

EMERALD STUDIES IN SPORT AND GENDER



GENDER EQUITY IN UK SPORT LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

EDITED BY PHILIPPA VELIJA AND LUCY PIGGOTT

Gender Equity in UK Sport Leadership and Governance

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Gender Equity in UK Sport Leadership and Governance

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Philippa dedicates this book to Mollie, Merida, Eva, Gabriella and Antonia; the Velija and Kekic Little Women, who I know we will go onto to do wonderful things - I can't wait to see and be a part of those journeys.

Lucy dedicates this book to Dr Anita White OBE, a true and tireless trailblazer in the women and sport movement who continues to inspire the next generation of women sport leaders.

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Introduction

Philippa Velija and Lucy Piggott

As we were editing this text, a high-profile example emerged of why a text on gender and sport leadership and governance is needed. Yoshiro Mori, the head of the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Committee, resigned in February 2021 after making derogatory comments about women in meetings. He had complained during a Japanese Olympic Committee meeting that talkative women make meetings ‘drag on too long’ (McCurry, 2021). He went on to say that if one woman speaks, they then all feel the need to speak, suggesting this as a reason for limiting the number of women in meetings. Whilst this example is located within the culturally specific context of Japan, which has a long history of leadership positions being dominated by men across its society, it is also situated within the internationally focused Olympic Movement and reflects similar examples of discrimination towards women sport leaders that have been reported by researchers across the world, including within the United Kingdom (UK). This high-profile case simultaneously highlights a changing sport governance landscape as well as the ongoing issues that impact upon women working in the leadership and governance of the sector. On the one hand, the global media attention that resulted from Mori’s comments, and his subsequent resignation, demonstrates how these comments are now publicly and globally viewed by many as being unacceptable. On the other hand, the fact that the comments were made in the first place demonstrates the everyday sexism that women continue to face within sport governance. Mori resigned because his comments were made public, but this draws our attention to the fact that there is ongoing resistance to women’s involvement in sport governance. There are, then, many reasons why a book like this is needed: to challenge the perception that equity has been achieved, to reflect on progress and change over a long-term process and to highlight the ongoing experiences of women in the sport sector. When we discussed what a text on *Gender Equity and UK Sport Leadership and Governance* should include, we wanted to bring together a text that would engage people in thinking about gender equity and make visible the everyday experiences of women working in the sector. To do this, we wanted to synthesise theoretical and evidence-based chapters that identify some of the ongoing inequalities in the sector.

To date, only two edited texts have focused on scholarship on gender and equity in sport governance – [Burton and Leberman \(2017\)](#) and [Elling, Hovden,](#)

and Knoppers (2019) – and both provide a broader context outside of the UK. We decided to bring together the work of scholars who have knowledge or research experience specific to the UK context into one collection. This includes: critical analyses of current strategy, policy, structure and practice across the contexts of the four home nations that form the UK; theoretical discussions of how we can think differently about gender relations in UK sport governance to uncover unexplored organisational practices that continue to contribute to gender inequity; and evidence-based suggestions on how to create change within the sector through future research and applied practice. In this introductory chapter, we highlight the importance of the topic, outline existing literature in the field, contextualise key terms used throughout the book and provide readers with an explanation of the organisation and structure of sport in the UK.

Why Is a Book on Gender Equity in UK Sport Governance Still Needed?

In response to increased professionalisation, commercialisation and accountability requirements for public funding in the sport sector, UK sport organisations have been placed under increased pressure to demonstrate ‘good governance’ in recent years. This reflects a process of transformation whereby national governing bodies (NGBs) have moved ‘from volunteer driven entities to those experiencing the forces of commercialisation and the infusion of paid staff to fulfil roles historically performed by volunteers’ (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2015, p. 492). *Sport England and UK Sport* (2016, p. 4) stress that those entrusted with decision-making positions within the sport sector, therefore,

...need to constitute and equip themselves in a manner that allows them to thrive in this shifting environment ... to protect the value for money the public receives from investment into sport and maximise the effectiveness of those investments.

