

# TROPHY WOMEN? 2015

NO MORE BOARD GAMES



**WOMEN  
N  
SPORT**



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# FOREWORD



Two years ago I joined Women in Sport; an enthusiastic new Chief Executive. On my second day in post, I attended an event for Chief Executives and Chairs in the sport sector. I began scanning the room for people who I could identify with, but there were very few; the room was full of men. That day I saw, and felt, the challenge ahead.

At Women in Sport we care about leadership teams and sport optimises this - from team captains to Olympic and Paralympic champions, leaders are at the heart of our greatest successes. But how do we fare away from the field of play? Behind the scenes, where money is invested, strategies created, and where the

future of sport lives each day, are we doing ourselves justice as a sector?

You don't really need a piece of research - though much exists - to know that the more diverse your leadership, the more expertise around the table, the better decision making will be. Women in Sport wants sport to be successful. This requires diversity amongst our leaders and recognition of the important role that women have to play.

At its most successful, sport has a massive ability to empower women and girls. Sport builds the skills and the confidence that help all of us to cope with life's challenges, and to succeed. Isn't it only right then, that the sport sector should reap the rewards of the empowered women who benefit from playing sport during their lifetime? We want women to choose to make sport their career and to see, and be able to follow, a clear path to the top.

The sector has made progress - this report shows this clearly. Dig a little deeper, though, and there is still cause for concern. Have we created an environment and culture where women can naturally reach their potential and succeed? Are we encouraging and supporting a wide range of women to progress in voluntary and paid leadership roles? Are we confident that progress made to date can be sustained and built upon? The evidence suggests not.

It is time to stop tinkering and to start transforming. Current and aspiring leaders in sport take note: this is an opportunity to act.

Let's not just break down the barriers to leadership that women tell us continue to exist; let's smash the barriers right out of the ball park - let's get rid of them once and for all. Let's transform our organisations from top to bottom and ensure we have a culture that welcomes women: a culture that provides opportunity and flexibility; that values the contribution of all women - not just a few; that really wants to see women succeed. Let's stop playing games with the board and embrace a diverse future.

Women in Sport wants to help and support - let's transform sport together.

**Ruth Holdaway,  
Chief Executive,  
Women in Sport**

November 2015

# INTRODUCTION

Taken at face value, the findings of this report should be cause for celebration. Following six years of research by Women in Sport into the gender diversity of sports boards, female representation on the boards of National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and other sports organisations that are funded and supported by Sport England and UK Sport, is finally averaging 30%. If you compare this to our first set of data in 2009, when survey findings put the proportion of women on boards at only 21%, progress has been marked and Sport England's target of 25% gender diversity on all its NGBs' boards feels within grasp.'

However, closer analysis indicates that big celebrations would be premature. Further scrutiny beyond the statistics comes in the form of in-depth interviews carried out with women and men at the top of sports organisations. They show that the barriers that existed six years ago still persist in preventing many women from taking on leadership roles; contributing to a continued gender imbalance on boards. The result is a lack of a sustainable pipeline of female leaders rising to the top.

We must not allow ourselves or others in the sector to rest on our laurels. Though the top line data has improved, this is not the full picture. Furthermore, there is still variation in the progress made by individual NGBs and publicly funded sports organisations - the average masks a huge range. The additional interviews we undertook with women in senior roles show that often, on the ground, not much has changed.

***"It's remained a very male dominated industry and I still find it a challenge when I walk into a room and it's filled with men. And they're middle-aged men! In suits. It's the blazer brigade. There is an atmosphere."***

As a result, the need for change remains.

Having had the privilege of talking to women in senior roles across various NGBs and sporting organisations as well as outside the sector, we are aware that these women succeeded due to a combination of not just great experience and talent, but also personal drive, determination and, sometimes, good fortune. We need to move beyond this. The next stage on the journey to equality is to mainstream and normalise senior-level female representation in sport and establish a system for recruitment and promotion based on skill, competency and meritocracy to give a fair chance to any deserving candidate. We see this as being a progression from a few exceptional women to a diversity of women fully engaged in the leadership of the sector alongside - and with equal status and standing to - the men.

This vision and ambition has influenced how we have approached this report. The detailed findings, with a breakdown of the data for each NGB and funded sports organisation, can be found on pages 21-24. In the report, we share what we have learnt from talking to senior women and men, to provide a practical perspective on how to move forward.

Getting more women into senior positions has already attracted much thought and attention in all sectors. We do not wish to duplicate this work. Instead, our priority is to focus on the sport sector and highlight where there has been less change - as well as showcase best practice experiences that could be spread more widely. We conclude with some concrete recommendations to shift the sport sector to the next level.

We are hugely grateful to Comic Relief for their funding of this work over the next three years, and to Sport England and UK Sport for their support this year.

We look forward to hearing more positive experiences and success stories in the future and hope that one day research such as this will no longer be necessary as it becomes normal to see women in the boardrooms of our NGBs and publicly funded sport organisations.



## BACKGROUND

Since 2009, Women in Sport has collected and published data on the gender make-up of the boards and executive teams of NGBs, and campaigned for gender diversity at senior levels in sport through our annual *Trophy Women?* Leadership Audit. For the past six years, this piece of work has provided valuable insight into women's representation at the highest levels of sports management and administration.

This year the audit was completed by all NGBs that are funded by Sport England, a group of NGBs that are funded by UK Sport and do not receive funding from Sport England, plus some additional sports organisations that are funded by UK Sport. These additional sports organisations were included in order to obtain a full understanding of female representation within publicly funded organisations. In the report, these are referred to as 'NGBs and funded sports organisations'.

This year, thanks to funding from Comic Relief alongside Sport England and UK Sport, Women in Sport was able to carry out extensive desk research and further qualitative research. This was done via 22 in-depth interviews with sports bodies, current and potential board members and executives, and women already in sports leadership. These interviews were used to learn more about career pathways, critical success factors, barriers to recruitment, any issues once in post and how to resolve them. Extracts are quoted throughout the report. In most cases these are left deliberately unattributed for confidentiality.

Further details on the sample for this research can be found at the back of this report.

# THE PATH TO PROGRESS SO FAR

## Recognition of change in the sector

Though there is still room for improvement, no one would want to claim that things have got worse. There is a clear sense we are making progress. This comes out in the data and was echoed in the voices of our interviewees. With some having many years of broad and varied experience in the sector and further afield, these experts are well-placed to judge. And we can see the change across different aspects of the sport sector.

There are signs of improvements in the promotion of top performing female athletes as well as female teams playing in traditionally male dominated sports.

- Wimbledon has awarded equal prize money to male and female competitors since 2007; professional squash has just started to do the same
- Within rowing, there is not only the Henley Royal Regatta, which was originally an all-male event, but also the Women's Regatta which has become the biggest women's rowing event in the world. 2015 was the first year in which the women's and men's universities Boat Races were staged on the same day and on the same course.

