3. **Boulder Parks:** in large urban conurbations, the provision of an extensive range of boulders that can cater for beginners to dedicated climbers should be considered

Challenges:

The biggest challenge is the cost compared with usual play-park climbing apparatus.

The majority of current facilities are far too small in scale to be regarded as significant and more importantly the design of the majority is limiting their use.

Poorly designed boulders create a barrier at an essential first step into early climbing participation. This can result in a negative and damaging first experience of climbing.

Poor design often means concentrating on aesthetics at the expense of practical use: limited holds (usually bolt-on holds) limits interest, the wrong design for the target audience, unsuitable for developmental work, fun competitions, or climbing coaching.

If the aim of a boulder park is to support and develop grassroots participation for local and surrounding communities, consideration is required in the development plan regarding what additional resources will be needed to enable active users. Such as:

- Access to climbing shoes — without this, progression and use will be limited
- Site specific training — the ability to supervise groups using the boulders
- Disability access and suitability / usability

Solutions:

We feel that through the knowledge and expertise in our sector we could positively influence and advise, through consultation, play park developments with regards to climbing boulders being installed. Projects that adopt recommendations made and receive our support would receive our recognition as ClimbScotland approved Climbing apparatus.

When play parks are being updated, and they are within easy safe access for local primary schools, then the development should be undertaken as a partnership approach to fulfil both school wall and boulder park aims.

MAIN PHOTO RIGHT: Cuningar Loop Boulder Park, Glasgow

PHOTO: Jonathan Bean





Walls in School Estates

School Walls:

There are a number of school estates that now have some form of artificial climbing structure. These predominantly consist of:

- Primary School: Playground traverse walls (mainly uncovered outdoors)
- High School: Roped climbing walls (most often located in shared spaces; for example gym halls, and main sports halls)

Review:

The review of the facility provision in the last strategic cycle, has shown that after the initial surge in interest for building climbing facilities in schools, many failed to get used or were un-maintained and closed. This was particularly true of the older Traverse Walls, which consisted of holds bolted onto the outside walls of existing buildings. In addition, many were being closed-off due to unfounded health and safety fears.

Larger roped walls were built indoors. Their popularity was often due to the adoption of the Curriculum for Excellence by Education Scotland. NICAS and Mountaineering Scotland noticed this interest and produced a document that married the outcomes of the Curriculum for Excellence to climbing, to ensure such walls were utilised. Most of the new build schools of the last 20 years installed a roped wall, but often taking poor advice. As a result the quality, scale, and siting within the building meant the usefulness and success of the resource was very variable across the country. As a result some closed. Some that were built in Community Campuses have recently been re-opened.

Aim:

Mountaineering Scotland's aim is to maintain the current facilities in working order and open up those which were closed. However, the focus will be to upgrade to new-style walls wherever possible. Local Authority areas currently lacking in any facility, will be encouraged to begin facility development, but Mountaineering Scotland needs to have a greater input to their design at an early stage if these are to be successful.

Challenges:

Our experience over the past cycle has indicated that school facilities have become a unused resources over time due to various key factors, including:

- Limited or no access to the resource due to shared space with other (usually other sporting) activities which take priority
- No qualified and or experienced staff to facilitate activities
- No qualified and or experienced staff to oversee maintenance
- No budget to pay for technical assessments (usually undertaken by a Technical Advisor), new PPE and new holds
- No qualified and or experienced staff, nor an ongoing budget to maintain the wall's primary resource — regular new route or boulder setting

The Solution:

Future facility development and investment in or around school estates should be able to clearly demonstrate through their business model and investment application how the above key points have been considered and will be overcome to ensure the resource doesn't experience failure once operational.

Mountaineering Scotland will advise on the best discipline to fit any particular proposed venue. In many respects bouldering facilities would alleviate the problems of qualified staffing and, PPE costs. Although they offer less scope for the Curriculum for Excellence, they provide more scope for the introduction to climbing and continued training in technique and physical ability.

PHOTOS RIGHT: Examples of school playground climbing structures

PHOTO: Dream Climbing Walls





Climbing and the Curriculum

What style of wall is best for the school curriculum?

Few Local Authority Schools have suitable climbing wall facilities that can be used both for PE and the Curriculum for Excellence. This would probably entail establishing a 'Small Wall' level facility. However, Mountaineering Scotland will support the building of any new wall project at a school, whether it is in a new build school or in an established school wishing to expand their facilities, in order to increase grass roots entry to the sport.

