

50% Female Leadership of Sport

No excuses: it's time for 50%

Women in Sport believes that there should be 50% representation of women in leadership positions within sport.

The Government should mandate that all sports organisations in receipt of public money aim for 50% of their board members to be female. This could be achieved through changes to the Code of Sports Governance.

These targets should sit alongside measurable action plans from grant recipients, for both board and senior staff roles. Arms-length bodies for sport should maintain a register of boards and senior teams to allow for monitoring of female leadership across the sector as a whole.

"We are a better board as a result. You get a different dynamic"

National Governing Body Board member on increasing the number of women on his Board

Why do we need 50% women in leadership?

If 50% of the decision makers had been women from the start, what would sport look like now?

- Would women's sport be chronically underfunded compared to men's? No.
- Would women's kit ever have involved white shorts? Again, no.
- Would sporting culture work around the lives of a balanced family, meeting the needs of women as well as men? Absolutely.

Our research shows that a 50:50 team at the top of an organisation creates the most positive, productive and inclusive working culture.

We will continue to perpetuate the exclusion of women and girls from sport until their lived experience informs leadership decisions.

It is vital that both the men and the women who lead are diverse in terms of their backgrounds and heritage and that disabled people are represented at the top of sport.



What else needs to change?

The principle of creating systems and culture that make women feel like they belong must be at the heart of this change. There is no point in appointing women into a hostile culture in which they can't thrive.

This should include:

- Initiatives focused on improving the attitudes and understanding of those currently holding leadership roles.
- Re-examining the federal structures that govern sports which are often designed around out-of-date assumptions about free time.
- Campaigns for wider societal change to release women's lives so they have equal leisure time, and equal share of the joy of sport, as well as equal chance to help organise it. This will require sharing of the unpaid work in the home.

Who is leading sport now?

Just 17% of Chairs, CEOs and Performance Directors in the top twenty sports (by participation in England) are women, according to a recent count by Women in Sport

40% of Premier League clubs and 83% of England Football League clubs have all male boards

Only 18% of companies in the sport and physical activity sector are run by women, whilst 28% of directors of companies in the sector are female



“We need more women making decisions for more women. Our sporting systems are not equal and this policy will help address the gender imbalances prevalent in sports leadership.”

“Diversity within an organisation’s senior roles provides a more complete mix of skills, perspectives and experiences, resulting in better decision-making and improved performance.”

Anika Wells, Minister for Sport in the Australian Government, announcing that the country will require, as a condition of receiving government funding, all national and state level sporting bodies to have 50% female boards from 2027

Get in touch

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