The media has responded to increased interest in women's sport with unprecedented levels of coverage of the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2015, paving the way for increased interest in the Women's Ashes and a 'summer of women's sport'. ITV broadcast the Cycling: Women's Tour, Sky Sports sponsors the Sportswomen of the Year (SWOTY) Awards and BT Sport covers the WTA circuit throughout the year along with the FA's Women's Super League. Women are also appearing in more senior and prominent positions in sports broadcasting and commentary. For example, Suzi Perry took over BBC Formula 1 coverage from 2013 and Gabby Logan broke new ground in April this year when presenting Match of the Day.

Some of the people we spoke to acknowledged the change they have seen within their own sports. Senior women across a number of sports spoke of a noticeable shift

in attitudes, with greater collaboration between male and female colleagues; something they argue was much rarer even ten years ago. Kelly Simmons, Director for Participation and Development at the FA, talked about how some years ago her organisation had merged male and female development departments to create a 'football development department'.

***"At that time, there were one or two people questioning whether externally it would be OK for a woman to be in a role that is developing men's and boys' football, but I think that's long gone now."***

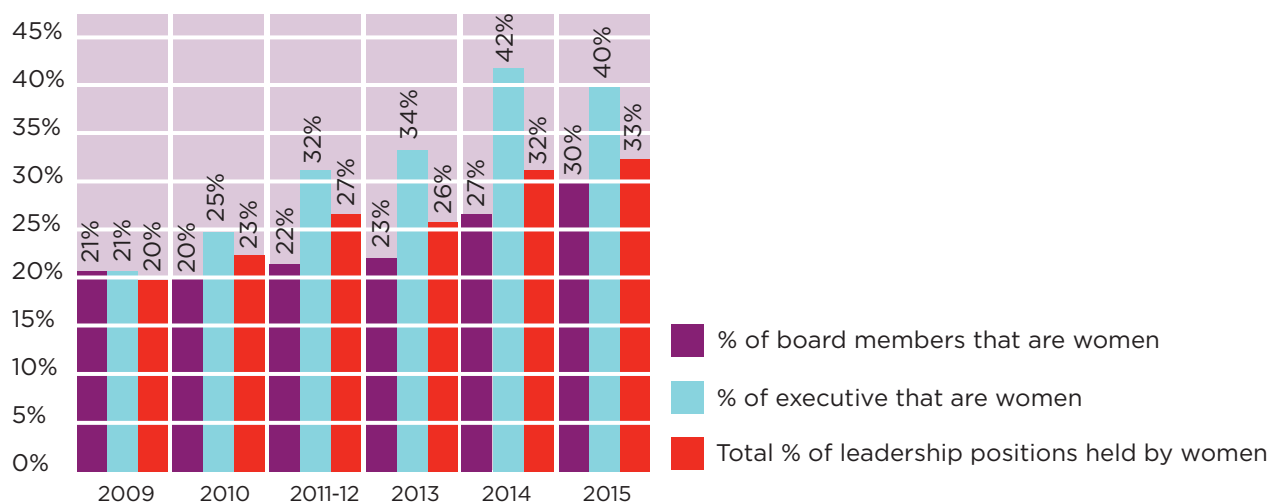
Likewise, we spoke to Genevieve Glover at the RFU, in a new role as the first independent member on the Nominations Committee, responsible for bringing greater process, transparency and efficiency to internal recruitment within the RFU Council and Board. Her appointment strengthens the presence of women within the RFU Governance Structure. There is, of course, more to do, but with three women on the RFU Board of Directors, and three in the executive team, progress is being made.

## Reviewing the survey evidence past and present

The chart on page six shows the changing profile of Sport England funded NGBs' boards and executive teams since we carried out our first study in 2009. Across all measures, there has been improvement. Progress has been greatest in the presence of women on executive teams. The proportion of women in such roles stood at 21% in 2009 but rose to 40% this year. And if the full audit sample of funded sport bodies is considered, the proportion is 43%.

We are particularly pleased by this increase in executive team presence as it shows that women are having the opportunity to be involved in influencing day-to-day decision making. In addition, executive positions often tend to be the ones in which someone is promoted from lower down within the organisation (unlike many board member positions). This suggests there are now more women managing to come up through the staff ranks of sport.

## Changing female profile of Sport England funded NGB boards and executive teams



## Comparisons with the corporate world

In recent decades, across all sectors, there has not only been acknowledgement of the gap in female presence at senior levels, but also the promotion of evidence that addressing this gap is beneficial. As a result, we can see progress in the world of business too. The proportion of women on boards has almost doubled over the past four years, albeit starting from a lower base. When the Davies Review into women on boards was launched in 2011, the representation of women on FTSE Boards was 12.5%; in 2015 the figure has risen to 23.5%<sup>1</sup>.

In both business and sport, there has also been the welcome disappearance of those boards that fail to include any women. Our *Trophy Women?* research from 2009 found

that ten NGBs – a quarter of sport’s primary administration – did not have a single woman on their board; four years ago, 21 (so more than 1 in 5) FTSE 100 companies had all-male boards. Today in 2015, all boards examined through our audit have female presence.

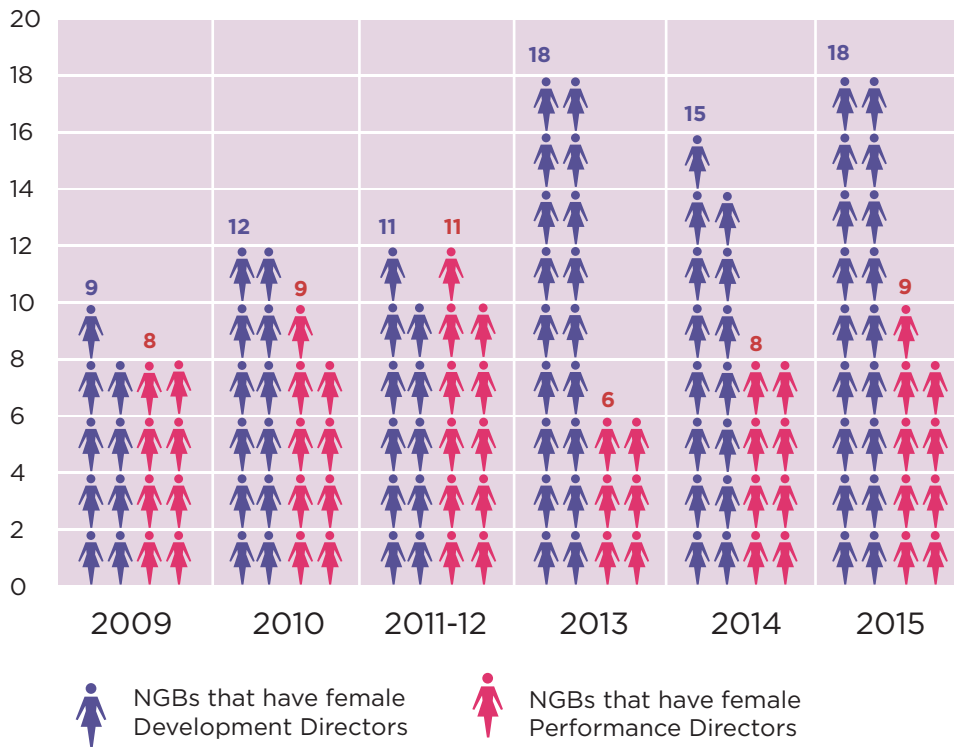
## Still too few female Performance Directors

