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Submission to the Women and Equalities Committee inquiry, “Beyond participation:
routes into sport for girls and women”

1. One-page briefing

- **Submitter:** Hleb Buziuk, independent public policy and governance researcher, submitting in a personal professional capacity.
- **Key messages**
 - Board-level progress has not yet translated into comparable authority, safety and retention for women below board level [2][3].
 - The main barriers are not entry alone. They also include insecure or poorly designed work, low trust in complaint handling, and weak support for care and progression [3][4].
 - The public evidence base is strongest for governance and coaching. It is much thinner for sports science, administration, officiating and sports journalism specifically [2][3][6].
- **Key findings**
 - Women are **40.8%** of board respondents (**n=669**), but only **25.0%** of chairs (**n=76**), **26.53%** of CEOs (**n=98**) and **31.03%** of performance directors (**n=29**). That is a **13.3 percentage point** gap between board presence and executive or operational authority [2].
 - In coaching, **91%** of Heads of Coaching Workforce (**n=31**) say a reporting system exists, but only **57%** (**n=31**) are very or quite confident women would trust sanctions to be applied fairly and consistently. **45%** of CEOs (**n=36**) support an independent complaints body, against **19%** opposed [3][9].
 - In the coach survey (**n=2,000**; **subgroup denominators not published**), **61%** of women felt heard and respected, versus **79%** of men. **67%** of women felt valued, versus **79%** of men. **43%** of women did not know whether they would be paid during leave, and **18%** of organisations offered no childcare or caring support [3].
 - Ofcom’s public data show a general seniority gap for women in broadcasting, but not a sports-specific one. Women are **50%** of TV employees and **44%** of TV senior managers, and **51%** of radio employees and **39%** of radio senior managers, with denominators not published [6].
- **Key recommendations**
 - **Sport England and UK Sport:** require a standard annual role-level workforce and safeguarding return from funded bodies from **2026-27**. **How to check:** public return and board sign-off.
 - **Sport England and UK Sport:** test Diversity and Inclusion Action Plans and welfare duties against below-board outcomes in the next funding cycle. **How to check:** revised assurance guidance and audit sample.
 - **Funded bodies:** publish a minimum workforce standard before the **2027 season** covering contracts, expenses, leave, caring support, development budgets and escalation routes. **How to check:** published policy and annual survey.
 - **Ofcom and major sports broadcasters or publishers:** publish a sports-desk EDI and complaints annex in the next reporting cycle. **How to check:** public annex.
- **What is new**
 - It links board gains to weaker female representation in day-to-day authority roles.

- It treats masculine culture as a measurable issue of voice, respect, complaint handling and retention.
- It distinguishes evidence-rich areas from evidence-poor ones and turns the latter into specific data requests.
- Origin-first sources. Strongest on governance and coaching. See section 3, section 7 and Annex A.

2. About the submitter

I am an independent public policy and governance researcher submitting in a personal professional capacity.

3. Methods, sources and limitations

This submission uses origin-first sources. Headline claims are anchored in funding rules, regulator data, official surveys or primary research. Committee material is treated as secondary where an origin source exists.

Evidence is strongest for governance and coaching, and thinner for sports science, administration, officiating and sports journalism specifically [2][3][6]. Claims in those areas are therefore kept narrow and paired with data requests. Broadcasting limits are currently single-source [6].

4. Context and background

The inquiry concerns routes into non-playing roles, not only participation. Public evidence suggests different barriers at different points in the pathway: entry gaps, weaker progression into authority, poorer trust in complaint systems, and uneven support for care, contracts and safety [2][3][4].

5. Evidence mapped to the terms of reference

5.1 Masculine cultures and take-up

Women are underrepresented among active coaches, at **38%** against **51%** of the population, with the denominator not published in the spotlight summary [4]. Once inside coaching, women report weaker voice and respect than men [3]. The barrier is therefore not only entry, but whether women are treated as legitimate holders of authority once they enter.

- **Observation:** women with children aged 25 to 54 are less likely to coach or instruct than women without children, **22%** versus **33%**, with denominators not published [5].
- **Added value:** masculine culture should be treated as a retention issue, not only a recruitment issue.
- **Three points:** Entry is not the only barrier. Authority must feel legitimate. Care and culture interact.
- **Counterpoint:** some lag is expected where pipelines were historically narrow.
- **Options:** **A** guidance and mentoring. **B** role and retention reporting. **Preferred: B.**

5.2 Bias, discrimination and misogyny across roles

The clearest public evidence is in coaching, with governance data also available [2][3]. Women report weaker respect and value than men, and **34%** said gender negatively affected whether they were respected, against **5%** of men, in the coach survey (**n=2,000**;

subgroup denominators not published) [3]. Governance data separately show stronger female presence on boards than in senior operational authority [2].

