

2021-2022

Kyniska Advocacy



**ANNUAL  
REPORT**

YEAR 1 OF KYNISKA ADVOCACY

# FORWARD

*A message from our Founders*

Being young co-founders is hard. We're 'too young', 'inexperienced', 'too outspoken' and often underestimated. There have been times where our age has been used against us. But, we know that's our USP: we're athletes on the ground, listening to our peers and amplifying their voices. We're unapologetically telling the story straight - telling it as it should be - that women are not on a level playing field in sport. Women are not sufficiently protected, respected, and celebrated in sport. That's the problem we're trying to solve, with efficient and effective solutions.

We've had a number of big wins this year. We changed our first national policy, gained considerable media coverage around our campaigns, and had our first mention in Westminster. This has all been a part of our 'building phase', creating a name for ourselves and becoming a trusted voice for women athletes across the UK.

Moving into year two, our aim is to build on this momentum and lay down strong roots and structures that will add resilience to our organisation. We are steadfast in ensuring Kyniska has equality and equity at its core.

COVID-19 has exaggerated many of the gendered inequalities we see in sport. We know that women had less access to sports facilities for training purposes during the pandemic and women had fewer opportunities to compete. For example, elite women's sport was out of action for 664 more days than men's sport during the pandemic, highlighting the continued prioritisation of men's sport, over and above women's sport. It may also have had a worrying disruption to the growing momentum of women's sport.



KATE SEARY & MHAIRI MACLENNAN

As we look to the future, we must try to understand the issues that we may face and work to prevent them. For instance, with women's right to abortion under threat in some nations, we must work to support women in other ways such as ensuring paid maternity leave in sporting contracts and securing more stable sports contracts for women.

Largely, our work streams will be decided by our Kyniska Women, following the issues that are the most pressing for women athletes in the UK right now. We've promised to be athlete led, and that isn't about to change.

Finally, a big thank you to all of the individuals and organisations who have supported us, and more importantly, challenged us to be better. We value your insights, lived experiences and steer as we embark on this journey.

*Kate & Mhairi*



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## BIG WINS

MAY 21'  
KYNISKA  
LAUNCH

#METOO  
TELEGRAPH

UK  
ATHLETICS  
OVERALL  
WELFARE  
POLICIES

KYNISKA  
NAMED IN  
WEST-  
MINSTER

JAN 22'  
FEMALE  
ATHLETE  
HEALTH  
PANEL

MAR 22'  
RECLAIMING  
THE ATHLETIC  
AESTHETIC  
CAMPAIGN

APR 22''  
STAMPING  
OUT SEXUAL  
VIOLENCE  
REPORT



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LIKE THE WORK WE'RE DOING?  
HELP US TO DO MORE!

# PROJECTS

There are many avenues we could have explored with Kyniska Advocacy, however with such a small team, we needed to prioritise the issues we tackled this year.

We decided on two key project groups: 'Stamping Out Sexual Violence in Sport' and 'Re-Claiming the Athletic Aesthetic: Understanding Female Athlete Health'.

## STAMPING OUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SPORT

Preventing sexual violence in sport will always be a topic close to our hearts at Kyniska, and is in many ways the reason why we set up our organisation, to fight for women in sport.

In February 2021, we launched our first campaign to improve policies around safeguarding and welfare in athletics. After a coach was only given a 5 year ban for sexual abuse of athletes, we wrote an open letter to call on UK Athletics to implement permanent, lifetime bans for coaches found guilty of sexual abuse of athletes. After 2000 athletes from across the globe signed the petition, UK Athletics changed their policy to include lifetime bans for coaches found guilty of sexual abuse and misconduct. This policy has now been put into place with several individuals receiving lifetime bans from the sport, setting a precedent for any similar cases. As recommended, they have also decided to review all historical safeguarding cases that did not end in permanent ban.

We have continued to work with UK Athletics, as well as Welsh Athletics, Scottish Athletics, Northern Ireland Athletics & England Athletics to overhaul their welfare and safeguarding procedures. They have introduced new safeguarding officers, introduced an athlete-led safeguarding and welfare panel (of which Kyniska is a member), and made the reporting process easier. As part of this workstream, we were asked to take part in the Telegraph Women's Sport '#MeToo' special investigation into issues of sexual abuse in sport.



Source: Telegraph Women's Sport

Kyniska also had its first mention in Westminster as Gavin Newlands MP questioned the sports minister over their responsibility to ensure governing bodies are protecting women in sport from abuse.

Our work has now turned to influencing policy sport-wide. Due to the structure of sporting governing bodies in the UK, there are inconsistencies in welfare and safeguarding. We believe that women should be safe regardless of their sport, or which UK nation they live in, and so we have developed recommendations to improve safeguarding and welfare to be implemented by all sporting governing bodies.