Both scholars and practitioners are increasingly arguing the benefits of gender-balanced sport boards for a range of meritocratic, democratic and social justice reasons. Meritocratic arguments include that increased representation of women positively impacts upon: improved organisational performance, access to the widest talent pool, more informed decision-making, and creative and forward-thinking boards (Childs, 2016; *Women in Sport*, 2015a; *Women on Boards UK*, 2011). Democratic arguments are based on claims that gender-balanced sport governance achieves a legitimacy that is more representative of the people it represents (i.e., stakeholders within the sport sector) and is, therefore, in a better position to respond to the needs of the ‘market’ (Szydlo, 2015). And finally, social justice arguments include that gender parity in sport governance is a matter of fairness, human rights and a key dimension in achieving gender justice (Hovden, Knoppers, & Elling, 2019; Whisenant, Pedersen, & Obenour, 2002). Whilst there has historically been an underrepresentation of women in UK sport governance,

Table 1 highlights how female representation has improved on the boards of publicly funded NGBs over the last decade, reflecting changing behaviours and opportunities for women. Whilst the representation of female board members in sport organisations has increased, there remain variations across sports and across the four home countries. This highlights some of the ongoing challenges to female representation that this book seeks to address.

As Table 1 shows, there is a lack of consistency of data collected on gender representation in UK sport governance across the four home countries, with notable gaps in data from organisations outside of England.

Chapters within this book highlight that there is still some way to go in achieving gender equity in UK sport governance as well as illustrating the lack of diversity and the need to address the issue through an intersectional lens. From a historical perspective, Nicholson (Chapter 3) stresses the need to better understand the historic processes and practices (particularly mergers) that have shaped

Table 1. Female Board Members on the Board of Sport Organisations in the UK between 2010 and 2019.

Year	Sample	No. of Organisations	Average % of Female Board Members
2010	Sport England funded NGBs*		20%
2012	Sport England funded NGBs*		22%
2013	Sport England funded NGBs*		23%
2014	Sport England funded NGBs*		27%
2015	Sport England funded NGBs*	47	30%
	Sport England and UK Sport funded NGBs and partners*	62	29%
2016	Sport England funded NGBs**	53	30%
	UK Sport funded organisations	17	37%
	Sport Wales high-funded organisations ¹	27	33%
	Sport Wales low-funded organisations	16	25%
	Scottish NGBs		29%
2017	Scottish NGBs**		31%
2019	Sport England and UK Sport funded NGBs and partners****	63	40%

Note: * Women in Sport (2015b); ** Women in Sport (2017); *** National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (2018); **** Sport England and UK Sport (2019); NGB: National Governing Bodies.

¹Sport Wales provides a high level of funding to 27 organisations and a low level of funding to 16 organisations. These two groups are considered separately.

the contemporary cultures of UK NGBs. This can help to inform the continued challenges facing many merged NGBs in achieving gender equity within their governance. At the policy level, various authors discuss continued challenges in how policy is implemented and how it translates at the everyday level. This includes noncompliance from some NGBs with gender representation targets that are part of governance rules in English sport (see Piggott, Chapter 4). At the cultural level, Preston and Velija (Chapter 8) discuss findings that women continue to experience the English Football Association (The FA) as an exclusionary space due to intersecting forms of power continuing to privilege men and masculinity. Clayton-Hathway (Chapter 9) explores governance and leadership in the context of horse racing. Furthermore, theoretically positioned chapters highlight the importance of drawing upon different theoretical perspectives, including critical/queer theory (see Knoppers, Chapter 1) and intersectional frameworks (see Simpkins, Chapter 2) to make visible and question organisational processes that may contribute to the exclusion of women and minorities.

Definitions of Key Terms

In this section, we define the key terms and concepts utilised by authors throughout this book, not only to aid understanding of the key issues discussed throughout the text but also to provide our understanding of the terms that are often used interchangeably to provide conceptual clarity.

Gender Equality versus Gender Equity

The terms gender equality and gender equity are often used interchangeably, despite having different meanings and requiring different approaches when they are implemented through policy or strategy. Gender equality is concerned with ‘sameness’ and treating men and women equally (Coakley & Pike, 2014). This includes equal treatment in laws and policies and promoting equal access to resources and services. The concept of gender equality has been criticised by feminists because ‘treating women and men in the same way does not give them equal opportunity because they start from different points’ (Skirstad, 2009, p. 12).

Criticisms of gender equality have led others to argue that men and women should be treated differently to achieve equality of outcome (Skirstad, 2009). This is known as gender equity, which ‘denotes fairness and justice in the distribution of opportunities, responsibilities, and benefits available to men and women, and the strategies and processes used to achieve gender equality’ (Sotiriadou & de Haan, 2019, p. 367). For example, gender equity is the focus of positive action through strategies such as gender/diversity quotas, always shortlisting a woman when recruiting for leadership positions or having women-only leadership programmes or mentoring schemes (including schemes and programmes for minority women). These strategies and policies are focused on achieving equality of outcome for a diversity of men and a diversity of women. Whilst the terms gender equality and gender equity are used by authors throughout the different chapters

of this book depending on the focus of the chapter, they are not used interchangeably and are explained by the authors. For instance, in Chapter 12, Renfree, Burgess and Jones provide an example of how to engage Generation Z in gender equality and sport governance.