One senior role where there has been limited progress and females are still underrepresented is the role of Performance Director in NGBs. The chart on page seven shows that whilst the number of NGBs that have female Development Directors has doubled from nine to 18 between 2009 and 2015, there has been very little change in the number of female Performance Directors. There are now nine NGBs with women in this role, but this dropped to only six in 2013.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/women-on-boards-2015-fourth-annual-review>



## Sport England funded NGBs that have female Development and Performance Directors

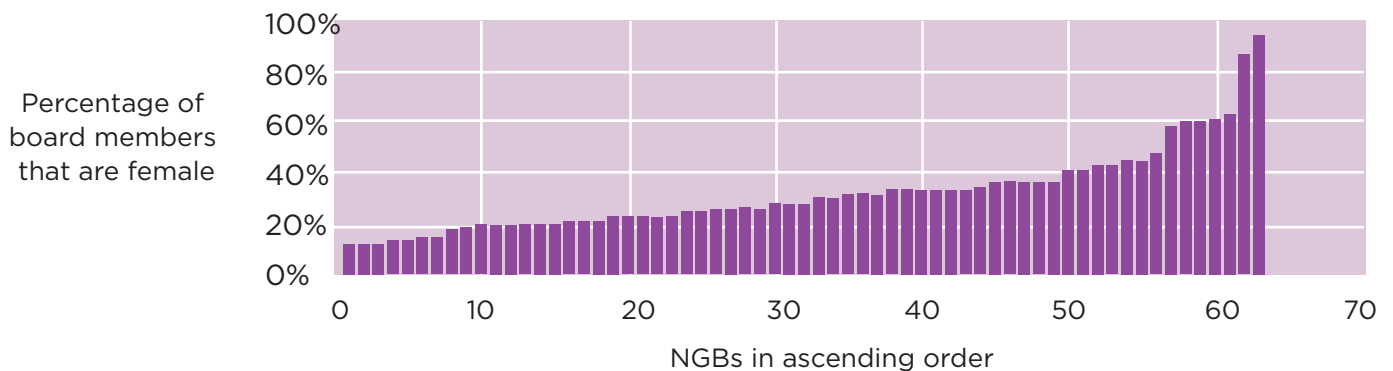


This situation reflects the different path likely to be taken in order to become a Performance Director. Many will have been coaches rising through the ranks, where - as we discuss later in the report - the culture still remains very masculine and challenging for women to establish themselves without making significant personal sacrifices.

In our 2009 report we 'named and shamed' those ten NGBs that did not have any female representation on their boards. As noted earlier, we are pleased to say that the review of

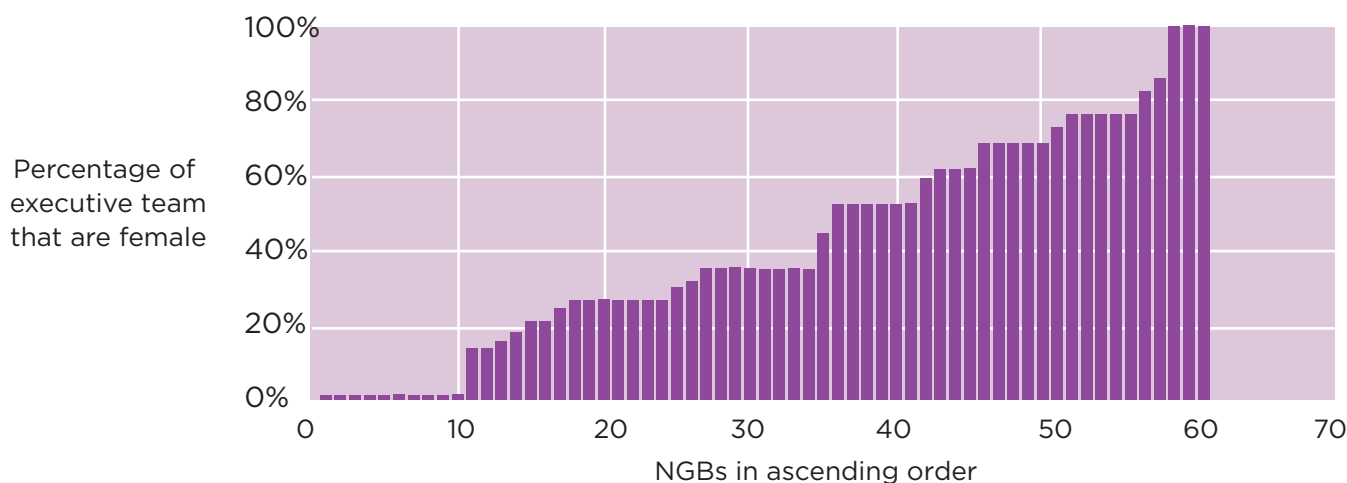
the latest data shows such action is no longer necessary. However, it still remains the case that there is wide variation amongst the sports organisations that were part of our audit in terms of how well they are doing at getting women on the board. Whilst 26 of the funded sports bodies have at least 30% female board members, there are 29 organisations in our audit which have not achieved Sport England's target of 25%.

## Distribution of NGBs - % of board members who are female



The trend is even more pronounced when we consider the presence of women on the executive team. Whilst there is a small group of 'high performers' where women dominate, there are ten funded sports organisations that have no women at all on their executive.

Distribution of NGBs by % of women on their executive team (excluding CEO)



## AREAS WHERE PROGRESS IS STILL NEEDED

Despite the fact that women are managing to get to the top, this does not happen without navigating numerous obstacles. As part of our first *Trophy Women?* report, we spoke to eight Chief Executives and Chairs, which gave us valuable insight into understanding why there was such a low number of women in leadership positions. For this report, we have repeated this approach with a larger number of senior women. Though the numbers have improved, many of the same issues were raised. This is cause for concern.

## Challenging culture

Helena Morrissey, Chief Executive at Newton Investment Management, a stakeholder from outside the sector, praised the positivity she saw in sport. "I love the sport environment - it's got very positive people, very can-do and goal orientated. It's less cynical than business. There's a mutually supportive environment - more collaborative than business. It's uplifting. Lots of determination." However, she went on to observe, "But women are still fighting against the system more in sport than in business which is further along."

Changing culture is tricky. Culture operates in the background and is often hard to pinpoint or describe in concrete terms. It can reflect unappealing values and ambitions. We heard a number of worrying stories about this from our interviewees, including cases where men have perceived it as a 'right' to step up to the board after 'serving their time' at regional levels.

