Non-Binary People, Sport & Physical Activity
Summary

Non-binary people have existed throughout time and culture, but binary gender organisation in UK culture may render non-binary people and experiences largely invisible. Furthermore, the current organisation of sport and physical activity along a rigid gender binary may result in amplified experiences of exclusion for this marginalised group of participants.

In fact, the limited data available on the participation of non-binary people in physical activity points to a population considerably less active than the wider community.

Key challenges are faced by non-binary people in the following areas:

- Gendered Spaces
- Gendered Activity
- Representation & Visibility
- Language

These barriers are addressed within the report through recommendations themed accordingly, whilst examples of existing adaptations made within mainstream grassroots sport to accommodate non-binary people are also highlighted.

Consideration is also given within the report to the specific challenge of school sport and PE and to the performance pathway.

Key challenges

- Gendered Spaces
- Gendered Activity
- Representation & Visibility
- Language
Introduction

Sport England commissioned Pride Sports to devise policy guidance for non-binary inclusion in grassroots sport and physical activity. The following report reflects data and commentary gathered through desk research, as well as input from focus groups and individual discussions with non-binary people.

As part of this work, Pride Sports commissioned the Proud Trust to host focus groups amongst young people with whom they currently work, and a further focus group and two individual interviews were held by Pride Sports with non-binary people involved in sport. A further interview was held with an NGB which has been working, within a mixed gendered framework, to become more inclusive of non-binary participants.
Non-Binary People

The word non-binary describes a wide array of different identities which fall outside of the gender binary, and can be related to, or completely separate from male and female gender identities. Whilst non-binary is often described as part of the trans umbrella, not all non-binary people identify as trans.

The etymology of the term non-binary is located in the concept of gender as two opposing and distinct identities, male and female, a gender binary.

The gender binary is very prevalent within contemporary British culture, and it’s easy to imagine that this binary has persisted throughout time and across geographies. In fact, society is so invested in the current organisation of gender; it can be challenging to imagine a time when social norms in British culture were different. However, the current binary understanding of gender wasn’t conceived until the 18th Century and even since that time, experience of gender, its interpretation and expression has varied considerably.

It is now widely accepted that a binary gender construct was imposed, through European colonialism, on many cultures that had more expansive understandings of gender\(^1\). In fact, there are more than thirty cultures around the world that conceive of gender as more than a binary. Take, for example the third gender Quariwarmi of Peru, Sistergirls and Brotherboys of Australian Aboriginal culture or the Two-Spirited people of indigenous North American cultures.

The acronym LGBTQI used to group lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning and intersex people in the UK, is LGBTQI2S in Canada, acknowledging the existence of two-spirited people within First Nations.

Prior to the Enlightenment, there were also European cultures that acknowledged gender diversity. Whilst it may seem that non-binary identities are a new thing, identifying outside the concepts of male and female is, in fact, one of the most ancient of notions.

Indeed, thirteen countries worldwide including Australia, Canada, Iceland, India, Malta, New Zealand, and Pakistan all allow non-binary people to be recognised on legal identity documents, such as passports and national identity cards.

The strength of the gender binary in the UK, however, and the way in which it informs our interpretation of the world, largely renders non-binary people marginalised and invisible in society as a whole, and in sport in particular.

\(^1\) https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/hypatia/article/abs/heterosexualism-and-the-colonialmodern-gender-system/FCD059336D5DBAE5F525804AEFAF8DF6
Non-Binary Experiences in the UK

It is estimated that around 0.4% of the UK’s population identify as non-binary\(^2\), although it is thought that non-binary identities may be on the rise, particularly amongst young people.

The UK Government’s 2018 LGBT Survey\(^3\), for example, found that younger trans respondents were more likely than older respondents to identify as non-binary; 57% of trans respondents under 35 were non-binary compared with 36% of those aged 35 or over.

Meanwhile, 0.7% of students responding to Sport Wales School Sport Survey (2018) identified as something other than male or female\(^4\).

Recent insight also highlights considerable disadvantages faced by non-binary people in the UK in their daily lives.

Not only do an overwhelming majority of non-binary people regularly face being misgendered, but many also feel the pressure to ‘pass’ as male or female to access services.