# PROJECTS



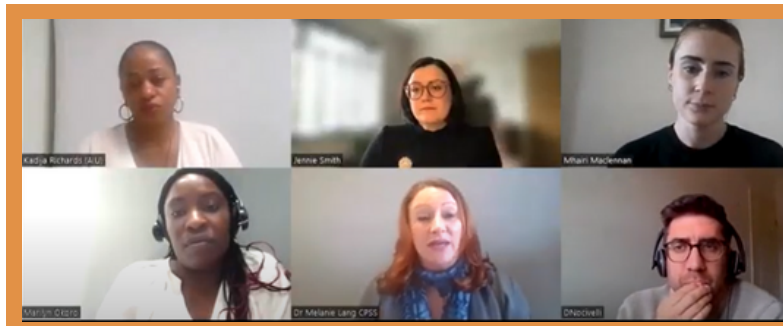
## STAMPING OUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SPORT CONTINUED

In April 2022, we launched our report 'Stamping Out Sexual Violence in Sport' which included 5 recommendations to policy makers and National Governing Bodies of sport. To develop our recommendations, we worked with athletes and leading specialists in safeguarding, welfare, and abuse in sport law. The report gained national media attention from the BBC, The Telegraph, and The Guardian. We are now in contact with all of the national governing bodies and the UK's sports ministers to implement these recommendations.



A huge part of creating a culture in sport that protects women is educating everyone who exists in the sporting arena. Speaking with athletes and parents, we realised that many people do not know the signs of abuse, and only realised the signs of abuse long after their abuse took place. If athletes, parents, and coaches knew the signs of abuse, there is a higher chance that more athletes would be supported.

To tackle the education gap, we created a welfare toolkit which was distributed within sporting national governing bodies and appears online. The toolkit describes the signs of abuse from an abuser, but also signs to look out for in athletes who are being abused. It also includes information on the reporting process, as well as useful helplines for support.



Furthermore, we held a free panel event on 'Stamping Out Sexual Violence in Sport' to discuss the recommendations in our report and also educate decision makers on the scale of the issue in sport. We welcomed Dr Melanie Lang (Researcher), Kadija Richards (Athletics Integrity Unit), Dino Nocivelli (Leigh Day), Marilyn Okoro (Olympian) and Jennie Smith (Safeguarding Today) to our panel. They spoke from personal and professional experience and emphasised the desperate need for change in sport, across the UK, both at a grassroots level, and at policy level.

# PROJECTS

## FEMALE ATHLETE HEALTH

We have noticed a lack of knowledge from coaches, parents, and athletes themselves, about the role female athlete health has on sporting performance. As a result of this, women's sport is plagued with mental health issues, poor body image, and high drop out rates for young girls. It also means that the quality of coaching for women suffers due to the lack of knowledge and research on the female athlete body.



Our project on female athlete health was the first campaign dreamed up and led by a project group made up of ambassadors and our Kyniska Intern. As a young athlete, our intern, Anna Hedley, was able to give a fresh perspective on the issue and guide us as to how to communicate with athletes struggling with the biological impacts on performance as a young woman in sport.

Our goal for this project is mandatory education for all coaches in all sports on female athlete health. We have recently been consulting on British Athletics' review of their coaching qualifications. Previously, female athlete health was not included in coaching qualifications. We are delighted that female athlete health is a prominent topic in the proposed qualifications moving forward. British Athletics including the topic is a brilliant start to reaching this goal.

Educating coaches is vital, but we also need to educate parents and athletes too. We hosted a free educational panel event on female athlete health to help bridge the knowledge gap about male and female athlete bodies. Over 80 people attended from a variety of sporting backgrounds and we received great feedback on the usefulness of the event. We were honoured to be joined by female athlete health specialists Dr Natalie Brown and Melissa Lodge, as well as Olympian Marilyn Okoro and young athlete Issy Kyson.



# PROJECTS

## FEMALE ATHLETE HEALTH CONTINUED

In addition to this, we launched a successful, interactive social media campaign. 'Re-claiming the Athletic Aesthetic' ran during Eating Disorder Awareness Week 2022. Search 'athletic' on any site, you will find one body type - slim, toned and white. We are told by billboards, newspapers and TV that we should aspire to this 'athletic' body. Our campaign encouraged athletes to reclaim the athletic aesthetic for every body type. This included posting a photo with the hashtag #AthleticAesthetic to change how athlete's bodies are perceived and improve diversity. The campaign was hugely successful with hundreds of athletes taking place. We saw the biggest impact of our social media posts so far, with single posts receiving a reach of over 19,000 accounts, and over 22,000 impressions.



We took the opportunity to educate on this important issue through collaboration with athlete writers and athlete-led organisations. We joined up with Pippa Woolven, founder of Project Red-S, as well as athletes, Issy Kyson, Jessica Robson (Scottish Athletics Youth Advisory Panel), and Alice Perkins, who bravely shared their experiences of body image and female athlete health in their sporting careers. Our ambassadors and interns also contributed to a written piece which appeared in Athletics Weekly.



# OUR TEAM

## AMBASSADORS & WORKFORCE

This year, we have been fortunate to learn from athletes across the country who have volunteered their time to shape the direction of Kyniska Advocacy and make us a truly athlete-led organisation.