***"Some people stay in positions because they like the power and this is off-putting for some people to join boards - they don't want to be associated with such people."***



In these environments, women can end up feeling like 'outsiders' and unwelcome. Unwelcoming cultures can also stop women from feeling they can behave naturally. Several of our interviewees said they have become very careful about how they present themselves in important meetings. Board level women from inside sport as well as outside it described how they consciously make an effort not to fulfil female stereotypical roles, like taking notes or making tea. How acute this issue is depends on the particular history of the sport, as one interviewee observed:

***“The challenge is in sports that have been around for a long time - long-established and traditional - in these you tend to find entrenched views. The big challenges are integrating women into sports that are traditionally ‘male’, like football and rugby. Newer sports, like volleyball and triathlon, have different values - that’s the biggest difference.”***

The outcome is not only a potentially difficult and uncomfortable environment for those women who have succeeded in getting to the top; more importantly, it can risk narrowing the pool of potential candidates for these senior roles. A number of our interviewees asserted that the women who are in senior leadership are of a 'particular type' who have fought tooth and nail to get there. In a much-cited piece for the US-based Atlantic magazine from July 2012, former advisor to Hillary Clinton, Anne-Marie Slaughter, wrote about 'Why Women Still Can't Have it All'. In her piece, she described how, “[The] women who have managed to be both mothers and top professionals are superhuman, rich, or self-employed.” We want to move beyond this situation.

## **Rigid and narrow governance structures**

There is a difficult legacy issue here. Regional sport structures are generally membership-based, with decisions on committee membership based on volunteers putting themselves forward and enlisting the votes of members. But membership still tends to be male dominated. Those who rise through the ranks from the regional levels are often the members of longest standing. Networks and presence are what counts and women's

credentials may be weaker if they lack the track record of male peers. We now need to find ways to transform structures to ensure women are able to move up from within the sport.

At the same time, whilst member support and input is vital for the success of sports at the grass roots level, higher level decision-making often requires professional input. In fact, the Head of Global Sport for an executive recruitment company felt that there was a requirement to beef up recruitment in order to address key skills gaps amongst some organisations. As such, nominations and voting for board level roles should come from a wider and more diverse pool.

***“NGBs are all at different stages in their evolution - they all need to be more commercially savvy and digitally led. As such these skills are in demand for new board members.”***

UK Sport, Sport England and Women in Sport have been challenging NGBs for some years to become more modern, professional and transparent. The Sport and Recreation Alliance has published a Voluntary Code of Good Governance to address some of these issues<sup>2</sup>. As a result of these efforts in part, we are starting to see some board level barriers diminishing, with a number of organisations already opting, and making an effort, to include independent non-elected members on their boards. This is good news, but now we need to go further. We need to ensure that women can rise to the top from within the sport sector as well as from outside it.

## **Time pressures and competing commitments**

Finally, we need to acknowledge more basic but nonetheless important barriers. These are not unique to sport. Across sectors, employers struggle to recruit and retain women based on more practical, lifestyle-related considerations. However there are certain features about the way sports administration tends to be run that can make life particularly difficult for some women.

***“Sport is an unforgiving environment in some ways if you're looking to balance your lifestyle.”***

<sup>2</sup><http://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/programmes-initiatives/boardroom/voluntary-code>

Working in sport at a high level can involve significant travel around the country and abroad. Even simple things, such as meeting times, can become a challenge. Board meetings in the evening after the standard working day, or at weekends, may clash with family commitments. Likewise, participation in local sport governance can be tricky. Running a club at committee level or working as a coach often has to take place at weekends and evenings, which again eats into valuable 'family time'.

From our research Understanding Women's Lives<sup>3</sup>, Women in Sport knows that spending time with friends and family is a dominant value for many women which dictates decision making about how to prioritise time. If these women are forced to make trade-offs between family time and working or volunteering in sports management, sport is very likely to lose out.



<sup>3</sup><https://www.womeninsport.org/resources/understanding-womens-lives/>

# ESTABLISHING A SYSTEM FOR SUSTAINABLE PROGRESS

In thinking about how to build further momentum behind the improvements we are already seeing, we are not simply recommending targets. We have more to offer than this. And as our research has shown, focussing on numbers alone does not always reflect the reality of the experiences that make up those numbers.

Therefore we have set out a series of recommendations in a supplement to this report: a 'checklist for change' with six consolidated, actionable goals that will enable us to start the necessary discussions with the sector that lead to lasting change.

## To quota or not to quota?

One mechanism that has been used to drive up senior level female representation in the corporate world is the use of quotas. Quotas have been applied extensively in a number of European countries including Norway, Spain, Italy, Iceland and France. The impact has been substantial. Nordic countries now lead the developed world in their percentage of female directors, with significant increases in women's representation also in Italy and France - the latter now ranking third in the world with 28% female directors.

The UK has shunned the adoption of such official mandatory quotas. Studies looking at the effectiveness of mandatory quotas across Europe showed the limitations of this policy approach. For example, Norway has seen a headline gain at boardroom level, but it is non-executive director appointments that account for most of the increase in representation, and while the quota may have helped in the boardroom, trickle-down effects have been negligible. It has had little impact elsewhere on increasing the number of female executives, or in helping women to close the gender pay gap.

The 30% Club<sup>4</sup> argues we should not legislate for what could be described as 'optical

change' at the Board level. They argue that there is a danger that people will believe they have fixed the diversity issue whilst not addressing the real challenges. They believe that developing the pipeline is the real key to sustainable change. "The 30% Club is philosophically opposed to mandatory quotas, believing that business-led, voluntary action is the only way to achieve meaningful change. We're not interested in seeing a few token women at the top; rather we seek sustainable change at all levels".<sup>5</sup>

These reservations were generally echoed in our interviews. There was a clear preference for recruitment to be based on merit and expertise. To do otherwise raised concerns about the potential for undermining prospective appointees.

***"I don't want to be the token pink in the room."***

***"My concern with quotas is that it immediately says to a woman: you're there because you're a woman, not because of your skills, experience and knowledge."***

## Quotas as a last resort?

As our exploration of the numbers in the previous section has shown, there is a wide variation across NGBs and sports organisations in terms of their performance in achieving female representation at senior levels. Some interviewees did concede that quotas could have value as a 'last resort' in organisations where major change is required, as observed by Kelly Simmons, Director for Participation and Development at the FA: "watching UEFA and FIFA co-opting women on to the board because their traditional system would be years away from recruiting the right numbers of women, I have seen the impact it has had. If it's driven from above then it will happen."

Others observed that quotas can be helpful if they catalyse useful behaviours.

***"In theory quotas are not ideal - as you do not want women on boards just to meet quotas - but in reality, if there are quotas it makes NGBs work harder to find the right people in the first place."***

<sup>4</sup><http://30percentclub.org/>

<sup>5</sup><http://30percentclub.org/resources/faqs>

Increasing the likelihood that women will reach senior levels can come from small but specific steps. However, for this to be sustainable and mainstreamed, transformative change needs to occur at a number of different levels. Taking action in one area is likely to have knock-on positive impacts further down the line. This is why systemic change is necessary throughout sport organisations.