In the UK Government LGBT Survey, non-binary people scored as one of the lowest groups against ‘Average Life Satisfaction’, averaging only 5.5 out of ten, compared to lesbians and gay men at 6.9 and the wider population at 7.7 respectively.

Non-binary people were least likely amongst trans respondents to be open with academic (16.9%) and non-academic staff (13.9%) about their LGBT identity, whilst 65.8% had experienced verbal harassment and 21% had been excluded from events or activities in education settings. 37% of non-binary respondents to the Government’s survey had tried to access mental health services in the previous year.

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\(^2\) [https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/technical_note_final.pdf]
\(^4\) [https://www.sport.wales/files/be75d2ef7a9f0620a5bcb3d71ba9c9ce.pdf]
Harrison et al. (2012) found that over 40% of non-binary people had attempted suicide at some point, a third had experienced physical assault, and a sixth sexual assault based on their gender.

Meanwhile, a 2016 survey of 895 non-binary people across the UK, ‘Non-Binary People’s Experience in the UK’ (Scottish Trans), found that of 84% of respondents felt their gender identity wasn’t valid, 83% felt more isolated and excluded, 76% felt that they had lower self-esteem and 65% felt they had poorer mental health due to the lack of representation of people like them within services.

### Non-Binary People, Sport & Physical Activity

Much of the sport and physical activity sector in the UK has been built along the gender binary. Not only are many sports clearly categorised as male or female, but so too are changing spaces, toilets and some activity spaces.

It may be unsurprising then that research conducted by the National LGBT Partnership in 2016 found that people who identified as something other than male or female were some of the most inactive people amongst LGBT+ populations:

- 56% of LGBT women were not active enough to maintain good health, compared to 45% of women in the general population
- 55% of LGBT men were not active enough to maintain good health, compared to 33% of men in the general population
- 64% of LGBT people who identified as something other than male or female (e.g., genderfluid or genderqueer) were not active enough to maintain good health

This evidence of inactivity amongst non-binary people is further supported by Sport Wales 2018 School Sport Survey, which found that students who identified as something other than male and female (0.7% of respondents), were not only significantly more likely to be inactive, but also:

- Less likely to enjoy PE a lot
- Significantly less likely to enjoy taking part in sport after school or lunchtime clubs a lot
- Less likely to feel comfortable taking part in school PE and school sport
- Less likely to feel that their ideas are listened to
- Less likely to feel confident in trying new activities than their male and female counterparts.

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5 https://escholarship.org/content/qt2zj46213/qt2zj46213.pdf
Likewise, the Scottish Trans survey ‘Non-binary people’s experiences in the UK’ received the following responses to their question:

‘Have you ever avoided any of the following situations because of a fear of being harassed, being read as non-binary, or being outed (people finding out you’re non-binary)?’

Whilst 8% left additional comments about changing facilities and expressed concerns around safety.

Bearing in mind these barriers faced by non-binary people in accessing sport and physical activity; it is unsurprising that participation of this group appears low. Also, unsurprising, is the consequent lack of non-binary athletes who are visible at performance level.

- Gyms: 42.2%
- Clubs or social groups: 39%
- Public spaces (e.g. parks): 16.9%
However, this may be starting to change. In 2015, WNBA player and New York Liberty Guard, Layshia Clarendon stated in an article in the Player’s Tribune:

“I identify as black, gay, female, non-cisgender and Christian. I am an outsider even on the inside of every community to which I belong. My very existence challenges every racial, sexual, gender and religious barrier”

They have since spoken openly about identifying as trans and non-binary, most recently sharing the story of their gender-affirming top surgery, which received wide ranging support across the WNBA.

Meanwhile, in September 2020, OL Reign midfielder and Canadian Women’s National Soccer Team player, Quinn, came out as non-binary. In an interview at the time, they said:

“When I was figuring out who I was, it was really scary and I didn’t really understand if I had a future in football, if I had a future in life... It’s really difficult when you don’t see people like yourself in the media or even around you or in your profession. I was operating in the space of being a professional footballer and I wasn’t seeing people like me”

Back in the UK, Caz Fields plays for FC United Women, a tier 5 club, and came out as non-binary in 2020, whilst UK-based non-binary professional fast pitch softballer Alyson Spinas-Valainis competes for Olympia Haarlem in the Dutch Golden League.