Governance/Leadership

As with gender equality/equity, governance and leadership are terms that are sometimes used interchangeably within the sport literature. Governance is concerned with ‘the system by which the elements of an organisation are directed, controlled and regulated’ (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007, p. 3). Sport governance is, therefore, the responsible management of sport and all its components across clubs, educational institutions, NGBs, government agencies, sport service organisations and professional teams (Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2009). This includes the implementation of planning, policy and strategy and is more than simply the day-to-day management of the organisation.

The governance of most UK sport organisations is led by two key groups of leaders. First, the board of directors is the highest decision-making level within the governance of UK sport organisations. Boards are voluntary and typically concerned with the development of strategy to improve or maintain the organisation’s performance. Second, the executive/senior leadership/management team is typically a team of paid employees who head the different departments of the organisation and are led by a chief executive officer (CEO) or equivalent role. The role of this team is to lead and make operational decisions on the delivery of the strategy of the organisation which has been agreed by the board.

Whereas governance is concerned with the systematic workings of organisations, leadership relates to the positions, behaviours and interactions of individuals. The term leadership has many meanings and can mean different things for different people. The concept of leadership can, for example, refer to: a trait or behaviour (a leadership style); a transactional event to achieve a common goal, such as rewarding or punishing a follower based on their performance (a leadership process); or a formal organisational role of an individual (a leadership position; Northouse, 2010; Western, 2008). Western (2008, p. 23) describes leadership as ‘a certain type of social interaction between people’ and a leader as ‘a person who has influence over others’. For Thorpe and Gold (2010), leadership is an ‘activity that is visionary, creative, inspirational, energising and transformational’ (p. 3).

Chapters within this book cover topics relating to gender equity in both sport governance and sport leadership. Some chapters present discussions that are solely focused on leadership, such as Booth (Chapter 10) who uses the findings and recommendations from her research to outline how a model of everyday leadership can challenge the inequalities in UK sporting systems. Some chapters discuss issues relating specifically to governance, such as Dennehy (Chapter 6) who examines gender power relations that drive governance and sport in Scotland. And other chapters discuss both leadership and governance, such as Renfree, Burgess and

Jones (Chapter 12), who present a case study of a collaborative project (the Gender Equality Toolkit for Generation Z) as part of their discussion on how to engage Generation Z in understanding and challenging gender inequality in sport leadership and governance.

Targets/Quotas

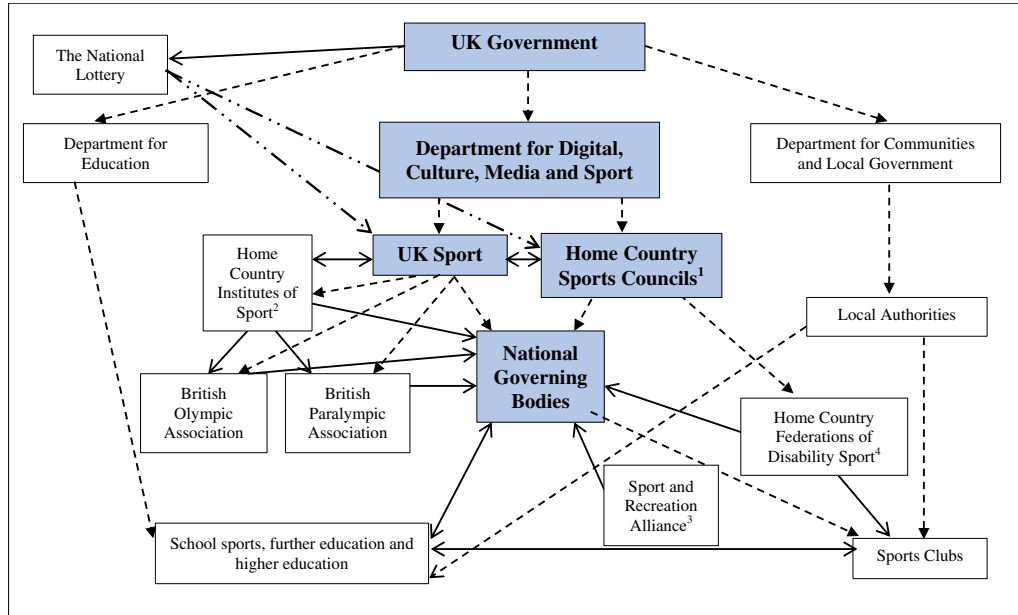
Both gender targets and gender quotas are discussed in various chapters within this book. Whilst both have the aim of increasing female representation in sport leadership and governance according to a requirement of a minimum number/percentage of women or of each gender, they are two distinctly different approaches. They also have different strengths and limitations. The key difference between the two approaches is that targets are voluntary and aspirational, whereas quotas are mandatory (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014). Due to their voluntary and aspirational nature, targets can allow organisations to take more time to focus more on the process of sustainably committing to achieving minimum gender representation as there are no sanctions if the target is not achieved (Sport England & UK Sport, 2016). In contrast, the mandatory nature of quotas places pressure on organisations to achieve a gender representation outcome by a certain deadline. This can make the actions of these organisations more outcome-focused rather than process-focused and are sometimes negatively referred to as ‘tick-box exercises’.