## 1) Cultural pre-conceptions and expectations

Culture is about changing attitudes. These are formed from a great messy bundle of factors including personal family background, upbringing and peer influences. Societal values play an important role too and this is where more public action can make a difference. A number of interviewees mentioned the recent Sport England 'This Girl Can' campaign as being important in helping to shift attitudes around women's participation in sport and encouraging the wider public to think again about how they might celebrate women's achievements.

### Male and female champions

A simple but key way to encourage a more receptive atmosphere to female leadership is ensuring that men are visibly supportive. As Helena Morrissey, Chief Executive of Newton Investment Management observed, "The 30% Club has offered useful learning. You need to have people (men) on the inside supporting the ambition - this is the only way. Hence you need men in positions of power welcoming women as well as women themselves."

Getting senior advocates, including men, has become easier thanks to the existence of well-known and credible research which makes the case for the business benefits of women as leaders. Having male peers on board is very useful beyond the contribution they may make personally. Our interviewees described it making them 'feel safer' to push for change.

***"Once you are a woman leading in a sports body, you're in a difficult position in so far as not wanting to look as though your agenda is all about pushing women. It's always got to come down to the business case."***

McKinsey has analysed their own efforts at gender equality and found progress was slower and more limited than they would have hoped. One factor they identified again supports the argument for male champions to share the work with female mentees. "Consider sponsorship: it's easy to say more is needed, but we've found that women at McKinsey are disproportionately sponsored by other women, which places a higher burden on our more senior women relative to senior men."<sup>6</sup>

### Inspiring confidence

As widely acknowledged by many of our interviewees, part of the cultural challenge to achieving female leadership can stem from the attitudes of women themselves. A lack of self-confidence can hold women back from progressing to business leadership roles. Research has shown that women are less likely to apply for a job unless they meet all of the requirements, while men will apply if they meet most of the requirements.

Sheryl Sandberg, Chief Operating Officer of Facebook touches upon this in her speeches and writing. In her 2013 book 'Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead', she describes how women sometimes keep themselves from advancing. "We lower our own expectations of what we can achieve," she writes.

In the sections below, we talk about specific measures to tackle this, but creating an empowering environment is an important step. Just seeing women performing well in leadership roles can have a huge impact on others.

***"What they do is simply undermine people's prejudice. Successful individuals convince doubters of their value. It's a case of women thinking, 'If they can do it, I can do it too'."***

## 2) Strategic pipeline management

Our vision is for a recruitment approach that is more pro-active but not biased. We want the process to improve so that all the best candidates get a chance. It is not about just doing the 'same old' or tweaking policies; it

<sup>6</sup>McKinsey. (2012). Women Matter\_Making the Breakthrough

requires a careful review of how positions throughout the organisation are filled to ensure a continuous flow of excellent but diverse talent all the way up. This involves developing appropriate tactics (specific campaigns and initiatives) and strategy (taking a planned path based on agreed priorities and principles).

### **Look downstream**

A key recurring message from this research was the need to go downstream. At a very basic level, this can be about ensuring that there are enough women to begin with. In an article for the Wall Street Journal<sup>7</sup>, Petra Einarsson, having recently been promoted to President in a major Scandinavian technology company observed, “To get more women at the top, you need to start at the bottom. If there should be quotas introduced anywhere, it should be in the recruitment, at entry level, so that there are more women to choose from when filling a management position.”

Developing the pipeline further down means supporting women who may still be several rungs away from reaching this level on the ladder. This is not about offering special treatment, but nurturing people to encourage them to think more boldly about their own future path. Women, particularly at lower levels, can need that ‘special tap on the shoulder’ to help them to see their own potential and find ways to grow professionally. Many of our interviewees were able to name individuals who had acted as mentors and supporters throughout their career, helping them to move forward. Others acknowledged that if they had had more support, they might have had the confidence – and made the time – to apply for more senior positions earlier.

***“Women don’t necessarily proactively look for roles. It is time consuming to look for positions and women have more time commitments. They need to be tempted in.”***

### **Build confidence through training**

Training not only sends a signal to women that they could set their sights higher, it also helps them to develop the skills (and thus the confidence) that they can go for it. Looking beyond sport, a recent report from Manpower, ‘When Women Lead, Businesses Do Better’, suggested that women need more help in continuing to grow and develop the right

skills. “Many research participants said they had not received any education early in their working lives about the types of skills and experiences that would be helpful to their career progression. Instead, they had reached middle-management levels and found they lacked the necessary expertise to progress further, by which point family responsibilities or over-qualification made it difficult to find positions that would give them the necessary experience.”

### **Co-opting roles**

Another way to develop the required expertise lower down is to co-opt women onto committees. It allows women to get a feel for what goes on at this level and to develop into the role, rather than struggle later to leap into the unknown. Moreover, it acts as a valuable way to get over the hurdle of lack of experience, as one interviewee told us:

***“Getting the first Board position is hard but important as most people want experience. But there are ways to get over that because many Board sub-committees co-opt people, for instance to get HR or accountancy expertise in.”***

### **Proactive succession planning**

Fixed term positions encourage organisations to think more pro-actively about the future vacancies they know will be coming up. We would argue that succession planning should be part of any well run organisation!

In sport, valuable talent also needs to be identified early on and held onto. But this type of proactive talent management appears to be rare in sport, as one interviewee told us:

***“[We] do not have succession planning. We don’t use our regions or counties well to scout for us. For example, where do the members of our Youth Advisory Group go? Why are they not encouraged to be on the Board?”***

### **3) Fair and transparent recruitment**

How recruitment itself takes place is an important factor. Recruitment should follow a rigorous and robust process, not be about informal chats and ‘jobs for the boys’.





***“Work needs to be done in terms of targeted recruitment campaigns - but should not be seen as a box ticking exercise. Organisations should show a true commitment to equality and diversity”.***

But there are mixed views as to how easy it is currently to find good female candidates. Some felt constrained by their organisation’s limited ability to advertise widely, exacerbated by the relatively low profile their organisation might have. As might be expected, this was more often the case for smaller NGBs. However, all agreed that it was important to increase the breadth of the pool, in particular to counteract the risk of attracting only self-selecting, self-confident women.

***“There is a large enough pool (and an increasing pool) but possibly not diverse enough and that’s the current weakness ... Breadth rather than number is the problem.”***

#### **Broaden the search outside the sector**

One way to widen the pool is to attract candidates from outside the sporting sector. Many of our interviewees recognised that this is happening already - but not enough. For example, increasingly sports organisations are moving to competency based appointments - appointing people on the basis of skills rather than credentials from a sports background. However, many sports are still finding it very hard to access women with these skills.

***“There is no shortage of women with specific skills that could fill roles with governing bodies but why are they currently not on those boards? Is it that we are not attracting people? Are we not making people aware of opportunities? ”***

Many stakeholders agree that there is indeed a need to review recruitment in NGBs to address potential skills shortages. But trying to bring people in from outside the sector is not simply a matter of putting the same advert in a different place.

Thought needs to be given to how the role is presented. Could it be that we actually attribute too much importance to ‘sportiness’ in the profession?