Credit: Lorie Shaull
However, these experiences may be heightened for young people whose identity exists beyond a gender binary, which can be rigidly enforced in school settings, both in terms of spaces, activity, and policing of gender norms by teachers and peers alike.

Young people who took part in a Proud Trust focus group were asked, at the beginning of their session, about their immediate associations with sport. Four non-binary young people responded with the following descriptors:

- ‘Challenging’
- ’Painful’
- ‘Tension’
- ‘Cisgender’

The focus group participants were asked about their earliest experiences of sport and physical activity. Some had very positive first memories of engaging in sport before they had gone to school:

“When I was a toddler we went to the Highland Games and I remember throwing things in a sport with other pre-schoolers. I really enjoyed it. So that started me off thinking sport was fun and wanting to do it.”

Challenges in Sport & Physical Activity

Challenging experiences in PE can be negative for all LGBT+ demographics, as outlined in research commissioned by Pride Sports in 2017.

However, these experiences may be heightened for young people whose identity exists beyond a gender binary, which can be rigidly enforced in school settings, both in terms of spaces, activity, and policing of gender norms by teachers and peers alike.
“I played football with dad at home. Just, like, kicking a ball around. It wasn’t really football actually but there was a ball! And I really liked that so when I went to school, I thought it would be like that.”

Other participants had their first experience of sport in primary school. These experiences were mixed, with some participants continuing to enjoy sport through primary school, and others finding they were excluded. Those who experienced exclusion found that this occurred through the gendering of available sports opportunities and access to gendered facilities:

“There was the after-school club at primary where you just did [sports] cos it was fun. It didn’t matter if you were good at it.”

“PE in primary school got worse for me because they gendered sports. Actually, it’s the first time I remember understanding that gender was in two groups. And I remember feeling unsure about that…I felt like in sport I did not belong anymore.”

“There was a climbing frame that was really fun. I was quite sporty at school…I was known as the sporty one.”

“I was really confused at PE being so different to at home. There was gendered changing in primary and it was like ‘what?’…I did PE but I stopped liking it.”

Secondary school sport had been challenging for all participants. Some had taken part but not enjoyed it, while others had found it so distressing, they refused to participate. There were consistent problems with gendered sports and facilities making participants feel excluded, distressed and frustrated:

“In secondary school I just didn’t do it. I hated using the changing rooms because they were gendered. They gave me detentions to try and make me do it and they basically just gave up.”

“I suddenly stopped liking sports when I went to high school. I stopped going to my football club outside school too…I just hated everything about it.”

“Girls did netball, badminton, aqua aerobics and cheerleading. And I asked if I could do them too and the teachers just said ‘no’. I hated being a boy so much then because we just did football all the time.”

“There used to be a few groups of us playing football at lunch time in year 7. And the teachers actually stopped the girls playing football so the boys could have more space because apparently we would get hurt. So girls couldn’t play football at lunch time whether or not they wanted to.”

The theme of competition came up repeatedly during the focus group. Participants mostly felt that competition had been a negative impact on their experiences of sport, particularly in school. Some of this was to do with competition being gendered, but some of the negativity was not directly related to gender:

“In secondary [sport] was for the people who were good at it and it was just like ‘that’s not for you’ because it was more competitive.”
“I did PE and I liked that but when they started doing tournaments in junior years I didn’t do them. They were gendered and by that time I was starting to feel upset being put into gender groups. So I never got to play on the proper teams.”

“I hated PE because of the teachers. They weren’t accommodating to a range of abilities and people were really mean-spirited when you took longer.”

There were, however, some positive experiences for participants at secondary school or as part of optional activities outside of school. These experiences were all ungendered, and often non-competitive:

“I chose to go to the [school] gym or do running. I loved them as you were on your own and could decide for yourself what to do.”

“I liked dance. We did ballroom and latin dance. And for some reason even though they gendered everything they didn’t gender that! So you could play the boy’s part or the girl’s part and it didn’t matter.”

