

Evidence submitted to DCMS Committee by LGB Alliance - registered charity 1194148

Terms of reference

DCMS Committee is inviting written evidence on the following questions:

1. How can the growth in domestic women's football be accelerated?
2. What should other sports be learning from the growth of women's football leagues in the UK?
3. What is needed for women's sporting organisations to grow audiences and revenues?
4. What action is needed to tackle sexism and misogyny in sport?
5. What needs to change at a regulatory level to facilitate more parity between men's and women's sport?

Introduction

LGB Alliance was formed in October 2019 in response to the decision of Stonewall, once itself an LGB rights campaigning organisation, to ban any discussion on issues of sex and gender and how they relate to lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Specifically, there were serious concerns about Stonewall's unqualified adoption and promotion of the belief that everyone has a "gender identity" – a concept about which there is no scientific consensus – as separate from, and overriding, biological sex. We refer to this belief as "gender identity dogma".

LGB Alliance believes that gender identity dogma reinforces outdated and regressive stereotypes. We would like to see a world where any boy or girl, man or woman, can dress and be whoever they would like to be as long as they respect the rights of others.

LGB Alliance is a lesbian-led organisation. We have no wish to present lesbians as victims, but it is fair to say that in the UK in 2023 lesbians are among the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in society. They are targeted both as women, and – even more threatening to some – as women who are not sexually interested in men. Discrimination, verbal and physical abuse start at an early age and continue throughout life.

While there are many social facilities and programmes for both LGBT youth and other disadvantaged groups, nothing at all has been set up specifically for young lesbians.

In the prevailing culture, young lesbians are expected to blend into LGBT groups – where they hear it is "transphobic" to exclude males who "identify" as lesbians from their "dating pool". In some cases, young lesbians are exposed to pressure from online platforms and peer groups that lead them to believe they are trans. LGB Alliance hears directly from these young women who tell us they have been accused of "transphobia" for rejecting sexual relationships with males. That is one of the reasons for setting up LGB Alliance's helpline for young people. This important project has been fully scoped with the help of experts in the field and LGB Alliance will be applying for full funding later this year.

We believe all children and young people should be encouraged to get involved in sport: not only to build their physical and mental health but also to learn about teamwork, responsibility and leadership. For decades, lesbians in particular have found friendship, fun and refuge in sport. This is a sector in which no one expects them to conform to gender stereotypes. Sports activities and teams can provide a haven away from the sexualised imagery of women and the consequent expectations

imposed on women and girls regarding the “right” way to look. In addition, sports activities are valued highly by lesbians as social meeting places, since there are few other meeting places for women and girls only.

The problem of lesbian isolation is worse than ever today, with the continuing erasure of lesbians from language and from society. For a useful illustration of this erasure, we would like to quote the words of John Nicolson MP. In his evidence to the First Tier Tribunal hearing of MERMAIDS -v- CHARITY COMMISSION & LGB ALLIANCE, Mr Nicolson said: “I know what a lesbian is.” Later on, he clarified his view: “You identify as being a lesbian if you feel yourself to be a lesbian. Nobody examines your body or examines your genitalia before agreeing that you are a lesbian. So, call yourself a lesbian if you want to be a lesbian.”

It is Mr Nicolson’s view, and that of many taxpayer-funded QT+ groups, that men with penises can be lesbians and that these men should be admitted to what were previously single-sex spaces. Most lesbians naturally disagree (although many fear to say so out loud, for fear of being ostracised), seeing this as an unwarranted intrusion into a cherished space.

1. How can the growth in domestic women’s football be accelerated?

Start young

Invest money, promote, invite sponsorship

Build on the success of the Lionesses

Set up a UK wide chain of football (and other sports) academies for girls – especially in deprived areas for girls with fewer opportunities to join clubs

2. What should other sports be learning from the growth of women’s football leagues in the UK?

As above all sports must focus directly on encouraging girls and women to take part. LGB Alliance urges sports authorities to prioritise other sports like hockey, swimming, lacrosse, netball, and tennis. Girls are often enthusiastic participants in these sports until their teenage years, when interest falls dramatically. If targeted efforts were made to encourage continued participation – via cool kit, competitions, social media, mixing sport with social events and travel, girls may well stay involved for much longer.

3. What is needed for women’s sporting organisations to grow audiences and revenues?

Media to promote women’s and girls’ sports

Government influence: we support UK Sport’s Code of Sports Governance:

- *Increased skills and diversity in decision making, with a target of at least 30 per cent gender diversity on boards*
- *Greater transparency, for example publishing more information on the structure, strategy and financial position of the organisation.*
- *Constitutional arrangements that give boards the prime role in decision making.*

We support the above, with one exception: we reject the phrase “gender diversity” and urge that the word “sex” be used instead of “gender” for the sake of clarity. An immediate goal should be representatives on a board at 50:50 sex-based split between male and female.