- **Observation:** evidence for sports science, administration and journalism within sport is much thinner than for coaching and governance [2][3][6].
- **Added value:** the more useful test is equal authority, not formal presence alone.
- **Three points:** Board diversity is not a full proxy for culture. Misogyny should be checked through complaints, exits and promotion patterns. Missing role-level data are a governance gap.
- **Counterpoint:** coaching evidence should not be assumed to describe every role identically.
- **Options:** **A** training and guidance only. **B** annual role-level reporting plus an independent pulse survey. **Preferred: B.**

5.3 Harm, harassment, abuse and violence

Protection appears weakest where reporting depends on structures women may already distrust. In the coaching study, **30%** of women reported bullying and **21%** harassment, with subgroup denominators not published [3]. Only **17%** of women were satisfied with bullying complaint outcomes and **15%** with harassment complaint outcomes, from the subset who reported and received an outcome [3]. UK Sport's independent route is a practical model, but only for Olympic and Paralympic performance programmes [9].

- **Observation:** **91%** of Heads of Coaching Workforce (**n=31**) said a reporting system existed, but only **57%** (**n=31**) were very or quite confident women would trust sanctions to be fair and consistent [3].
- **Added value:** safeguarding coverage is not the same as trusted protection from misogyny.
- **Three points:** Policy presence is not outcome evidence. An untrusted route will under-protect. Ask for case-flow data, not only policies.
- **Counterpoint:** a new independent route could duplicate existing processes.
- **Options:** **A** strengthen internal systems only. **B** require an accredited independent escalation or investigation route. **Preferred: B.**

5.4 Employment and contractual barriers

Employment conditions are a material barrier. From the Heads survey (**n=31**), **18%** of organisations said they provided no childcare or caring support, and **23%** provided partial support [3]. In the coach survey (**n=2,000**; **subgroup denominators not published**), **43%** of women said they did not know whether they would be paid during leave, while only **21%** said yes [3]. Only **32%** of CEOs (**n=36**) said meaningful budget was set aside to attract, develop and retain women coaches [3].

- **Observation:** among paid coaches, **15%** of coaches with a disability reported permanent roles, against **25%** of non-disabled coaches. Women from ethnically diverse groups were also less likely to report permanent roles than White women, **10%** versus **29%**, with subgroup denominators not published [3].
- **Added value:** mentoring alone will not solve barriers created by weak job design.
- **Three points:** Unclear leave rights are a barrier. Expenses, childcare and contract security affect viability. Progression promises are weak without budget.
- **Counterpoint:** smaller bodies may need phased implementation and templates.
- **Options:** **A** guidance and mentoring. **B** a minimum workforce standard tied to funding. **Preferred: B.**

5.5 Additional barriers for minority ethnic and disabled women

The evidence points to added barriers, but measurement remains weak. In the coaching study, only **10%** of women from ethnically diverse groups reported permanent roles, against **29%** of White women, with subgroup denominators not published [3]. Activity Alliance found disabled people were **13%** of the sport and physical activity workforce, against **16%** of the total employed workforce, and disabled women were **4.2 percentage points** less likely than disabled men to see themselves working in sport [7][8].

- **Observation:** only **9%** of disabled respondents agreed they had the opportunity to become a coach or deliverer, against **24%** of non-disabled respondents [7].
- **Added value:** intersectional disadvantage is visible, but the administrative data needed to track it remain too thin.
- **Three points:** Extra barriers are visible but under-measured. Weak evidence should trigger better reporting. Accessibility and fair progression should be tested together.
- **Counterpoint:** subgroup sizes are smaller and can be volatile.
- **Options:** **A** targeted outreach only. **B** an intersectional workforce return plus accessibility audit. **Preferred:** **B**.

5.6 Requirements on organisations up to board level

The Code for Sports Governance already provides a starting point. It requires diversity ambitions, a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan with a public annual update, annual board evaluation, and a board welfare and safety lead for bodies seeking or receiving Sport England or UK Sport funding [1]. Yet the 2024 governance survey still shows a clear gap between women's board share and women in chair, CEO and performance director roles [2].

