

An Independent Regulator for Sport

The case for an Independent Regulator for Sport

Sport transforms lives. It can give girls and women resilience, courage, self-belief and a sense of belonging. It can deeply enhance physical and mental health IF it is safe and free from abuse. We must do everything we can to give women and girls these incredible experiences in sport, and they need to know where to turn if things go wrong.

Abuse in sport – whether it be physical, emotional, sexual, or a combination of all of these – disproportionately affects women and girls. There are too many distressing high profile cases to mention, in many different sports. But it is not only a problem at elite level: grassroots sport is affected too. Misogyny is the root cause.

Yet there is no independent body that the victims of this abuse can turn to.

Abuse in Sport

Sport is inherently physical, demanding close physical proximity and contact between athletes as well as between athletes, their coaches and medical staff. This creates an environment where there can be a clear risk of abuse.

The culture of sport also contributes. The high value society places on sport can create a mentality that prioritises winning over everything else. This allows successful individuals to build significant personal power in their sport, with the consequence that unacceptable behaviour is more likely to be tolerated.

In elite sport, this is magnified and the threat to the careers of people who do speak out is very real. A string of high-profile cases shows that this is a systemic problem not best countered on a sport-by-sport basis.

Women in Sport believes there should be an Independent Regulator for Sport focused on tackling abuse in all forms.



An Independent Regulator for Sport

Introducing an Independent Regulator with relevant expertise and no conflicting interests would create a system that everyone involved in sport could have full faith in.

It would make the whole of sport safer and build trust in the sector, not least amongst women and girls. Ensuring that women and girls feel safe, and are safe, in sport is a key factor in increasing participation and closing the gender sport and exercise gap.

The Independent Regulator for Sport should:

- Have responsibility for issues to do with abuse specifically, given that other bodies exist already to address doping, gambling, and match-fixing.
- Be both proactive and reactive, working with the sports sector to prevent abuse and investigating allegations of it.
- Be able to direct Governing Bodies to make changes as and when necessary.
- Be able to take complaints from individuals and Governing Bodies.
- Ensure sports and governments collaborate across the home nations by creating a UK-wide Regulator.

How is sport regulated?

Currently any victims of abuse can only make a complaint to the National Governing Body of their sport. These Governing Bodies are expected to govern everything in their sport; including upholding a sport's reputation while simultaneously exposing misconduct. This represents a clear conflict of interest.

Elite sport is already well-regulated for some issues, with established independent bodies to tackle specific issues like doping and, in the near future, the finances of men's football. And yet abuse, something that touches all sport at all levels, has no equivalent.

The story so far

2017: Duty of Care in Sport Review, chaired by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson, recommends an independent body to tackle abuse and embed a duty of care in sport.

2021: House of Lords National Plan for Sport and Recreation Committee does the same.

2023: UK Government launches a call for evidence on integrity in sport, including abuse.

2024: A General Election is called, before the then-Government had responded to the call for evidence. So, what now?

“The success of sport, in terms of helping people achieve their potential, making the most of existing talent, and attracting new people to sport relies on putting people – their safety, wellbeing and welfare – at the centre of what sport does.”

Foreword to the Duty of Care in Sport Review, Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson

Get in touch

To discuss an Independent Regulator for sport and our other policy positions, please email rachel@womeninsport.org

 @womeninsport