We have 9 ambassadors from a variety of sports, including Swimming, Athletics, Triathlon, Tennis, Hockey and Motorsport. Our Ambassadors come from different levels in sport, from Olympic and Paralympic level to grassroots. We have athletes who are just starting their careers and some individuals who have recently retired. This diversity gives us a unique look into sport in the UK.

Our Ambassadors have varying roles. Some have become members of our project groups, working on sexual violence in sport and female athlete health, others have appeared on our panel events, written articles and supported our social media campaigns.



Early in our Kyniska journey, we wanted to give athletes a platform to speak out about issues they face in sport. To do this, we set up our 'Female Gaze' blog where we host guest writers who respond to current events and tell their stories. Topics have included competing through the menopause, eating disorder awareness, gendered elite sportswear, the pressures of social media, and athlete motherhood.

We have also grown our communications team and now have two content creators, a resident writer and a poet-in-residence. The team transforms our work into powerful, accessible messages and ensures that they reach wide audiences. We have seen a stark improvement in our social media engagement since our communications team formed.

Source: Include Summit







# OUR TEAM

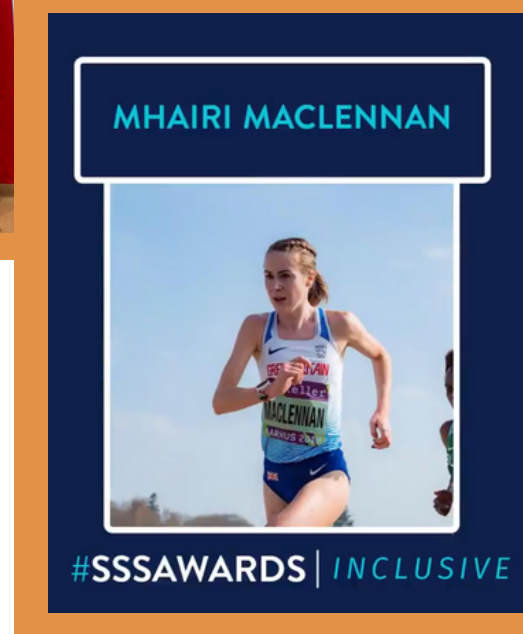
## AMBASSADORS & WORKFORCE CONTINUED

Finally, we launched an internship position within Kyniska Advocacy. This is targeted towards a young athlete to give them valuable work experience, as well as feeding into our knowledge of the issues our younger athletes are facing. We wanted our intern to learn valuable skills for the future and so she steered the vision of our project on female athlete health, participated in meetings with key stakeholders and presented at our live panel event.

We are delighted that we can give young athletes the opportunity to grow, network, and make real change. It is important to us that we can provide opportunities to upskill athletes away from their sporting arena.

However, we are in the position where our roles are voluntary. We think it is crucial that women are paid for their work, and so we are working towards financial security to ensure this can happen. We are incredibly grateful for those individuals who have given their time to Kyniska Advocacy.

Our team has been honoured to receive a number of awards for our work, none of which could be possible without our volunteers. In 2021, Co-Founder Mhairi MacLennan won the Scottish Student Sport Inclusion Award. Co-Founder Kate Seary won a Women of the Future Award for services to sport.



# TO THE FUTURE



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## KYNISKA BOARD

Moving forward into year two, we will be forming a board of directors for Kyniska Advocacy. A board will ensure the organisation's prosperity by collectively directing the company's affairs, while meeting the appropriate interests of our stakeholders. The introduction of a full board will be invaluable in seeking legal and financial advice for our fundraising efforts, as well as adding a layer of accountability and transparency for our finances.

## DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

To be truly athlete-led, we need to hear the voices of women athletes from all backgrounds. Currently, the diversity of our team and ambassadors is not sufficient. We know that we need to do better. As a new organisation, we have the opportunity to ensure equality and equity is embedded in our structure, and lead the way on diversity and inclusion.

This can start by ensuring our new cohort of ambassadors and our board are representative of society. A big part of this will be improving our outreach to Black and Ethnic Minority and LGBTQ+ communities and disabled people.

We also wish to create stronger relationships within a wider range of sports. Due to our Co-Founders being runners, our strongest audience has been athletics. However, our organisation is for women in all sports. Again, the diversity of our ambassadors and the organisations in which we collaborate will help us to share our message with many more different types of athletes.

## AMBASSADOR PROGRAMME

It has been incredibly valuable to have the input of our ambassadors in our work. So far, our ambassadors have flexibility with how much work they wish to do with us around their other commitments. However, we think that a more structured approach in the future could benefit the organisation and our ambassadors. Moving forward, we are looking to create different 'tiers' for our ambassadors to allow those who would like to do more work on our projects to do so. We would also like to introduce a year long programme so that we are hearing new voices every year.

## FINANCIAL SECURITY

So far, our founders and wider team are working voluntarily. We are incredibly proud of what we have achieved with limited time and resources, but we know how much more we could be doing with a full-time working team. We also believe it is important to pay women for their brilliant work and we are striving to be able employ women in sport in the near future.

A key part of our work over the next year will be to secure financial support as a non-profit organisation. To help with this aim, we have brought on a new member of the team to help our fundraising efforts.

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