

Tessa McInnes – Written evidence (NPS0121)

1. I have been sports club volunteer for several years; am currently a Welfare Officer for a national governing body (NGB)-affiliated club, am a former volunteer on an NGB regional cttee, am a member of 4 affiliated sports clubs; a parent and a keen amateur competitive sports person.

Question 2: how children and young people can be encouraged to participate in sport, etc

2. I wish to address the situation of girls, as they are underrepresented across nearly all sport. For female-specific research on why girls and women (GW) are not attracted to exercise (including competitive sport), please read the research by Sport England for its This Girl Can Campaign. For years, as a parent and volunteer in organised sport, I observed locally and nationally, too much activity (& most of the funding for activity) is achievement orientated – it appears it must have measurable outcomes; be skills-attainment-based, performative, competitive. Who sets these goals and do they serve children and young women? I don't think so. These prioritise traditionally masculine goals.
3. Girls are socially conditioned to avoid what they perceive as risky activities. They are shamed for their bodies and bodily functions, such as sweating and periods, and revealing their shape. All of which deters them from enjoying activity. They are being directed to fit into the existing norms of activity. This does not align with *why girls* might want to be active.
4. I'm on a women's cycling forum – 1000s of members, globally. I can tell you that the main reasons why women cycle are for emotional wellbeing and a sense of freedom and achievement. The outcomes are highly significant for physical and emotional good health – but are not necessarily easily measured. Nowhere is this recognised in national 'sports' strategies, especially not by unaccountable national sporting bodies (NGBs).
5. Girls and women (GW) also want to be active to get from 'A to B'. They are deterred from doing so because of the perceived risks of being on the roads – these risks are not unfounded. We have some evidence to suggest that solo women experience closer passes from traffic than men and I hear all too often of frightening and dangerous abuse from male drivers directly at GW – misogyny is, sadly, an everyday experience for many solo active women (I'm sure you are aware of GB Team women athletes' experiences training in lockdown, as reported in the press, including one being knocked down by a car).
6. To attract GW we need to think outside the 'man box' and stop calling activities 'sport'. Many young adults, girls *and boys* still have a strong need to PLAY. Play IS ACTIVE – that's what we want to encourage. It also releases endorphins – a great benefit in the time of a mental health crisis

amongst young adults. So why must all funding and equipment be so attainment orientated? We have a Sport England. Why don't we have an Activity England? In Victoria Park in Bath, there is, in the giant play area, a rare zone specifically for older teenagers - I even got my 75 yr. old mum on some the equipment. I've seen this nowhere else. But if GW did not feel exposed when participating in activities (perceived 'lack of skills', to need to perform, to body shaming) they would do more. They do not want to be judged. They do not want to judge themselves as wanting (which they always do). GW love traditional play equipment - so give them some! They'll be more active, alright.

7. And what about elderly people (EPs)? We have an ageing population crisis and an obesity crisis. It is critical to the resilience of our NHS that EPs are enabled to stay strong and mentally healthy. Regular exercise is a proven remedy - but again, it needs to be free, spontaneous, non-intimidating. Play equipment and gym-style equipment in public parks and recreation areas, on areas commonly used for walking, would encourage young adults and EPs to see activity as a non-intimidating, accessible and enjoyable pursuit, without the anxiety attached to performance/competitive-based activity.
8. What I want to see is more play and gym-style equipment for adults.
9. Activity (again, not sport) must be prioritised at schools - cycling proficiency needs a resurgence and funding - cycling has a major part to play in pollution reduction and health outcomes - making cycling part of everyday life for all is not aspirational (especially not with the popularity of e bikes). It should be as natural a given as learning to drive.
10. Why do we not encourage **all** primary schools to start the day with a Thai Chi/ warm up routine as they do in other countries? I used to slow-jog to school with my children (in our work/school clothes) because otherwise I'd miss my train. What I learned over time was how beneficial this was for my anxious child - the activity syphoned off his anxiety and loosened up his limbs, warmed him up in winter and encouraged good circulation. Those benefits are universal. It does not require special skills to do gentle warm exercise for 10 minutes each day - which is as important as any other kind of school assembly.

Question 3. How can under-representative groups be encouraged to lead more active lifestyles?