Despite their limitations, quotas have been found to be a more effective method of increasing gender representation compared to targets. Piggott (2021) compared Norwegian and English sport governance policy and noted a key difference in the approaches of the two countries. Whilst English sport governance policy has a relatively short history of implementing gender targets, Norway was the first country to implement gender quotas to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in sport. It is no coincidence that Norway has long been a world leader in female representation in sport governance. In 2020, average female representation was 44% across the boards of Norwegian sport federations. Within this book, the issues of quotas are discussed by Liston (Chapter 5) in her discussion on gender and sport governance in Northern Ireland.

The Organisation and Structure of UK Sport Governance

The governance of sport in the UK is complex. There are different power and funding relationships that exist at various levels of sport governance, and organisations hold different levels of autonomy and power. The key organisations involved in the governance of sport in the UK, and their relationships to each other, are presented in Fig. 1.

The stakeholders highlighted in blue (grey in printed version) in Fig. 1 are the most influential stakeholders within UK sport governance, and we will introduce the role of each of these in turn.



- > Lines of funding with responsibility
- > Partnerships of responsibility without funding
- - - -> Lines of funding without responsibility

1. Sport England, SportScotland, Sport Wales and Sport Northern Ireland
2. The English Institute of Sport, the SportScotland Institute of Sport, the Sport Wales Institute and the Sports Institute Northern Ireland.
3. The representative body for national sport organisations in the UK.
4. Activity Alliance (England), Scottish Disability Sport, Disability Sport Wales and Disability Sports NI.

Fig. 1. Key Stakeholders of UK Sport Governance.

UK Government

The department in government responsible for overseeing sport policy and funding is the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in the amount of funding that DCMS has channelled into the sport sector, with a major reason for this being the introduction of the National Lottery in 1994. Such increased funding has meant that the UK Government has increased power over the sport organisations it funds, including the power to demand higher governance standards from organisations in receipt of public funding. Prior to this, the sport sector was dominated by powerful bodies beyond the direct control of the Government, such as private clubs and NGBs (Houlihan & Lindsey, 2013). The UK Government devolves its power in the sport sector to two quasi-autonomous nongovernmental organisations (quangos): UK Sport and Sport England.

UK Sport

The UK Sports Council (UK Sport) forms part of the former British Sports Council alongside the four Home Country Sports Councils (HCSCs). UK Sport receives £150 million of public funds each year and has a primary focus on the management and distribution of funds for high performance sport (UK Sport, 2017). A significant way in which UK Sport exerts executive power over the governance of sport organisations is through its process of awarding funding to NGBs of Olympic and Paralympic sports. Good practice for governance and leadership is a key performance indicator (KPI) which is used by UK Sport to determine which NGBs are eligible for receipt of funding (UK Sport, 2014). The most recent example of this is the publication of the latest national sport governance code, *A Code for Sports Governance*, in 2016 (Sport England & UK Sport, 2016). This strategy will be explained and discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 (Piggott, 2021).

Home Country Sports Councils

The four HCSCs are made up of Sport England, SportScotland, Sport Wales and Sport Northern Ireland. Although there are slight differences between the four Sports Councils that are specific to each home country, they all have the same basic principles and responsibilities: the management and distribution of public investment to increase sport participation in all areas of society, the development and nurturing of talent and investment in sport facilities (Sport England, 2021; Sport Northern Ireland, 2021; SportScotland, 2021; Sport Wales, 2021). In this text, gender and sport governance is explored across the four home countries, showing similarities in representation and policy, but also drawing out the different political and social cultural contexts in each of the home nations. In Chapter 4, Piggott analyses the development of gender equity policy in English sport governance. She draws on Bourdieu as a theoretical perspective to critically analyse the extent to which sport organisations have complied with this policy to