Our priority focus will be on new school proposals as they come forward, where facilities can be included in the initial design stage to ensure maximum and targeted usage.

Our secondary focus will be to help find suitable venues within established schools in areas that can be linked into a regional network.

Early Planning

It is important at the early stages of planning to decide on the style of the wall (the climbing discipline). Mountaineering Scotland have always recommended bouldering walls for schools as they offer less complicated management, are more cost effective to maintain, require far fewer PPE, less complicated staffing experience and qualifications and allow greater staffing ratios.

They are also easier venues to deliver entry-level climbing as well as more advanced movement and technique coaching. They can easily be used in PE, although they fulfil less of the outcomes of the Curriculum for Excellence as a roped wall, but the trade off means it is often worth considering bouldering if only a small area is available for a roped venue.

Community Campus Walls

School walls may not be open to the public and still gain support and advice from Mountaineering Scotland. But where they are part of a community campus, public opening is an advantage and here we would recommend they should be developed at the "Small Wall" scale if there are no such walls in the area. Public use will increase income and help sustain the longevity of the wall. In such circumstances new builds should be located within the campus where there is no conflict with other activities.



ABOVE and RIGHT: Examples of different styles of wall currently established at schools / community centres

Climbing in Physical Education



Cognitive Skills

- Develops problem-solving skills
- Improves spatial awareness
- Enhances memory and concentration
- Builds confidence and self-esteem
- Develops decision-making skills
- Encourages risk-taking and resilience



Physical Competencies

- Develops strength and endurance
- Improves balance and coordination
- Enhances flexibility and agility
- Builds core stability and posture
- Develops fine and gross motor skills
- Encourages teamwork and communication



Physical Fitness

- Improves cardiovascular health
- Builds muscular strength
- Enhances endurance
- Develops flexibility
- Encourages healthy lifestyle choices
- Builds self-discipline and perseverance



Personal Qualities

- Develops self-confidence
- Encourages risk-taking and resilience
- Builds teamwork and communication skills
- Enhances problem-solving abilities
- Develops leadership skills
- Encourages a positive attitude

Where to next?

Step One: Get set go! www.climbScotland.net

Find out the climbing routes for children and young people in your area. You can also find out more about the physical and mental benefits of climbing, and how to get started.

Step Two: Get set go! www.climbScotland.net

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Step Seventeen: Get set go! www.climbScotland.net

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Step Eighteen: Get set go! www.climbScotland.net

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Step Nineteen: Get set go! www.climbScotland.net

Find out the climbing routes for children and young people in your area. You can also find out more about the physical and mental benefits of climbing, and how to get started.

Step Twenty: Get set go! www.climbScotland.net

Find out the climbing routes for children and young people in your area. You can also find out more about the physical and mental benefits of climbing, and how to get started.



Small Wall: Community

Small Wall Provision:

There are two key areas for small wall development:

1. **Existing facilities:** Some existing local facilities are old and are no longer meeting the needs of the local climbing community, are too small for current demand or are unsuitable for the pathway, and would benefit from being up-graded
2. **New facilities:** There are only a few areas remaining in Scotland where provision of a local facility is lacking as part of the network in a region

The Review of the last strategy shows that virtually all designated Small Walls are situated in local authority leisure centres. This is because these walls are not financially viable as stand-alone facilities. Although this means a more unrestricted access is possible (unlike those situated in schools) they were almost all in shared areas and all have limitations.

Challenges for established facilities:

Our experience indicates that the venues that are meeting the local need, and are in fact building clientele numbers, are those that have the staff in place to deliver. The key factors why some are not able to deliver as well as possible includes:

- A varied range of ownership & management with varied priorities and funding constraints
- In some cases an ageing resource with a lack of space to expand to meet modern needs
- Limited access to the resource due to shared space within a multi-sport venue and other activities taking priority
- No on-going budget to pay for new holds
- No qualified and or experienced staff, nor an ongoing budget to maintain the wall's primary resource — regular new route setting

Challenges for new development:

It is unlikely that in areas already serviced by a Small Wall, that there is an alternative operator that will be able to offer a facility of this size. It is therefore important to maximise the use of existing venues.

Solutions:

Mountaineering Scotland will work in partnership with local authorities and leisure centre trusts to investigate any options for upgrading their climbing facilities if they are not meeting the needs of the community. With Olympic inclusion, interest in climbing is growing and possible expansion of the scale and style of climbing discipline available may offer a cost effective investment.