11. See above for GW - include in any strategy a focus on safer ways to be active (cycling routes, well-lit lanes,) and the PLAY element (non-competitive, non-skills based opportunities) as well as competitive sports.
12. Girls (females) need single sex spaces. Please don't accuse me of being 'transphobic' - I make no distinction between males with possible gender dysphoria and other males **specifically because in sport, sex matters:** for safety, fairness and safeguarding. I do not foreground sex unless it is relevant (and it is relevant here and in other spheres such as healthcare); I do not mean to be provocative or mean. I'm happy to call a transwoman 'she' unless it there are reasons why this is not appropriate (e.g. in court).

13. All males, regardless of personal beliefs, are socially conditioned as male and have male bodies. With as many as 1 in 3 GW experiencing sexual abuse and domestic violence in the UK (see ActionAid UK and Refuge.org.uk), it is imperative that GW have female-only spaces to enjoy activities without their PTSD being triggered – which it would be, regardless of how the male in question perceived themselves. There is also the issue of GW of faith – who cannot socialise with males and who are one of the most (if not the most) underrepresented groups across all activities. Why are we not addressing this? Why are their interests and needs dismissed?
14. Hampstead Heath used to have 3 ponds with different designated uses, meaning that everyone could benefit from them (including transgender people) because they were: 1. Male only, 2. Female only and 3. Mixed. The female pond is now accessible to any male on that male's say-so alone. **This means that the many orthodox Jewish women from the local community, whose opportunities for exercise and outdoor pursuits were already limited, can no longer use any of the ponds.** Only females are excluded by this new policy. While men? Well, they can use all three. This is discrimination against females.
15. It will be impossible to encourage activity amongst GW, especially GW of faith, if you fail to acknowledge the criticality of female-only opportunities, opportunities that must be protected by laws.
16. We segregate sports and activities by sex for well-established reasons (safety, fairness, equal opportunity, dignity). We must continue to do so to ensure that everyone can benefit from a range of life-enhancing activities. The Equality Act must be re-visited because it was never intended to oversee the dismantling of female-only vital services and amenities – including sport – which I am witnessing now. Unaccountable NGBs (e.g. British Cycling, England Rugby, the National Kickboxing Association) *are not even considering* using the sports exceptions *which were intended to protect female equal opportunities*. Female-only services and sports are essential to enable equal opportunities, visibility and health and wellbeing. These vital opportunities should be protected under the law with the current law amended to ensure their presence (clearly, we cannot rely on organisations to apply these exceptions in the face of lobbying and widespread misinformation on the law, even that disseminated by the EHRC); **the exception should be to include males only where it is justifiable and proportionate to do so**. This does not exclude any group – all human beings are either male or female – and some activities can fairly be mixed sex. To organise any sport on the grounds of personal belief, against all evidence that supports single sex provision – is as perverse as organising it on the basis of political leaning or religious beliefs. Personal beliefs should not dictate sport and activity – especially those involving competition and careers. You will lose a generation of elite female athletes, and generations of active women, if you continue to do nothing to halt the ideological assault on single sex provision. Base decisions on fairness, evidence and data.

17. If we continue to ignore GW needs for dignity, privacy and safety by forcibly teaming GW with males, we are prioritising male needs to use GW as props to their performance of femininity over female needs for space away from males in a male-dominated society. If we prioritise one group's feelings based on their beliefs (transwomen – plus any men who say they are 'living as a woman' whether that is true or not), we are creating an arbitrary, unfair, and uninterrogable practice. Why do we choose to prioritise this one group and not prioritise the feelings of women of faith and other women, based on their personal beliefs? This is not a rhetorical question: I should like the cttee to consider this and set out its answer.
18. By choosing to abandon sex-based activities (sex based for justifiable and proportionate reasons, such as to increase uptake and representation), we are excluding the very women who are most likely to be inactive, from activities they might otherwise take up. We are deliberately excluding those women of faith (e.g. Muslim and Jewish) who cannot socialise with males – this is not equality and it is not inclusive. I would argue that it is discriminatory on the grounds of religion and sex.
19. There is no need for an 'either -or' decision – there should be mixed sex and single sex opportunities. Here is an example of how *not* to do this: British Cycling offers mixed sex activities where trans people can attend in the gender of their choosing. The NGB also offers equivalent activities which are advertised as 'female only'. All the publicity material presents this as the case. But they are not. These 'women-only/female-only' activities invite men who self-identify as transwomen. This is not made clear on the NGB's website or in any advertising. GW who are considering attending these activities and who may be women of faith and/or survivors of male violence with PTSD, are given no opportunity to be in full possession of the facts so that they can make an informed choice as to whether this activity meets their needs. This is forced teaming. Any male stranger who claims to be 'living as a woman' (this is not enquired after) can attend.
20. The sole reason for this specific activity (and the funding from Sport England to support it is on the basis) *that they are women only*. Sport England's KPI attached to this funding is to "increase the update of females" in this sport. It is a reasonable assumption that most of the British public would share a common understanding of which people fall within this group. But tacitly this NGB permits attendance, with no questions asked, by *any* males -not just those with a gender recognition certificate. These are any males who want to be in an all-female activity based on their say-so alone, no questions asked (British Cycling stated that it considered making any enquiries of such males to be "an overreach").
21. At least four women activity leaders have expressed their concerns about this non-transparent policy to British Cycling's Head of Ethics. As the NGB