“I was in Air Cadets and I did mixed rugby. I was in the Squadron Rugby League... Rugby was always seen as a boys’ sport but if you wanted to do it you could just do it. I really enjoyed it, and no one minded.”

“Boys and girls did different sports. The boys’ was actually more physically accessible for me but I couldn’t do it because I was a girl. So I had to do gym which I physically could not do so as well as making me feel emotionally s*** it made me physically ill and in pain. All sports just means pain to me.”

Meanwhile, one of the non-binary adults interviewed by Pride Sports described their experiences of high school sport as positive:

“At secondary I went to an all-girls school, so there was less division. I was suddenly given freedom to play, whereas I was never given the ball at primary school”

Whilst it is encouraging to hear of positive experiences, in the cases where school PE had been a negative, these experiences significantly impacted participants’ future participation and enjoyment of sport. Indeed, some had not participated since school:

“The last mandatory sports I did, I remember celebrating and thinking ‘that’s it, I’m never doing this again and nobody can make me’.”

“It was literally traumatic. Even remembering it here 10 years later is making me feel a bit anxious. Changing was the worst bit. I didn’t want to change in front of others and I didn’t want to see others. It was a constant reminder of being in the wrong group.”

These experiences of young people in the focus group may speak to data from Sport Wales School Survey (2018) and the National LGBT Partnership survey (2017). It is likely that if non-binary children and young people experience school sport and PE negatively, it may have a detrimental impact on accessing physical activity later in life.
In terms of challenges to accessing sport and physical activity beyond the school environment, the following key themes were raised by all contributors:

• Gendered Spaces
• Gendered Activity
• Representation & Visibility
• Language

Gendered Spaces

The highly gendered nature of sports spaces can mean that non-binary participants experience greater exclusion than they would in other aspects of their daily lives. As one focus group participant who only ever attends training ‘already changed’ outlined, “I do feel I have to compromise more than in my real life”.

Gendered spaces can be a minefield for people who don’t identify with a gender binary. Navigating gendered spaces such as changing rooms and toilets can make non-binary people feel, at worst excluded and at best compromised.

“Binary changing rooms made me feel othered”

In some facilities, the gender binary is so core to the design of the building, that non-gendered sport and physical activity spaces can only be accessed by binary gender segregated areas. Take some leisure centres for example, where a community swimming pool can only be reached through the male or female changing rooms, or grassroots clubhouse where toilets are located inside gendered changing rooms.

Making non-binary people compromise their gender-identity before they’ve even got in the pool, on the court, or on the pitch can present a physical barrier that binary identified people simply do not have to navigate.

As outlined in ‘Specific Detriment: Barriers and Opportunities for Non-Binary Inclusive Sports in Scotland’ (Erikainen et. al 2020) even gym spaces can be organised along gender lines:

9 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0193723520962937
“gym spaces tend to be organized into feminized and masculinized areas based on presumptions about the kinds of exercises that women and men (are supposed to) do: While weightlifting areas tend to be gendered masculine, cardiovascular and resistance machine areas are generally gendered feminine, because men are expected to engage in muscle building and women in weight management and muscle ‘toning’”

For some non-binary people experiences of gender dysphoria, the feeling of discomfort or distress that often occurs in people whose gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth, may be heightened in gendered spaces and they may require additional privacy even in situations where they are compromising and using a male or female space.

Equally, some non-binary people may be able to ‘pass’ as male or female and may not experience overt scrutiny or policing by male or female participants, whilst some non-binary bodies may not reflect society’s gender norms and expectations and therefore be subject to unwelcome attention from binary gendered participants.

Gendered Activity

Traditional sport and physical activity in the UK are premised on binary gender divisions to such an extent, that even ‘mixed’ sports such as softball and korfball have roles that relate specifically to male and female players.