Additionally, our staff (Regional Development Officers) will advise and help support the use of upgraded venues.

Mountaineering Scotland will look to influencing the inclusion of a Small Wall standard climbing wall in any new (School) Community Campus project. This approach may also be the best option in an area where facilities already exist but are old and not meeting community needs.

PHOTOS RIGHT: Pickaquooy Climbing Wall, Orkney

PHOTOS: Ian Rendall





Hubs (Roped and Boulder)

The Regional Hub is the critical component of our climbing wall facility provision catering for larger populations and a greater range of activities which act as the main facility for a designated “Region”. There may be more than one hub in a region.

Hub endorsement primarily indicates their ability to deliver different aspects of the Mountaineering Scotland Climbing Development Plan and act as central hubs to other ‘Small Walls’ and school walls. 6 Regions have been allocated on the basis of the Needs Analysis and are indicated by the circled areas in the map on page 15. Large scale dedicated bouldering only venues are now integral additions to the overall provision and these can also be regarded as Regional Hubs and endorsed according to what they offer.

Changes made to the competition structure in 2021 mean hub requirements have changed regarding competition capacity. Changes to the GB pathway have also meant further hub changes regarding the facility training hardware and hold selection.

If there is more than one Level 1 or Level 2 Hub in a region, our new strategy will look to working with these current hubs rather than looking for new-build Level 3 National Centre projects, if at all possible.



2023 Hub Level Reassessment:

Hub Endorsement indicates what we as the national governing body and the endorsed centre can deliver together. It is not an indication of a hierarchy but a pragmatic agreement of how we can support each other and Scottish climbing

As a result we have reassessed the HUB designation of all the current hubs and assessed the newly opened venues. We assess on the basis of the criteria for each hub outlined below with different weighting being given to different criteria depending on their importance in relation to our strategic aims. There is a range of assessment within each level as not all venues have the same facilities and operational capacities that align with the new requirements of competition and training.

The new designations are as follows:

RE-ASSESSED REGIONAL HUBS

Level 1: Regional Hub:

Should have the capacity to deliver local competitions, the NGB FUN Competition Round (roped or boulder) and SNBL; host FUNDamentals 1&2 workshops, NICAS 1&2 and support ‘early years’ grass roots introduction. Upper-level 1 Hubs would need to have a small training option and potentially host a YCS Round.

1. Bouldover Climbing Centre, Dumfries (boulder)
2. Alien Rock & Alien Bloc, Edinburgh (roped & boulder)
3. Perth College Climbing Centre (roped & boulder)
4. Avertical World, Dundee (roped & boulder)
5. The Ice Factor Kinlochleven (Roped & Boulder) (currently closed Sept 2023)
6. HangOn Climbing, Hamilton (boulder & YCS boulder round)
7. Transition Extreme Aberdeen (roped & YCS roped round)

PHOTO LEFT: HangOn Climbing Gym, Hamilton

PHOTO: HangOn

PHOTOS RIGHT: Perth Climbing Wall

PHOTOS: Mountaineering Scotland





LOTTERY FUNDED  **sport scotland**

RE-ASSESSED REGIONAL & NATIONAL HUBS (continued)

Level 2: Regional Hub:

Should have the capacity to deliver local competitions, NGB FUN Competition Round (roped or boulder), SNBL; host FUNDamentals 1&2&3 workshops, NICAS 1,2 and 3 (and/or NIBAS equivalent), NGB Development Squad coaching academies. Upper-level 2 Hubs would need to be able to host a YCS round, have an Early Years area with ancillary equipment and a dedicated Performance Area. A Level 2 Hub may be assessed as a 'Performance Centre' if it has a large dedicated Performance area with all sport-specific and gym-style equipment for training.