Local councils should assess the practical needs and financial resources required to maintain clubs for girls. Pitch fees could be waived by local councils to support these clubs. Kit could be provided, though this can sometimes be covered by local fundraising. Indemnity insurance is one area of expense that could be absorbed by local councils, to give clubs, coaches and managers necessary protection and reassurance. (This relates to points made below regarding gender identity dogma.)

The following blog on kitlocker.com website is helpful in this respect:

<https://www.kitlocker.com/blog/the-true-costs-of-setting-up-a-grassroots-football-team/>. It contains a small study of 30 clubs in Sheffield and Hallamshire which details costs and issues relating to playing in winter and the differences between adult and child clubs. For example, kit for growing children needs to be replaced, whereas adults only require one set.

Other measures that could promote the participation of women and girls:

- Prime time TV slots for games
- Affordable tickets to games, family-friendly environment, commercial sponsorship

4. What action is needed to tackle sexism and misogyny in sport?

In our view, the biggest threat to girls and women wanting to take part in sport today is the campaign to be more “inclusive”. Campaigners use this seemingly positive word to promote the *inclusion* of boys and men who say they are girls and women in female sports. This strikes at the heart of female sports and could eventually destroy them. It disregards the reason sports are divided by sex – which is to ensure fairness and safety in women’s and girls’ sport. In other words, the innocuous word “inclusion” is used to promote rank misogyny.

It goes without saying that we need a zero-tolerance approach to sexism and misogyny in general, a serious focus on better safeguarding to eliminate abusers, and a genuine commitment to the continuation of single-sex sports and changing facilities.

But these key issues can only be addressed once sports authorities fully comprehend the threat posed to women and girl participants by the inclusion of males – regardless of “identity” – in schools and grassroots clubs. This “inclusiveness” eliminates fair competition in most sports, and in contact sports it also compromises safety. Women and girls (especially those belonging to particular faith groups) will be less likely to take part, the end result being not “inclusiveness” but self-exclusion. Women and girls will not participate in sports where they cannot excel or win (due to the unfair competition created by including men and boys) or where they are at threat of injury or exposed to the opposite sex in changing facilities.

Sport should be:

- A place where there is fairness and opportunity and that provide an environment for developing friendship groups outside family and school
- A place where there is equal opportunity and the chance for self-improvement through training and practice. Again, this relates to single-sex sports, and mixed-sex sport in schools and clubs up to age 12, prior to puberty.
- A place where there is a sense of social acceptance and an emphasis on health and strength and teamwork rather than conformity or “good looks”. This is of particular importance to girls, many of whom have severe problems with self-image. Pornography and online influencers display impossible role models and girls in particular suffer as a result. Eating disorders and self-hatred than can result in self-harm have been commonplace for many years, and sadly whilst eating disorders are becoming more common than the past among boys, girls are ten times more likely than boys to suffer from these disorders. And now we see the surge in girls seeking help at gender identity clinics, wanting to escape from the challenges of being a member of the “second sex”.

For more on eating disorders:

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/problems-disorders/anorexia-and-bulimia>

All children should be encouraged to be comfortable with their bodies. They also have a right to privacy and should not be forced to get changed in the company of the opposite sex. This is for clear safeguarding reasons, and applies to coaches and teammates. They should not have the burden of expressing their discomfort, or be made to accept someone of the opposite sex in their changing facility by adults.

Growing numbers of females report discomfort with having males in their changing rooms, the best-known example perhaps being the male-bodied swimmer Lia Thomas changing in the female locker room.

Hannah Mouncey from Australia provides another powerful example:

<https://www.outsports.com/2020/8/28/21402020/hannah-mouncey-trans-athlete-handball-aflw-locker-room-five-rings-podcast>

Children get a great deal of satisfaction and confidence when they perfect a taught skill, can see themselves improving, and can achieve goals.

Children have an innate sense of fairness. They understand without being taught whether they are participating in something that provides a fair chance of excelling – in other words, whether they are competing on a level playing field. If a boy competes on an all-female team the level playing field is removed, the risk of injury increases, and the chance of winning is largely out of reach.

We believe all this will lead to declining popularity and interest in sport among girls and women, and that their mental health and physical fitness will suffer as a result. One of the best opportunities for girls to build self-confidence and learn how to work as part of a team would be lost for ever.

Whilst in the UK, most sports are played on a single-sex basis, there are growing concerns that this is changing. If gender identity dogma – the view that anyone can identify as the opposite sex and should be treated as such – were to be accepted by sporting bodies, from community level upwards, we will eventually see the eradication of women's sports.

In the US we are seeing more and more examples of male-bodied athletes identifying as the opposite sex and competing directly with women – potentially taking their places at top level competitions like the Olympics – <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/01/sports/olympics/cece-telfer-olympic-trials.html>

The International Olympics Committee has announced that Paris 2024 will have more youth-focused events and will include “100% gender equality”. Given the confusion surrounding the word “gender”, we are unclear if this word is used here to refer to biological sex.