Even in individual sports, the binary organisation of activity can be a barrier for non-binary people. As Al Hopkins a non-binary runner from Edinburgh Frontrunners explains:

1. Are you male or female?

- Female
- Male

10 https://www.runnersworld.com/uk/health/a35128538/the-life-of-a-non-binary-runner/
For many non-binary people, the experience of having to be labelled as something they are not can be so excluding that they end up leaving a sport or activity. As a young person in the Proud Trust focus group explains:

“I did no sports for about five years when I finished school. I picked up Park Run in my 2nd year of uni, which I really liked until they started requiring you to have a gender. Because they put everyone’s times up which is fine, but they had men’s and women’s and you had to be one. I stopped going then.”

Binary gendered kit can also be problematic for non-binary people, as can tight fitting clothing for some non-binary people who may be experiencing gender dysphoria. As previously mentioned, non-binary people may also face scrutiny and policing from other participants if their body doesn’t match the gender they are assumed to be through the kit they are issued. Sport and activity spaces, such as swimming pools, can also be highly prescriptive about clothing, and this can create an insurmountable challenge for many. One interviewee spoke about the joy of “floating like a starfish” whilst accessing swimming in a trans-only space, which welcomed all bodies.

Representation and Visibility

As already mentioned in the report, it is estimated that there are between 272,000 and 475,000 non-binary people living in the UK, of whom the majority are not currently active enough to maintain good health.

Meanwhile 65% of respondents in the Scottish Trans Non-Binary Survey (2015) reported that imagery, language and comms is not inclusive of non-binary people across services. This was confirmed as being the case for sport and physical activity across all focus groups and interviews undertaken as part of this report.

As a non-binary runner from New York, Lauren Lubin explains in a recent article:

“Recognition is the most fundamental step — and our first major obstacle...You can’t have hopes, dreams, and aspirations if you’re not recognized ... And sports, systematically, is the most entrenched [institution] in gender norms.”

One interviewee talked about their search for inclusive spaces following top surgery, and eventually finding a club to accommodate them, even though all public-facing communications by the club only including representations of men. Whilst their persistence may be admirable, it shouldn’t be difficult to find sport and physical activity opportunities which reflect all members of the community and our varied lives.
Language

Language can be a hugely important tool in making non-binary people feel welcome in sport and physical activity.

From the language that is used on promotional material, to the gender options available on membership forms, to the language used by coaches and administrators, language can be key in creating inclusive environments.

As Layshia Clarendon, a non-binary player for New York Liberty in the WNBA explains in a recent article:

“I’ve heard like Taj McWilliams-Franklin, who works for the [league] office, like this was like last year, and she asked me, when I was in the office: “Laysh, what pronouns do you use?” And that made me feel like, so seen and whole and like: “Wow, Taj is thinking about this?” So, little things like that can also make people feel like, seen and whole.”

At grassroots in the UK, one of our focus group contributors, whose club actively promotes the inclusion of non-binary people on its website and promotional materials, commented “It was a big thing for me…to be explicitly included” Whilst another commented that introducing pronouns at the beginning of an activity session “makes non-binary identities more part of the playing experience, rather than a concession to individual people”.

Other issues facing non-binary people also include the inability to accurately describe their gender identity on forms which may enable them to access sport and physical activity. The Scottish Trans Non-Binary survey (2015) found that ‘Only a tiny number of respondents felt that they were usually or always able to accurately describe their gender identity when filling in forms to access services – 4% (n 867)’, whilst ‘58% of respondents felt that they were never able to accurately describe their gender identity on forms’.

Membership or registration forms which offer only binary options of male and female render non-binary people invisible, meaning that not only potential participants can be put off take part in sport and physical activity, but also, data capture is can be inaccurate and not fully represent the experiences of our diverse communities.

“what pronouns do you use”
Spaces

Spaces which are not gendered and provide ample privacy can be great for everyone.

Changing villages, which provide access for all, but can be sectioned off for different events/sessions are ideal.

LEAP Sports Guide to Non-Binary inclusion\(^{11}\) suggests including within these settings:

‘gender-neutral single occupancy changing rooms that are accessible to everyone, can be locked for privacy, and have a shower and a toilet incorporated into each room’.