***“People think you have to be ‘sporty’ or know the sport. Make sure people know that skills are what boards are looking for.”***

***“Lots of people involved in sport seem to feel a need to talk about their passion for sport - do we overplay that? If you’re talking to the CEO of Coca-Cola, does he rave about how fantastic soft drinks are!?”***

We need to stress that leadership skills are transferable from other sectors as the journey of Georgina Usher shows.

Georgina has been an athlete since she was 11, competing on many occasions at European and World level - most recently winning gold at the 2014 Commonwealth Championships. But she had always considered fencing a hobby and her professional life was more focused on how she could afford to take part in her hobby. After completing a Computer Science degree, Georgina started working in IT and eventually moved into consultancy and change management. She worked across a number of different industries, including legal, insurance and membership services.

After two maternity leaves, she expected to go back into private industry, for example as the director of a department in a larger firm. This would have been the logical progression. She was on the Board of Fencing and was approached by her Chair to apply for the role of CEO. Initially she was hesitant as she didn’t think she had the ‘relevant’ skills for the role. However, Georgina soon realised there were lots of crossover skills for the role, as running an NGB is very similar to running any business.

***“I think my previous role as Operations Director of a small membership and professional services firm gave me a significant amount of transferable skills. It’s the Ops Director function, possibly more than the industry itself, that is important.”***

#### **Use a variety of promotional techniques**

Interviewees cited a number of specific resources they found useful for attracting women. These included:

<sup>7</sup>Even Scandinavia Has a CEO Gender Gap, WSJ May 21 2014

- Job fairs reaching out to a wider group of potential candidates
- Women in Sport and other organisations sharing opportunities with these audiences
- Women on Boards networks to find women interested in senior leadership who would not necessarily have considered a position in the sports sector.
- School and college based initiatives

### Co-ordinated initiatives

In describing a schools based initiative, run by Inspiring Women in Sport<sup>8</sup>, one interviewee explained that its success raised additional questions about current gaps in the sector regarding early stage recruitment.

***“None of the girls realised that there were all these jobs in sport. It’s a recurring theme! Whose responsibility is it to raise awareness? NGBs need to take some responsibility, especially in their local area.”***

We do have to recognise that resources may be limited at some NGBs and that despite best intentions, neither funds nor expertise are available to carry out extensive and far reaching professional recruitment. These concerns were raised many times in the course of this study – it is clear that NGBs would appreciate more expert guidance.

To support those that might otherwise struggle, a more co-ordinated approach could offer benefits. We can see that it would help to address any gaps or weak spots in the sector. One interviewee suggested one way in which this might be delivered.

***“We should take a more strategic and proactive approach – look at all the funded NGBs and the board positions that are going to become vacant in the next few years, check the pool of existing or potential board directors and start looking at matching up people with NGB positions based on competencies.”***

#### **(4) Review governance structures to ensure they promote diversity**

Traditionally having the opportunity to play a role in the national governance of a sport has required working through various levels e.g. going from club to regional before finally reaching a national level. As we have seen, one way to side-step the need for this potentially

limiting process is the creation of independent board members. Recruiting for an independent board member creates the opportunity to search for individuals with the right skills, rather than sports knowledge. It thus helps to ensure the potential pool of candidates is wider and more diverse than otherwise might have been the case.

However, as our review of the effectiveness of quotas has shown, some have reservations about making too much of this as an opportunity. It can sometimes be used as a quick fix which will have little impact further down the organisation. It is important to ensure that the focus is on developing a more balanced board – in other words one where there is a more even mix between elected and independent members – rather than simply – as we have seen happens in the private sector – increasing the size of the board overall.

***“If it’s easier and quicker to get the right women on boards as Non-Executive Directors (NEDs), then OK. But if in 12-24 months’ time, the only women on boards are still NEDs, then this feels like ‘whitewash’.”***

### Champion transparency

The importance of transparency as a means of keeping up the impetus for change, cannot be underestimated. It should be standard practice for the industry to publish figures such as those included in this research report. Organisations need to hold each other to account.

#### **(5) Making it practically possible**

Developing a welcoming culture and ensuring that the process for pipeline management is transparent and fair is important but not sufficient. Practical challenges are inevitable. However, simple steps such as publishing the dates of meetings with long advance warning can make a difference as it allows individuals time to make appropriate plans.

Some organisations provide tangible support to deal with more burdensome commitments. For example, we heard of examples of sports organisations that had supported executive

<sup>8</sup><http://www.inspiringthefuture.org/inspiring-women-in-sport-2015/>

committee members with childcare costs to enable them to attend board meetings or other events when these were unavoidably scheduled at weekends or other anti-social hours. In no cases were the women in question asking for any kind of special privileges. It was simply a case of finding a mutually acceptable solution to ensure the organisation could get the best from everyone on the board. We argue that this kind of action should take place regardless of the gender of the individual.

### **Working hours**

Flexible working is an important consideration. While board roles may be suitable for flexible working as they rarely require daily presence from nine to five, other roles in sport remain deeply demanding. A recent study by Leeds Beckett University, which investigated women's wellbeing at the various stages of their careers as sport coaches, found that these women tend to experience poorer work-life balance than many other professions, leading to burn-out. However, thinking differently about employment models has helped: "Many of the coaches have given up their social lives, have limited family time, experiences of failed personal relationships and have stopped participating in sport and physical activity because the coaching role was the priority... However, job sharing of head coaching roles, or a team approach to coaching programmes has worked well for some of the coaches."<sup>9</sup>

Can this learning be applied more broadly to other senior roles in sport?

### **Pay**

Equal pay for individuals carrying out the same roles is essential. This is already standard procedure at some organisations outside sport, for example at Newton Investment Management. A number of our interviewees observed that more could be done in this space in sport to stimulate change.

***"Declaring salaries at the highest level is a good move to highlight inequality. People are embarrassed into taking action."***

## **(6) Ensuring ongoing career success and satisfaction**

People power must be nurtured. This means capturing the inspiration and learning that comes from individuals at all levels sharing their expertise with others. It can encompass case studies, role models, mentors and networks – all of which were mentioned by our interviewees as being resoundingly important.

### **Inspirational role models**

Whilst few would question the value of role models, the question of whom exactly should be used as a role model requires more thought. We often think of role models as leading lights, individuals at the peak of their success who inspire others to emulate their amazing achievements. Annamarie Phelps, Chairman at British Rowing, talked about the gymnast Nadia Comaneci, who inspired her when she was an eight-year-old girl.

Inspiring high level ambition is good, but not enough. There is also room for role models that are more grounded and honest. This was recently highlighted in a report by Manpower, 'When Women Lead, Businesses Do Better',

***"There is a clear need to highlight the women who have succeeded in business, but not present them as superwomen who faced no challenges and did it all by themselves. Instead, role models need to be 'real models', to be honest about the challenges they have overcome and the support they received to do so."***

We believe this is particularly important if we aim to normalise women in senior leadership. Role models that are honest and relatable may be more helpful than 'trophy women'.

This important finding echoes research Women in Sport has conducted into women's motivations for playing sport – 'What Sways Women to Play Sport?'<sup>10</sup> – where we found that potential influencers and role models are situated within and across different layers of context in women's lives and can impact behaviour in different ways. Often the most powerful influencers are those who are closest to us.