1. Glasgow Climbing Centre (boulder and roped)
2. Bloc 10, Dundee (boulder—YCS boulder round)
3. Above Adventure Climbing Centre (boulder and roped—YCS roped round)
4. The Newsroom, The Climbing Academy, Glasgow (boulder—YCS boulder round)
5. Rockgelly, Lochgelly, Fife (boulder and roped) **In Development**

Level 3: National Centre:

*Hubs would be considered as 'National Centres' if they cater for National level competitions (SYBC and/or SYCC) and/or training. They need to be able to host NGB FUNDamentals 1&2&3 and Physical Training workshops, NICAS 1,2,3,4 and 5 (and/or NIBAS equivalent), and NGB Development Squad Academies & National Squad competition/technical coaching camps. A Level 3 Hub could also be assessed as a 'Performance Centre' if they have a large dedicated Performance area with all sport-specific and gym-style equipment for physical training. We would also expect a **Performance Centre (see page 26 & 27)** to have a boulder wall suitable to be set at IFSC standard using modern comp holds and volumes to allow training for International boulder events.*

1. The Prop Store, The Climbing Academy, Glasgow (boulder performance centre)
2. Eden Rock, Edinburgh (boulder performance centre)
3. The Ledge, Inverness (boulder performance centre)
4. The Ice Factor, Kinlochleven (Ice Centre only) (Currently closed Sept 2023)

Level: 4 International Centre:

There is the need for only one facility that can host international events in Scotland. We will support the continued development of the Edinburgh International Climbing Arena to fulfil its role as the country's International Competition and training venue in the three disciplines of Lead, Speed and Boulder.

1. Edinburgh International Climbing Arena , Ratho



PHOTO ABOVE LEFT: The Ice Factor Ice Wall, Kinlochleven
PHOTO: EP



PHOTO ABOVE RIGHT: The Hanger Wall, EICA, Ratho
PHOTO: Mountaineering Scotland
PHOTO RIGHT: Above Adventure, Kilmarnock
PHOTO: Mountaineering Scotland





Performance Centres

The previous strategy concentrated on the designation of a centre with specific requirements for developing physical performance (both at elite, recreational and competitive levels). The strategy wished to ensure that all Level 2 and Level 3 Hubs had some sport-specific training apparatus (to varying degree). However, the specialisation of climbing disciplines and the emergence of GB Climbing means the new strategy will need to be updated to cater for these changes.

Physical Performance:

Mountaineering Scotland will aim to designate a series of Performance Centres across Scotland where Scottish Squad members (and dedicated recreational climbers) will be able to access dedicated sport-specific and S&C training facilities. Such facilities will become increasingly important for training in our academies. These centres would best be located at Level 3 National Hubs that can cater for the additional requirements, including:

Ancillary Performance Training Aids: athletes in most other sports use strength and conditioning training as a core function of their programme using now standard S&C apparatus. A wall wishing to offer courses to clients and offer suitable facilities for its performance Squads (youth or adult) as well as for the Scottish Youth Squads and GB Team members requires the following aids:

- **Fingerboard:** standard training apparatus for all levels of climbers. They enable climbers to practice climbing-specific hangs and pull-ups to train maximum and endurance grip strength on different types of hold.
- **Circuit Boards:** walls of varying steepness with marked holds linking problems together following varying-difficulty, colour-coded 'circuits'. Used principally to train general power endurance. An alternative variation adopted by some walls is an 'old-school Woody'; essentially a mixed specification wall between a Systems Board and a Circuit Board
- **Systems Board:** one of the best training methods for specific types of movement, grip and kinetic chain development. As it uses the whole body it results in training specific combinations of grip, arm and body positions. These walls are very specialised and usually only used by small numbers of elite climbers.

- **Campus Board:** an advanced training aid which relies on powerful dynamic moves and which places high forces on the tendons, muscles and joints of the arm and so is only suitable for advanced intermediate to elite climbers who are already proficient and used to training. It is used to develop contact finger strength, isometric finger strength, explosive upper body power and power endurance.

Technique Performance:

GB-Level Bouldering Performance Hub: we also aim to establish a dedicated hub that will cater for the specific style found in modern international bouldering competitions. This will require specific holds. We envisage lending National Hubs similar holds for camps.

Speed Climbing Training: although two new Level 2 Hubs in construction have included short wall panels at speed-wall angle and will have speed holds, we do not envisage the building of a further Olympic sized speed wall in Scotland.

Challenges:

A review of the sport-specific performance facilities built in the walls established in the last strategy indicates that some, particularly those in Level 1 and Level 2 Hubs, are underutilised by recreational users and are often not used at all for performance coaching sessions. There are few Scottish-based coaches who have the expertise to coach on these types of apparatus, but the Mountain Training Coaching Award Scheme Performance Coach Award will soon be launched and such facilities will be more in demand.