Where space constraints limit every cubicle containing showers and toilets as an option, architects and developers must think about the following:

- Are there lockable showers with space to change that afford privacy for participants in ungendered spaces?
- Is there access to ungendered toilets, that are not the only accessible toilets in a facility
- Can participants access sports areas, such as pools or gyms without having to walk a distance in front of others, especially those not using the same facilities

For organisations, facilities and clubs making physical adaptations to existing space, it’s important to think about the needs of the person accessing the space, both in terms of the privacy it affords, and not marking out the non-binary person as different to other participants.

Of course, grassroots sports clubs often have little control over their environment, hiring facilities for training and competitions. Where it is not possible to make physical changes to the activity environment, clubs and activity providers should think about the following

- Have you thought about non-binary people’s needs?
- Have you communicated the limitations of the environment in which you are delivering your activity? (e.g. gendered changing rooms, toilets) This showering policy from Vancouver Frontrunners is great, for example [https://vancouverfrontrunners.org/about-vfr/showering-policy/](https://vancouverfrontrunners.org/about-vfr/showering-policy/)
- If you have exclusive use of facilities and non-binary participants, could you think about using temporary signage to make all members feel welcome? For example, putting up a temporary sign with the name of the club/activity (alternately, there are some great resources on the Gendered Intelligence website: [http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/professionals/resources/toilets](http://genderedintelligence.co.uk/professionals/resources/toilets))

SPACES
AREAS TO CONSIDER:

• Do you have the needs of non-binary people at the heart of your work?

• Do you have capacity to develop new environments? If so, are you considering the needs of non-binary people in design?

• Is it possible to adapt existing environments to provide some ungendered space?

• Are you communicating the limitations of the facilities you use with potential participants?
Activity

It may seem as if creating non-binary sporting opportunities is an enormous hill to climb in sporting structures founded on gender difference, and a culture which magnifies binary gender roles. However, there are sports organisations that have adapted the way they organise their sport to become more inclusive.

**Baseball Softball UK**

In 2017 Baseball Softball UK (BSUK) set up an LGBTQ+ panel (now the LGBTQ+ Committee) with support from Sport England and Pride Sports. Questions about non-binary inclusion were coming up at the time with the agency, and the panel identified the development of non-binary inclusive rules as a priority. This was achieved by creating a third gender category within existing binary rules. You can see the rules here: [https://www.baseballsoftballuk.com/document/inclusive-softball-rules-lgbtq-committee](https://www.baseballsoftballuk.com/document/inclusive-softball-rules-lgbtq-committee)

Originally, it was envisaged that these rules might be used for community tournaments and events, such as the annual BSUK LGBTQ+ inclusive tournament in Manchester. But the rules have been taken up now for all BSUK tournaments and The London Softball League, the largest open softball league in the UK. BSUK has even recently received a request from New Zealand to use the rules there.

To ensure buy-in from the softball community, BSUK surveyed players. BSUK is now working with the British Association of Softball Umpires to include LGBT+ inclusion in their training.

BSUK attributes the success of the initiative to:

- Always having the participant at the heart of the discussion
- Insight into the softball community and their ability to be able to discuss the issues with this community directly
- Knowing that they would not be able to change international rules immediately, but rather than wait for this longer-term change, taking action

**Scottish Athletics**

**Scottish Athletics** became the first NGB to include non-binary options in its competitions in 2017.

This came about through consultation with Edinburgh Frontrunners and their non-binary runner (A former President of the club) Al Hopkins. Al had first spoken to Jog Scotland in 2015 specifically about membership reporting options, and the lack of ability to accurately report on the participation of non-binary members.

In October 2016 Al competed in the first race in Scotland to include a non-binary category, at the Jedburgh Running Festival. Al ran the half marathon as non-binary, the first known entrant in the first known existence of the category outside Canada. This was an unofficial event but was followed in 2017 by an Edinburgh Frontrunners run including a non-binary category at Edinburgh Pride. For this run, Scottish Athletics implemented a temporary rule change to include a non-binary racing category, making it the first licensed race with the category globally.
In 2018, Scottish Athletics were successful in bringing about a permanent UK Athletics rule change to allow a non-binary category in road races, then in 2019 Scottish Athletics made it compulsory for competition organisers to include a non-binary option at all Scottish Championship events.