has no authority to which it is ultimately answerable its CEO and its Chief Ethics Officer have casually dismissed all concerns, refused to answer questions and responded that all concerns 'must' be motivated only by bigotry. Despite this dismissal British Cycling has subsequently removed references to 'female only' from its advertising for these 'women only' rides.

22. **This is not equality. This NGB's hostile dismissal of women's concerns has already resulted in some women self-excluding from these activities,** which are expressed to be 'for women'. This is bitterly disappointing. The public cannot rely on NGBs to uphold fairness and equal opportunities, to create female-orientated opportunities. They are not fit for purpose. This particular NGB tolerates women because women bring Govt funding. In reality it upholds a covertly and overtly female-hostile culture.
23. This NGB has also erased all female-only, single sex competitive activities without any equality impact assessment, consultation or publicity whatsoever. This is catastrophic for GW participation. "You need to see it to be it".
24. GW are already under-represented in the competitive side of this activity (and the recreational side) – for reasons of perceived risk, lack of mentoring, support and the aggressively masculine culture of competitive events. This particular NGB has been before a select committee investigating allegations of sexism in the past.
25. Competing against males, with their innate, unsurmountable superior physiology, will only deter more GW. I resigned as Women's Officer from an NGB because I cannot encourage girls to compete against men – I would not want to be in an accident in an activity with a man – because of the risk of greater injury – not only due to their superior speed and greater weight but because of female physiology (I am happy to send you all the evidence but one example: the latest findings that teenage girls face almost the double risk of concussion than boys playing football – Guardian, 27 April 2021). Nor can I justify ignoring the overwhelmingly evidenced physical advantages of being male (see Dr Ross Tucker, advisor to World Rugby @ScienceofSport and the latest 2021 publications of research by Dr Joanna Harper in the BMJ:
<https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/early/2021/02/28/bjsports-2020-103106>
and Drs Hilton and Lundberg:
)<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40279-020-01389-3>
- 26 This is fatally unfair. If competitive girls perceive that they cannot win, however hard they train, they will drop out. This is NGB's new medal-winning strategy appears to be that the next Olympic gold medallist in the women's track events will be a male.
26. This will start an 'arms race' amongst clubs and between countries, because as soon as one group fields males in female categories, other

groups will be compelled to do so, to remain competitive and have a chance at winning. The drive to get more males into female sports will start younger and younger – with children in their early teens being affected. In the next 5-10 years, if GW sports are not better protected, there will be no more elite sport for them. There will be mixed sport involving elite females and males. Meanwhile, men’s single sex sport is wholly unaffected. This is sexism. We can do better – we can protect and support hard -won female sport and created mixed sex / open categories, or support transwomen to compete in the male category by changing the macho culture and enrolling male athletes to mentor and support transwomen athletes. We need to pioneer a more inclusive environment where gender stereotype non-conforming males are received positively and encouraged.

27.If you want to encourage GW to be more active please address these very different issues.

Reform NGBs:

28.NGBs receive millions of pounds of public money yet they are not subject to FOI requests; they are under no obligation to carry out equality impact assessments; they are not accountable to any authority; they are non-transparent, able to introduce policies which ignore the law, safety and safeguarding and equalities principles, to foreground one group only - males. They dismiss legitimate complaints without remedy for the complainant. This cannot be allowed to continue. Right now at least two prestigious NGBs – British Cycling and England Rugby, are seeking to impose anti-scientific, ideology-based policies on female sport (and only female sport). The National Kickboxing Association is consulting on permitting self-identifying males in female categories. This is discriminatory and disastrous for GW. Not one of these NGBs appears to have considered applying the single sex sport or services exceptions in the Equality Act - why not? This discredits our national standing as a sporting nation.

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