Solutions:

- 'Performance Coach' training of Scottish coaches should be a priority target with the MT Award reinvigorated
- Mountaineering Scotland should join with those performance coaches with knowledge of performance coaching to develop and deliver suitable workshops
- Speed Wall training is normally split into three sections. It would be possible to find suitable angled areas and establish short training sections without the need for a whole dedicated speed wall.

THE LEDGE

E/P



Dry-tooling and Ice Walls

The previous strategy identified The Ice Factor in Kinlochleven, which had opened in 2003, as the Scottish National Ice Climbing facility (and a Level 1 Regional Hub for its limited roped climbing and bouldering). At the time it was the only one of its kind in the world. Some years later, the Scottish Tooling Series (STS) was set up with an ice round at the Ice Factor, but mainly using dry-tooling rounds. The STS ran successfully for over 10 years before being subsumed into a GB series which faltered around 2015. These events were not organised by the national governing bodies.

At international level, Ice Climbing competitions are managed and organised by the UIAA. In its infancy, the competitions were 'open' and athletes could compete without being in their country's (federation) team. Mountaineering Scotland and BMC sporadically supported athletes to attend through this period. The open access policy is still the case for European Cups but the World Championships now require Federation Team selection. Through GB Climbing, MScot and BMC set up the GB Ice Climbing Team in 2017.

In 2021 The Scottish Dry-tooling Club was set up in Glasgow and affiliated to MScot. It organised the first UIAA competition in the UK hosted at Glasgow Climbing Centre in 2022 (European Cup Round 3). For the 2022-2023 season, all 11 members of the GB Ice Team are based in Scotland.

Ice Competitions Coming of Age: the UIAA had previously stated its aim that ice climbing be included as a sport in the Winter Olympics. In 2022 it formed a new Climbing Working Group to oversee the 2022-2023 competition season and to set up new governance.

Challenges:

Ice competitions are mainly held outdoors where low winter ambient temperatures allow it. Unfortunately, competitions in the UK will inevitably need to be held on specifically constructed dry-tooling walls, as will any training facility.

Indoor Ice: International competitions include ice (particularly in the speed discipline), but Scotland's indoor venues (The Ice Factor unit and The Snow Factor in Glasgow) are too small and suitable for low level training only. Unfortunately both facilities closed in 2023, although The Ice Factor's future may be secured and MScot will do all it can to help. In any event the running costs of a large enough indoor refrigeration unit to host a GB or

International level competition are prohibitive.

Indoor Dry-tooling: Tooling events require purpose-built volumes, hanging bollards and specifically-designed holds. There is a plan for a bespoke training wall within Glasgow Climbing Centre on which to train, but nothing in Scotland on which to compete. One-off competitions must be purpose built onto normal roped walls presenting challenges to protect the wall from damage.

Safety: As ice tools are not tethered to the climber, the climbing zone around a dry-tooling wall therefore requires high barriers in case of dropped axes, so the arena area utilised is larger than a normal event with greater impact on the venue.

Aims:

As in other competitions there are three disciplines (lead, Speed and Boulder). We aim to help establish a selection of training and competition facilities that can cater for the additional specific requirements of all three including:

General Training Facilities: small bouldering walls / training walls, either purpose built or bouldering areas within established centres, can be used for training, although dry-tooling does damage resin holds and crampons cannot be used.

Dry-tooling Competition Performance Hub: we aim to establish a dedicated venue catering for lead training for GB and International level competitions. This needs to be a steel structure with wooden surface, 20m high, variable angle, usually a tower with a dogleg, generally overhanging to horizontal, with variable sized volumes and UIAA competition approved specific holds.

Speed Climbing Training: in Scotland this can only realistically be held on an artificial wood panelled wall of 20m height and steepness. It would also require speed auto-belay.

Solutions:

- Mountaineering Scotland will work with suitable climbing centres and the Scottish Dry-tooling Club to secure areas converted to dedicated dry-tooling training across Scotland
- Mountaineering Scotland will investigate the feasibility of a purpose-made lead and speed dry-tooling wall suitable for competitions

MAIN PHOTO: UIAA 2023 Ice Climbing Youth World Championships and European Cup, Finland

PHOTO: Aki Nevala

INSET PHOTO: Scottish Dry-tooling competition at EICA Ratho

PHOTO: Lucas Warzecka



International (Indoor) Centre

The development of Edinburgh International Climbing Arena at Ratho Quarry (EICA: Ratho), incorporating the National Indoor Rock Climbing Centre was established with full support from Mountaineering Scotland as the NGB 'National Centre'. Since then its status as an International Competition Centre has grown with IFSC competitions in Lead and Speed being held regularly. However, there is a lack of suitable bouldering surfaces to cater for ClimbScotland National bouldering comps as well as IFSC bouldering competitions.