### **Stepping-stone role models**

We believe there is a need for role models

<sup>9</sup><http://www.leedsbeckett.ac.uk/news/0815-women-sports-coaches-close-to-burnout/>

<sup>10</sup><https://www.womeninsport.org/resources/what-sways-women-to-play-sport/>

throughout the journey. As a recruiter for the sector put it, ***“There need to be clearer pathways – people need to know how to progress through the ranks, what they have to do.”***

***“Right the way up the pipeline you need role models that girls and women aspire to. You need to make sure that the stepping stones are in place right through the pipeline. You do need these high profile people but it’s the people along the way who make the difference.”***

### **Gender-neutral mentors**

Many of our interviewees talked about the great support they received from individuals throughout their careers. They highlighted the fact that these important people were not only women, but often men, who had recognised their talent and worked with them to ensure they made the most of their potential. We feel there is also room for ‘women-only’ initiatives, which can be very helpful in creating a safe space for women to build their confidence and ask questions they do not feel would be appropriate in a more public setting.

### **Networks**

Many support networks, both informal and formal, are already in place.

- Women in Sport runs the Women’s Sport Network, a subscription-based membership group consisting primarily of women working in or towards careers in sport, particularly those with aspirations for leadership. The network offers a variety of events and opportunities to hear the latest insights on topics related to leadership and women’s sport, as well as meet others in the sector, including sport’s first peer-to-peer mentoring programme, delivered by Women Ahead.
- Outside the sector, there are groups - such as Women on Boards, mentioned by a number of our interviewees - which organise workshops, courses and other such events.

***“Over the last three to four years there are a number of NGBs that have started working more collaboratively so peer support from other sports has been really helpful.”***

Networking is also taking place as a result of the fact that organisations are working more closely together. We have to ensure that these

meetings and new supportive relationships build, and that the development of networks is not left to chance.

## **PAYBACK FOR GETTING IT RIGHT**

As our interviewees frequently mentioned, there is a growing body of evidence that confirms the value of investing time and effort into ensuring a fair system for finding and promoting the best talent. These cross-sector studies show that benefits can accrue, both in hard terms (a correlation between increased female senior presence and financial performance) and soft terms (better approaches to decision-making and risk-taking). These benefits apply equally to the world of sport.

### **Get the best catch**

By taking steps to ensure the talent pool is filled with candidates who are there on merit, rather than based on longevity and connections, NGBs are more likely to get top quality people onto their boards. We also believe passionately in the importance of bringing the right skills into our sports organisations to make them ‘future fit’. Taking a skills-based approach to recruitment means increasingly important skills needs, such as expertise in digital media, fundraising and HR, can be addressed.

### **Develop more representative views**

With greater diversity in candidates also comes the benefit of greater diversity in outlook. We can avoid the risk of “group think”. Having the chance to benefit from a wider range of different backgrounds and experiences means a more balanced and representative view on matters.

***“If you don’t have diversity, then you just think as the people around the board table think. If you diversify by bringing in individuals that represent the society that we live in, it gives you a more grounded, more holistic, more rounded perspective.”***

Though there was uncertainty about whether formal proof for this exists, some of our interviewees also felt that having more women as senior decision makers could potentially impact the sports participation gap between men and women at the grass roots level. Having women at the top can increase the chance that women's needs as customers are taken into account.

***“Board members influence the strategic direction of the sport and so female board members can influence what programmes are funded and ensure that these programmes are equitable, which in turn should encourage more participation.”***

### **Foster reasoned debate**

Studies show that women tend to approach discussions and decision-making with more emphasis on reviewing the evidence, allowing others to share their opinions and encouraging a more balanced way of thinking.

This ability to influence debate rather than directly control is particularly useful in the world of sports administration. NGBs have an important role to play in setting guidelines and structures which help their affiliated clubs to best serve their members. However, we must all recognise that their influence is limited. If boards are making decisions in a way which has involved listening and reasoned debate, there is greater chance of all involved being satisfied with the final outcomes and being more likely to comply.

### **Leveraging its own momentum**

We believe that once the process is under way and the system established, organisations will find it easier to build momentum around increased female representation at senior levels. Attitudes and cultures change and women are more likely to apply if they see other women at senior levels, as we have seen in organisations outside sport. Building this momentum is particularly important for smaller NGBs whom we have seen might struggle from a practical perspective due to limited resources. Furthermore, a more efficient and effective co-ordinated and collaborative approach avoids organisations potentially falling through the cracks.

This research has led to our 'Checklist for Change', summarising the practical ideas for Women in Sport to work on with the sector and to become a tool for NGBs and others to use as a shortcut to improving gender diversity at board level.

# METHODOLOGY

As in previous years, in 2015 Women in Sport ran an online survey to audit the levels of female representation on boards and executive teams in sports organisations in the UK, including the presence of women in the roles of CEO and Chair. The audit was completed by all National Governing Bodies (NGBs) that are funded by Sport England, a group of NGBs that are funded by UK Sport and do not receive funding from Sport England, plus some additional sports organisations that are funded by UK Sport. These additional sports organisations were included in order to obtain a full understanding of female representation within publicly funded organisations.

In addition to the audit, Women in Sport was able to carry out extensive desk research as well as 22 in-depth interviews with people in senior roles within the sector. The people we spoke with included Chairs, CEOs, senior level staff such as Development Directors, and board members. We also conducted interviews with people working in senior roles and with board positions outside of NGBs and

sports organisations. The majority of the interviewees were women. The interviews were all 45-60 minutes long and all were recorded with the permission of the interviewee. The data gathered from the interviews is cited throughout the report but for the majority of cases is not attributed to a named source. A list of interviewees is set out below and Women in Sport thanks them all for volunteering their time and views for this important study.

When we analysed the data, we examined NGBs as a group on their own as we have previously audited this group and therefore could compare the results to identify trends and change over time. We also analysed this year's data as a whole, incorporating NGBs and other organisations in order to achieve a fuller understanding of the status of women in senior roles throughout the sector.