- **Observation:** women were **40.8%** of board respondents (**n=669**), but **25.0%** of chairs (**n=76**), **26.53%** of CEOs (**n=98**) and **31.03%** of performance directors (**n=29**) [2].
- **Added value:** the accountability question is whether governance requirements are being tested against below-board outcomes.
- **Three points:** Board rules are necessary but not sufficient. DIAP updates should link to workforce outcomes. Welfare leadership should be matched by case-flow data.
- **Counterpoint:** stronger reporting requirements create some compliance burden.
- **Options:** **A** keep a board-level focus. **B** require annual role-level workforce and complaints reporting. **Preferred:** **B**.

5.7 Good practice, dissemination, journalism and broadcasting

There are usable practice points, but they are uneven. UK Sport's independent reporting model shows that a separate route can operate in one defined part of the system [9]. Older Sport England volunteering data show women are less likely than men to referee or officiate, **16%** versus **30%** among volunteers, with denominators not published, and that evidence should be refreshed [5]. Ofcom's data show a wider broadcasting seniority gap for women, but not a sports-specific cut [6].

- **Observation:** in TV, women are **50%** of employees and **44%** of senior managers. In radio, women are **51%** of employees and **39%** of senior managers, with denominators not published [6].
- **Added value:** best practice should be spread through a common dashboard, not by case studies alone.
- **Three points:** The sports broadcasting question cannot be answered fully from current public data. Officiating remains a male-skewed route. Best practice needs a common dashboard.
- **Counterpoint:** sports and employers differ in size and labour model.

- **Options:** **A** informal sharing of good practice. **B** a common annual dashboard plus a sports-desk annex. **Preferred:** **B**.

6. Recommendations

Quick wins

1. **Committee lever.** **DCMS, Sport England, UK Sport and Ofcom** should provide a common written data pack within six months of the Committee's report, covering role-level workforce data, retention, complaints, care support and sports-desk broadcasting data. **How to check:** deposited return or published annex.
2. **Delivery action. Funded bodies** should publish a minimum workforce standard before the **2027 season**, covering contracts, expenses timeliness, leave rights, caring support, development budgets and named escalation routes. **How to check:** board-approved published policy and annual survey return.

Structural steps

3. **Delivery action. Sport England and UK Sport** should require a standard annual role-level workforce and safeguarding return from funded bodies from the **2026-27** cycle. **How to check:** annual return and audit sample.
4. **Delivery action. Sport England, UK Sport and funded bodies** should phase in an accredited independent escalation or investigation route across funded sport, with specification in **2026-27** and operation from **2027**. **How to check:** service specification, uptake data and outcome dashboard.
5. **Committee lever. Ofcom and major sports broadcasters or publishers** should publish a sports-desk annex on workforce, freelancers, complaints and exits in the next annual EDI reporting cycle. **How to check:** public annex.

7. Quant-lite results and Minimum Data Request Pack

Derived metric 1: board-to-executive authority gap

Definition: female board share minus the mean female share across Chair, CEO and Performance Director roles. Inputs: **40.8% (n=669)**, **25.0% (n=76)**, **26.53% (n=98)** and **31.03% (n=29)** [2]. Formula: board share minus the mean of the three role shares. **Result: 13.3 percentage points**. Note: funded bodies only; performance director numbers are small.

Derived metric 2: reporting-to-trust gap

Definition: share of Heads saying a reporting system exists minus the share very or quite confident women would trust sanctions to be fair and consistent. Inputs: **91%** and **57%**, both from the Heads survey (n=31) [3]. Formula: **91 - 57**. **Result: 34 percentage points**. Note: small leadership survey and coaching-specific.

Minimum Data Request Pack

Field	Definition	Owner	Cadence	What it enables the Committee to test
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Role-level workforce return	Sex, ethnicity, disability, contract type and role for chair, CEO, performance director, head coach, officiating lead, welfare lead, and senior editorial or production roles	Sport England, UK Sport, funded bodies, major broadcasters	Annual	Whether women reach and remain in authority roles
Joiners, leavers, returners	Entries, exits, re-entries, role level, contract type, top-coded reason for leaving	Funded bodies	Annual	Whether barriers are at entry, retention or return
Complaints case-flow	Route used, allegation type, complainant role and sex, time to triage, time to close, outcome, sanction, appeal, satisfaction	Funded bodies, Sport England, UK Sport	Quarterly	Whether protection is timely, trusted and fair
Sports-desk annex	Employees and directly employed freelancers by sex and seniority, applicants, appointments, complaints and exits	Ofcom, broadcasters, publishers	Annual	Whether journalism and broadcasting are improving in sport specifically

8. Impact, performance and value for money artefact

A minimal performance template would let the Committee test whether policy is changing behaviour, using published baselines where available and the section 7 data pack for the rest.