Scottish Athletics include the following information on their website and offer support for race organisers to deliver non-binary options through a designated member of staff.

Read more here: https://www.scottishathletics.org.uk/32904-2/

Mixed sports without gender segregation or roles are becoming increasingly popular with young people, who mainly socialise in mixed gender groups. The majority of teenagers are likely to identify someone of a different gender as a close friend. In 2021 young people, in the main, are less interested in gender segregated activity that takes them away from the friends and peers.

It is in this context that newer sports such as roller derby and Quidditch are thriving. The Women’s Flat Track Derby Association uses ‘gender expansive’, an umbrella term to include those who do not identify with the gender binary. Their gender statement reads:

“The WFTDA recognizes that identifying as transgender, intersex, and/or gender expansive is not in any way related to an individual’s eligibility for participating as a volunteer or employee. An individual who identifies as a trans woman, intersex woman, and/or gender expansive may skate with a WFTDA charter team if women’s flat track roller derby is the version and composition of roller derby with which they most closely identify”

12 https://resources.wftda.org/womens-flat-track-derby-association-statement-about-gender/
Meanwhile, the International Quidditch Association rules allow for only four athletes of ‘the same gender’ on pitch at any one time and states:

“We embrace players of all genders and sexualities, and athletes play as their stated gender (whether they are cisgender or transgender, with a binary or nonbinary gender). All quidditch athletes have the right to define how they identify, and it is this stated gender that is recognized on pitch. Many players have, for the first time, found a team sport that recognizes them as they are.”13

In fact, even in gendered sports such as football, which is only routinely licensed as a mixed sport up to the age of 18, some grassroots women’s clubs are offering recreational opportunities which include non-binary players. Goal Diggers FC (www.goaldiggersfootballclub.com) and the recently launched Manchester Laces (www.manchesterlaces.co.uk) are prominent and well subscribed examples of this trend. Meanwhile the GFSN (Gay Football Supporters Network), which has existed since 2002, offers mixed football opportunities at clubs throughout the UK and now has clubs in most major cities.

In summary, some traditional sport governing bodies and development agencies are looking at ways to make their sports more inclusive through adaptation of rules. Meanwhile, newer sports are likely to organise outside of the gender binary altogether, and community clubs are offering non-binary offers outside licensed competition.

13 https://iqasport.org/discover/
ACTIVITY
AREAS TO CONSIDER:

- Are you able to adapt rules to be more inclusive of non-binary people?

- Are you able to promote ungendered sports offers?

- What non-competitive opportunities can you offer non-binary people and how does this link with binary offers that may be further along the pathway?
Binary Competition

Whilst non-binary people may be accommodated in grassroots sport through the adaptation of existing rules or the addition of non-binary categories, attention must also be paid to the performance pathway, particularly in relation to the growth of non-binary identities amongst young people in the UK.

How do we ensure that young people wanting to progress in a sport do not encounter unnecessary obstacles?

Whilst we now have non-binary athletes competing at the highest level in WNBA, in international football and pro softball, it is important to acknowledge that performance sport is highly regulated, usually in relation to the use of testosterone and other hormone therapy, and some non-binary participants may use gender-affirming hormones therapeutically.

It is therefore recommended that trans-inclusion policies relating to binary competitive sport also explicitly describe the ways in which non-binary people may participate in competition.

Regulating bodies should include the following in any such policy/guidance:

- A non-binary definition
- Differentiation between non-binary people who are taking hormones and those who are not
- A reference to language use (gender-neutral options) on teams and other competition environments
- Dress codes and kit. Non-binary people should be able to dress according to their gender identity
- Reporting of any discrimination
BINARY COMPETITION
AREAS TO CONSIDER:

- Are you able to adapt rules to be more inclusive of non-binary people?

- Have you considered the inclusion of non-binary people at all stages of the performance pathway?

- Do you understand how rules at grassroots level may interact with regulation further along the pathway and how the transition between the two may affect non-binary athletes?

- Do you have the care and safeguarding of non-binary athletes at the heart of any policy development?