5. What needs to change at a regulatory level to facilitate more parity between men's and women's sport?

The short answer is that all sports regulators must recognise that unless women's sports can continue to be single-sex they will wither and die. Categories exist for good reasons. Some bodies – like World Rugby – have taken the right, evidence-based approach but elsewhere massive confusion persists at all levels of sport. LGB Alliance recommends that regulators simply follow the science – whilst avoiding ideology.

Evidence currently cited as “scientific” available ranges from studies conducted and centred on a personal bias (<https://www.outsports.com/2020/8/28/21405145/joanna-harper-world-rugby->

[transgender-athlete-ban-science-research-transphobia](https://www.bbc.com/sport/rugby-union/53476972)) to an extremely detailed “workshop” analysis (<https://www.bbc.com/sport/rugby-union/53476972>)

Since World Rugby published its ban on male-bodied athletes in the women’s game, a new study has been published:

<https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/55/11/577>

To summarise the conclusions of this study: the 15–31% athletic advantage that transwomen displayed over their female counterparts prior to starting gender affirming hormones declined with feminising therapy. However, transwomen still had a 9% faster mean run speed after the 1-year period of testosterone suppression that is recommended by World Athletics for inclusion in women’s events.

This confirms the unfair advantages males would have when participating with or against females. Girls are unlikely to be encouraged to participate in sport if they are not strictly single-sex. Parents are right to have concerns and should be able to raise these concerns without the risk of personal repercussions.

As well as following the science, Government (central and local) must clarify the Equality Act 2010 exemptions, making it clear to community clubs that it is entirely lawful for them to exclude competitors of the opposite sex and to keep their clubs single-sex. Doing so is “a proportionate way of achieving a legitimate aim”, to use the language of the Equality Act. Even so, staff and volunteers may fear a backlash from activists who continue to falsely insist that trans-identifying males are legally entitled to take part. Faced with the threat of “doxxing”, personal attacks and possible litigation, staff and volunteers could well decide to leave. Clubs at grassroots level rely on community support but if those who actively support them find themselves involved in difficult disputes, they may well give up altogether. Clarity is therefore essential.

Club managers and coaches who go ahead and include players of the opposite sex in single-sex teams risk injury, either to the trans player, to other teammates, or to players in the competing team. A female player who plays with or against boys – after the age of puberty – is at risk in football, rugby and other contact sports such as martial arts. A male player who plays with girls and against girls may injure their teammates or a member of the opposing team, besides which he would present a safeguarding risk.

We also wish to encourage the removal of sex-based stereotypes in sport by changing the language used in club materials and in the mainstream media. The Premier League is used to refer to the men’s game – but the women’s game is also Premier League. Why should the word “football” be used to refer only to the men’s game?

It is clear that boys learn from men – so we encourage all those involved in men’s sport to think before they speak. Here are a few illustrative comments made by boys about girls playing sports with them in the playground: “Girls are too weak,” “They are girly-girls,” “It’s a man’s game,” and “They’re too weak, fragile, short, and they might break a nail” (Oliver & Hamzeh, 2010).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281684552_The_body_physical_activity_and_inequity_earning_to_listen_with_girls_through_action

It might be helpful to remind people that the best-performing England footballers on the international stage in the last 60 years are female.

A massive issue that dominates all discussion of parity between men's and women's sport is money. The Premier League is big business with enormous payments to male players and coaches. The difference between what they are paid and their facilities, versus those applying to women demonstrates clear sexism. It was back on 5 December 1921 that the FA banned women from playing football. It is believed that this was because the success of the women's game, who played to raise money for charity, might divert paying spectators from FA games. This is the appalling history of the women's game. It is way past time for both Government and the FA to lead by example and ensure that male and female players receive the compensation they deserve. Until that happens, girls will grow up learning that they are second class citizens whose lives and careers are always worth less than those of boys.

There is an urgent need to provide girls-only centres of excellence where they can develop their sporting skills. Val Robinson paved the way with her residential sports centre for talented hockey players, as did Rachael Heyhoe Flint for talented cricketers. Talent scouts should be looking for our future female stars as well as male and providing the best possible facilities. Parity will never be achieved until this happens alongside serious investment in girls and women's sport.

IN CONCLUSION

LGB Alliance recognises the significant challenges faced by children and young people who do not conform to "gender stereotypes". Many of them will grow up to be lesbian, gay or bisexual. Today, many children and young people spend time online trying to work out who they are and where they may find a place where they feel they belong. How much better it would be for girls and boys to find a sense of belonging in sport. No pressure to conform, just fair competition and skills development.

WE RECOMMEND DCMS rejects gender identity dogma and makes clear to UK Sport that it is essential to continue to provide single-sex sports for the benefit of all women and girls – especially lesbians, whom we represent.

For more information, please go to:

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