

# STAMPING OUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SPORT



KYNISKA  
ADVOCACY

## IF YOU ONLY HAVE 5 MINUTES...

Sports environments create unique risks regarding the safety and welfare of participants. Whilst some progress has been made to protect children, far less has been done to protect those over 18, far too little has been done in the UK to protect sportspeople from abuse. The paltry progress made to date is not due to a lack of guidance. The Duty of Care in Sport report, published in 2017 made numerous recommendations, but most have been ignored.

For too long, government has failed to act and NGBs have moved too slowly when it comes to protecting adults from sexual violence in sport. Current policies and resources to prevent sexual violence are patchy and inconsistent, and there is a lack of faith in the system.

Safeguarding and welfare must be a priority regardless of where in the UK you live or the sport you partake in.

The UK governments must urgently address this problem. From Sports Councils, to sports clubs, change is required. As we will show, both cultural and structural issues exist. For the most part, National Governing Bodies remain responsible for both organising their sport and regulating it. There is an irrefutable conflict of interest with this system.

## WHY IS SEXUAL VIOLENCE PREVALENT IN SPORT?

There are significant power imbalances within relationships in sport. A “success at all costs” mentality within many sports can mean that extreme and abusive coaching techniques can be tolerated or even praised as inspiration or ground-breaking, if they deliver medals. Blind eyes are turned towards inappropriate behaviour or rumours about coaches or management, if their work is viewed as pivotal to success.

There remains a culture within some sports which accommodates verbal, physical and even sexually abusive behaviour in the guise of “banter”, “initiations” or “team-bonding”. Whilst the professionalisation of many sports has seen much of this behaviour eliminated, in amateur, grassroots, school, and university sport, incidents of abusive behaviour are still seen as part of the culture. Though cases are regularly reported, many more instances are seen as a normal part of the sporting experience[i].

Small NGBs do not have the funds to operate effective and adequate safeguarding and welfare programmes. Reported costs of safeguarding within UK Athletics from 2021-22 were in the region of half a million that year alone, with the cost of running the safeguarding and welfare team coming to £257,000, the cost of counselling and psychology sessions for individuals being around £22,000, and the legal costs of reviewing policies and case panels coming to £248,000. UKA have undergone a significant transition and development within the area of safeguarding following an internal, but independent review in that commenced in 2019/20.



## WHAT HAS TO CHANGE?

### 1. **Independent body for duty of care and safeguarding in sport**

As was recommended to the government in 2017 by Baroness Grey-Thompson in her Duty of Care in Sport Review[i], it is vital that an independent body be created to tackle all forms of abuse, and ensure high levels of duty of care in sport.

### 2. **Mandatory reporting of sexual abuse and misconduct to the police and independent body for sport**

Currently, there is no statutory requirement for individuals working in sports organisations to report known or suspected child sexual or physical abuse to the local authority, or the police in appropriate circumstances, for independent assessment. We believe a statutory duty to report these concerns on reasonable grounds must be introduced to sports personnel who have personal responsibility for the children in their care.

### 3. **Ringfenced funding for safeguarding and welfare from Sports Councils.**

We propose that Sports Councils require that a percentage of their funding is dedicated to implementing robust safeguarding and athlete welfare systems at all levels of the sport. At present, NGBs have autonomy over how and where they can use the money they receive. By ensuring that there are specific funds for safeguarding and athlete welfare, NGBs can ensure that they have full-time welfare officers who are always paid.

### 4. **National coaches licensing scheme and register**

While individual NGBs have largely put in place both licensing schemes and coaching registers (for example British Fencing[iii]), the Duty of Care in Sport Review concluded that “more work is needed around checking whether self-employed individuals have the appropriate qualifications and security checks to work in sport... to assist with this, a national coach licensing scheme should be considered, with the creation of a register of licensed coaches.”[iv]

### 5. **Lifetime bans for abusive coaches**

All sports should implement a policy of implementing lifetime bans for coaches proven, through a disciplinary process, to have committed physical, sexual or emotional/psychological abuse, even without a criminal case. Currently, most NGBs use the ‘balance of probabilities’ threshold for disciplinary proceedings, which is lower than that used in criminal courts (‘beyond a reasonable doubt’). More athletes will be protected as a result of lifetime bans being issued.

## OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

- **An independent body for duty of care and safeguarding in sport.**
- **Mandatory reporting of sexual abuse and misconduct.**
- **Ringfenced Sports Council funding for safeguarding and athlete welfare.**
- **A national coaches licensing scheme and register**
- **Lifetime bans for abusive coaches in cases of any form of abuse.**



- [i] Child Abuse in Sport: European Statistics UK National Report The prevalence of interpersonal violence against children (IVAC) inside and outside sport in the UK, Report authored by Melanie Lang, Mike Hartill & Daniel Sage.
- [ii] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/duty-of-care-in-sport-review>
- [iii] Children's Commissioner report 'Protecting children from harm' (2015) stated: Only 1 in 8 children who are sexually abused are identified by professionals
- [iv] British Fencing (2020) Accredited Coaches [COACH REGISTER - BRITISH FENCING]
- [v] Grey-Thompson, Tanni (2017) Duty of Care in Sport Review [Duty of Care in Sport Review - GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk))]

## **WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THE ONGOING SUPPORT OF:**

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