- Do you have robust procedures in place for dealing with reporting and subsequent sanctioning of any discriminatory behaviour?
Representation and Visibility

Gender identity is not the same as gender expression, and therefore non-binary identities are not necessarily represented by androgyny. Some non-binary people may express themselves through masculinity or femininity in a way which confirms our assumptions and stereotypes about gender. It can therefore be challenging to represent non-binary people visually.

However, representation of diverse bodies and participants is essential in creating more inclusive communications. As too is acknowledging non-binary people and identities. It is important to acknowledge in communications that not all non-binary people identify with the trans umbrella, so the use of ‘trans inclusive’ as a catch all term, may end up excluding some.

The non-binary flag colours can also be used to represent non-binary inclusion.

As too can the non-binary symbol


International Non-Binary People’s Day takes place each year on 14 July and is aimed at raising awareness and organising around issues faced by non-binary people. This day can provide a key touchpoint for organisations wanting to communicate non-binary inclusion.
REPRESENTATION AND VISIBILITY
AREAS TO CONSIDER:

• Are you able to adapt rules to be more inclusive of non-binary people?

• If non-binary people are welcome in your club, session or activity, do you state this explicitly?

• If there are limits to non-binary inclusion in the sport/physical activity you offer e.g. mixed training but gendered competition, do you communicate this effectively?

• Can non-binary people see themselves and the issues they may face represented on your website and other communication platforms?
Language

Language is hugely important in the acknowledgement and validation of non-binary identities and organisations should think about ways to include non-binary people when language is used in both written and spoken contexts.

Forms

Organisations/clubs should examine and update existing documents, policies, and procedures to remove gender-specific language or include options beyond male and female.

For example, in any situation where gender is monitored, the following question and options could be incorporated:

Which of the following options best describes how you think of yourself?

1. Woman
2. Man
3. Non-binary
4. In another way

Pronouns can also easily be added to membership forms, not only to communicate inclusion, but also as an important reference point for staff.

Workforce

Language used by members of the workforce can also be hugely important in making non-binary people feel welcomed and the following represents good practice in working with groups and individuals:

Use gender-neutral language, such as they/them or someone’s name (if you have it) until you are confident of their pronouns.

Make a habit of introducing pronouns when you meet participants for the first time.

At the beginning of a session, encourage participants to share names & pronouns routinely.

If you have gendered teams, you may still have non-binary players. Make a habit of saying ‘men’s team players’ or ‘women’s team players’ rather than ‘men’ and ‘women’.

If you make a mistake with someone’s pronouns, correct yourself and move on.
LANGUAGE
AREAS TO CONSIDER:

• Are participants/members able to accurately describe themselves on all forms/documentation?

• Do policies use gender-neutral language throughout?

• Is your workforce confident to use gender-neutral language?
School PE and Sport

As previous work by Pride Sports, Leap Sports Scotland and others has shown, school sport can be a complex environment to navigate for many young LGBT+ people, particularly school environments which rigorously segregate along the gender binary.

A gendered sports offer, e.g. netball for girls, football for boys, persistent stereotyping and gender policing by peers, along with anti-LGBT+ bullying can be a disincentive to participation in later life to LGBT+ young people across the spectrum. This can be particularly true for non-binary children and young people.

School PE and sport can be significantly improved for all young people, but particularly LGBT+, and non-binary children and young people, by taking the following steps:

- Avoid segregating pupils by gender where possible
- Offer a diverse range of sports and physical activities within the school environment, both within the curriculum and extra-curricular offers. Consider team and individual sports and activities which aren’t gendered
- Provide at least some ungendered changing and toilet spaces
- Allow all pupils to wear kit that reflects their gender identity
- Challenge gender stereotyping and name-calling at all times
- Inform students of how to report any concerns/incidents
SCHOOL PE AND SPORT
AREAS TO CONSIDER:

• What are the opportunities for offering mixed ungendered sport and physical activity?

• Is your school able to offer diverse extra-curricular activity that provides opportunities for non-binary pupils? Do you have links with local clubs that can support this?

• Do you acknowledge non-binary identities and is the welfare of non-binary children and young people at the heart of your school offer?

• How can you involve non-binary pupils in making PE and sport more accessible?
Non-Binary People, Sport & Physical Activity

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