Sport		
Name	Organisation	Role (at the time of the interview)
Nicole Sapstead	UK Anti-Doping	CEO
Georgina Usher	British Fencing	CEO
Prof Elizabeth Hall	Disability Snowsport UK	Chairman
Sally Munday	England Hockey	Chief Executive
Susan Cooper	Bowls Development Alliance	Development Director
Vicky Annis	England Netball	Director of Finance and Corporate Resources
Genevieve Glover	Rugby Football Union	Independent Member, Nominations Committee
Clare Connor	England and Wales Cricket Board	Head of England Women's Cricket
Lisa Wainwright	Volleyball England	Chief Executive
Karen Neale	England Athletics	Non Executive Director
Kelly Simmons	The Football Association	Director for Participation and Development at the FA
Emma Boggis	Sport and Recreation Alliance	Chief Executive
Sue Hornby	British Canoeing	Development Director
Alison Howard	Rounders England	CEO
Jenny Fromer	Baseball Softball UK	Joint CEO and Head of Operations
Jane Allen	British Gymnastics	CEO
Annamarie Phelps	British Rowing	Chairman
Tim Hollingsworth	British Paralympic Association	CEO
Jan Paterson	British Olympic Association	Chairman
Kit Taylor	PSD Group	Head of Global Sport
Non-sport		
Helen Owers	PZ Cussons plc, Informa plc, Wragge & Co, Eden Project	Non Executive Director
Helena Morrissey	Newton Investment Management	CEO

2015 Governing Body	Female Chief Executive <sup>1</sup>	Female Chair	% of board members who are women (including CEO and Chair) <sup>2</sup>	% of women in executive leadership positions (excludes CEO) <sup>3</sup>	% of women in all leadership positions	Female Development Director <sup>4</sup>	Female Performance Director <sup>4</sup>
Archery GB			17%	50%	28%		Yes
ASA <sup>5,6</sup>		Yes	25%	33%	27%		
Badminton England			18%	33%	21%	Yes	
Baseball Softball UK	Yes		31%	25%	29%		
Basketball England <sup>5</sup>			30%	60%	40%		
BMC <sup>5</sup>			22%	25%	23%		
Boccia England		Yes	56%	50%	55%	Yes	
Bowls Development Alliance <sup>5,7</sup>			29%	0%	29%	Yes	
British Canoeing			10%	100%	36%	Yes	
British Cycling			17%	13%	15%		
British Equestrian Federation <sup>5</sup>			60%	75%	67%	Yes	
British Fencing	Yes		38%	67%	44%	Yes	Yes
British Gymnastics	Yes		42%	33%	40%		
British Judo <sup>5</sup>			23%	20%	22%		
British Orienteering			30%	67%	44%		Yes
British Rowing		Yes	23%	20%	22%		
British Shooting			23%	67%	31%	Yes	
British Triathlon <sup>10</sup>			20%	-	-		
British Water Ski & Wakeboard			30%	100%	36%	Yes	Yes
British Weightlifting			18%	25%	20%		
British Wheelchair Basketball <sup>5</sup>			33%	33%	33%	Yes	
British Wrestling <sup>8</sup>			11%	0%	8%		
EMDP		Yes	83%	60%	76%	Yes	
England and Wales Cricket Board			14%	23%	19%		
England Athletics			27%	17%	24%		
England Boxing <sup>5</sup>			25%	33%	27%		
England Golf Partnership			30%	0%	25%		
England Handball <sup>5</sup>			20%	50%	33%	Yes	
England Hockey	Yes		21%	25%	22%		
England Netball	Yes	Yes	91%	80%	88%	Yes	Yes
England Squash & Racketball <sup>5</sup>			25%	25%	25%		
English Lacrosse		Yes	58%	57%	58%		Yes
The Football Association <sup>9</sup>			8%	30%	18%	Yes	
GB Taekwondo			20%	67%	38%		
GBWR <sup>5</sup>			30%	100%	42%	Yes	Yes
Goalball UK			17%	67%	33%	Yes	Yes
Lawn Tennis Association			40%	13%	28%		
Pentathlon GB			17%	60%	29%	Yes	



2015 Governing Body	Female Chief Executive <sup>1</sup>	Female Chair	% of Board members who are women (including CEO and Chair) <sup>2</sup>	% of women in executive leadership positions (excludes CEO) <sup>3</sup>	% of women in all leadership positions	Female Development Director <sup>4</sup>	Female Performance Director <sup>4</sup>
RFL			17%	29%	23%		
Rounders England	Yes		44%	25%	38%		
Rugby Football Union			21%	43%	29%		
RYA	YES		33%	14%	25%		
Snowsport England			30%	0%	30%	Yes	
Table Tennis England	YES	YES	42%	75%	50%	Yes	
Triathlon England <sup>5</sup>			18%	75%	33%		
UK Athletics			33%	-	-		
Volleyball England <sup>5</sup>	YES		15%	33%	19%		Yes
Sport England and/or UK Sport funded NGBs (2015)	9	7	30%	40%	33%	18	9
Sport England and/or UK Sport funded NGBs (2014)	10	5	27%	42%	32%	15	8
Change since 2014	-1	2	3%	-2%	1%	3	1
<b>UK SPORT FUNDED SPORTS ORGANISATIONS</b>							
British Amateur Boxing Association			8%	0%	8%		
British Bobsleigh & Skeleton Association <sup>5,11</sup>			11%	0%	8%		
British Curling <sup>5</sup>			29%	33%	31%		
British Disabled Fencing Association <sup>5</sup>			57%	71%	64%	Yes	
British Ski and Snowboard			9%	50%	15%		
British Table Tennis Association for People with Disabilities (BTTAD) <sup>8</sup>		YES	33%	33%	33%		
Disability Shooting Great Britain Ltd			20%	0%	20%		
DSUK	YES	YES	20%	83%	44%		
Great Britain Boccia Federation <sup>5,7</sup>	N/A		29%	25%	27%		
National Ice Skating Association of Great Britain & N.I.			38%	75%	50%		Yes
British Athletes Commission		YES	57%	0%	57%		
British Paralympic Association <sup>5</sup>			20%	50%	31%		Yes
English Institute of Sport			27%	50%	33%		
Sport Resolutions			33%	0%	31%		
sportscoach UK <sup>1</sup>			40%	75%	50%		
ALL NGBs AND PARTNERS (2015)	10	10	29%	43%	33%	19	11

## NOTES:

In 2014 we published a table of 45 Sport England and UK Sport joint-funded NGBs. This year we have collected data for UK Sport sole-funded NGBs and partners as well.

Where comparisons are made with last year's data, where possible, we have used exactly the same NGBs who provided data previously. We have removed RFU, Triathlon England and England Boxing from the trends as they did not supply data in 2014.

1. Chief Executive or equivalent role
2. All who sit on the top tier of governance including executive positions (such as Chief Executive) and non-executive positions (trustee positions). Voting rights vary by NGB
3. For the purpose of this report these figures include the senior management and heads of committees and excludes the Chief Executive
4. Some NGBs may have a number of Performance and Development Directors. If they have more than one and at least one is female, it has been acknowledged here in the list
5. These NGBs do not include a CEO as part of their official board complement. However, for the purpose of consistency, we have added their CEO to their total board figure
6. ASA has two boards: the ASA Group Board and the Sport Governing Board. The results in this table are for the ASA Group Board. At the time of writing their Deputy Chair, who is female, is acting as their interim Chair
7. Bowls Development Alliance is led by the Development Director not a CEO; GB Boccia Federation does not have a CEO
8. BTTAD and British Wrestling both have vacancies for posts.
9. The figures for leadership team is based on the FA Senior Management Team
10. At the time of data collection, no response was provided for Executive Leadership positions, however recent data shows that 3 out of 5 positions at British Triathlon were held by women at this time.
11. Data relating to Executive Leadership Team accurate at time of collection. Two subsequent female appointments to the Executive Leadership Team mean this figure is now 40%.

- information not available

Data correct as at 1st August 2015

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