The current freestanding bouldering facilities in the arena at EICA are very dated and do not reflect the standard and quality of the surrounding walls nor the resources at the venue. The boulder cave is small and is focused on performance which limits general recreational use. The inclusion of a larger wall at the venue would need to be constructed in such a way to enable multi-purpose use.

EICA aim to remove the three free standing boulders in the arena and replace them with a new bouldering structures that will have a triple function:

1. To continue to offer bouldering that caters for a range of abilities
2. To provide IFSC standard bouldering problems for National Squad training
3. To host IFSC standard bouldering competitions to a live audience

Strategic Priority:

With this proposed enhancement, EICA would be the only UK venue with all three Olympic standard discipline walls (Boulder, Lead and Speed). We would support this proposal in order to have a single venue with suitable walls to host the Scotland Squad training camps in order to attain a standard to be selected to the GB Team.

Upgrade: EICA, Ratho (IFSC standard competition bouldering wall and new 'small wall')

Competition Requirements:

Despite the scale of the arena, it is considered that it may no longer be able to host all international events due to the lack of spectator space. However, we will work with EICA and the BMC through GB Climbing to ensure its continued standing as an international venue, and as an international standard training facility.

PROPOSAL SUMMARY

International:

Freestanding Competition Boulder in the Arena:

250m² surface area

Competition macro features

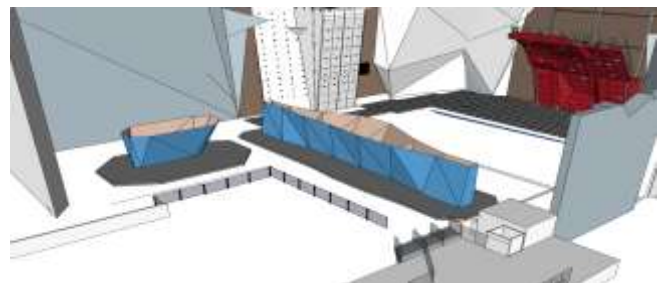
Commercial:

Small Wall within the building catering for lower grade recreational climbing

90m² surface area

Macro features

Draft Design renderings by King Kong Climbing Walls, Dream and Entre Prise



PHOTOS RIGHT: IFSC

World Cup EICA Ratho

PHOTO: Mountaineering Scotland



EICA would benefit from replacing the dated boulders in the arena with a modern IFSC standard competition wall that could cater for national and international competition, as well as delivery of elite performance coaching. PHOTO: IFSC



Competition and Performance

hold and volume provision

Scotland currently lacks the hold provisions for athletes to train and compete on. Our aim is to establish a hold and volume library that can be utilised by our endorsed coaches/setters to deliver performance coaching and training opportunities on international and world class blocs.

Solution:

With financial support and backing from the Sportscotland facilities team, Mountaineering Scotland wish to create and build a hold provision/library that will in turn, enable us as the SGB to support Scottish pre-GB and International talent in Scotland.

This resource will reduce the current requirement for Scottish athletes to travel south of the border to the likes of Sheffield, to access the standard and style of blocs they are expected to compete on at international/world/Olympic events.



The IFSC Official Sport Equipment is an initiative which aims to make the playing field fairer across international IFSC events (World Cups, World Championships, and Youth World Championships).

Each IFSC event will use only authorised IFSC Official Sport Equipment within the Field of Play to ensure that all stakeholders share the same experience, from Athletes and National Federations to Route Setters and Event Organisers. Furthermore, in compliance with the Olympic Charter Rule 50, the IFSC Official Sport Equipment aims to set out a high standard of quality and clean venue as an Olympic Sport.

The highest priority has been placed on the Holds, Macros, and Volumes category of the Official Sport Equipment due to their importance on Sport Climbing's fairness and quality. A wide range of Holds, Macros, and Volumes is necessary for fair and versatile Route Settings in the Field of Play, with a minimum 3-4 providers ideally featuring in each IFSC event.



PHOTO: Nonaka Miho (Japan) 2023 IFSC World Cup at Salt Lake City
Credit: International Federation of Sport Climbing



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