- Female share in chair, CEO and performance director roles [2].
- Female retention and returner rates in coaching and officiating from the section 7 data pack.
- Median complaint close time and complainant satisfaction by sex from the section 7 data pack.
- Women in senior sports-desk editorial or production roles from the section 7 data pack.

9. Committee may wish to ask

To DCMS, Sport England and UK Sport

1. Your data show **40.8%** women on boards but **25 to 31%** in key authority roles. What below-board role return will you now require, and by when [1][2]?
2. How do you currently assure DIAP and welfare requirements against workforce outcomes, not policy existence alone [1][3]?
3. Will you require a common complaints dashboard and an independent escalation route across funded sport and, if not, why not [3][9]?

To funded bodies and NGBs

4. What are your female joiner, leaver and returner rates by role and contract type?
5. What share of complaints brought by women are closed within timetable, with a recorded outcome and appeal?

To Ofcom and major sports broadcasters or publishers

6. What would it take to publish a sports-desk cut in the next EDI cycle [6]?

10. Risks and further work, References, Annex list and Annex A

Risks and further work

- The strongest evidence is in coaching and governance, so generalisation to other roles should be cautious.
- Officiating evidence is older and should be refreshed.
- Broadcasting data are not sports-specific.
- Several leadership findings come from small denominators.
- Most public evidence is cross-sectional, so retention mechanisms should be tested with administrative data.

References

[1] Sport England and UK Sport, *Code for Sports Governance*, current guidance page.
<https://www.sportengland.org/funding-and-campaigns/code-sports-governance>

[2] Sport England and UK Sport, *Diversity in Sport Governance 2024*, Nov 2024.
<https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2024-12/Diversity%20in%20Sport%20Governance%20-%202024.pdf>

[3] Women in Sport and Leeds Beckett University, *Reimagining Sport Coaching*, Jan 2026.
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[4] UK Coaching and YouGov, *UK Coaching Population Study 2024: Gender Spotlight*, 2024.
<https://www.ukcoaching.org/getmedia/c69de789-3af2-44f4-9bd8-e00cc2baf82b/Gender-Spotlight-Report-v2>

[5] Sport England, *Spotlight on Volunteering and Gender*, 2018.
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[6] Ofcom, *EDI in Broadcasting 2024/25*, Nov 2025.
<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/tv-radio-and-on-demand/diversity-and-equality/reports/2025/equity-diversity-and-inclusion-in-broadcasting-2024-25.pdf>

[7] Activity Alliance, *Research into the Workforce Gap*, Nov 2024.
https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/005/136/Workforce_Gap_Research_Report_original.pdf

[8] Activity Alliance and Rose Fawcett, *Annual Disability and Activity Survey: Secondary Analysis*, Aug 2025.

https://www.activityalliance.org.uk/assets/000/005/391/Activity_Alliance_Annual_Survey_Demographic_Report_-_FINAL_original.pdf

[9] UK Sport, *Integrity and Safeguarding*, Jan 2026.

<https://www.uk sport.gov.uk/resources/integrity-and-safeguarding>

Annex list

- **Annex A:** Evidence Ledger

Annex A. Evidence Ledger

Claim	Type	Source A	Source B	Source B role	Status	Confidence	What would change my mind	Verification owner
Board progress has not yet translated into comparable executive or operational authority for women	SYNTHESIS	[2]	[3]	Independent corroboration	INPUTS-ANCHORED	Medium-High: sources align	Stable multi-year parity in key authority roles	Sport England, UK Sport
Conditions of work and trust, not entry alone, are major barriers to women's progression and retention	SYNTHESIS	[3]	[4]	Independent corroboration	ORIGIN-ANCHORED	High: multiple studies align	Longitudinal retention data showing no sex gap	Funded bodies, Sport England
Policy coverage is ahead of trusted protection in complaint handling	INFERENCE	[3]	[9]	Independent corroboration	INPUTS-ANCHORED	Medium: strong coaching evidence	High trust and fair outcomes in published case-flow data	Sport England, UK Sport, funded bodies

The Committee cannot yet answer the sports broadcasting question from public data alone	INFERENCE	[6]	None	Not applicable	SINGLE-SOURCE	Medium -Low: strong but not sports-specific	Sports-desk annex with workforce and complaints data	Ofcom, broadcasters, publishers
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