

**Department of Culture, Media and Sport - Sport Integrity
(Call for Evidence): A Response from the Sport and
Physical Activity Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam
University**

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DCSM Sport Integrity – Call for Response (10th October 2023)

A Written Response by James Newman, and James Rumbold, Sport and Physical Activity Research Centre, Sheffield Hallam University

Please provide any additional comments to explain your responses. Please do not provide details of specific cases or concerns and do not provide any personal information.

Our response is provided with reference to the DCMS ‘Get Active’ strategy (August 2023). Specifically, our response links directly to Chapter 2 of the ‘Get Active’ strategy (points 2.1-2.4), and focuses on sport integrity issues related to misconduct (and other issues that can be described as “duty of care issues”). Our response is informed by our published research over the past five years on psychological stress, well-being, bullying, and safeguarding in UK elite and professional sport environments. We have provided supporting evidence in the way of published research findings from our research team.

In addition, we would like to signpost the DCMS to a recent scientific call for further evidence on protecting the welfare of various individuals who operate in sport in the scientific journal entitled ‘Frontiers in Sports and Active Living’. A link to this call for research and practice evidence is provided here: <https://tinyurl.com/55cpk3fa>
Edited by our research team at Sheffield Hallam University, this scientific call will make freely available a collection of research findings, policy and practice developments from across the world related to safeguarding, welfare and a duty of care to those operating in sport environments. This open-access scientific evidence will be available to read from May 2024 at the latest.

Thinking about the UK sport sector in 10 years time, what would success look like to you in terms of strengthening the integrity of sport?

- All populations involved in sport (e.g., players/athletes, coaches/managers, CEOs/board members, staff across organisations, the media, and fans/spectators) are more educated and aware of what constitutes inappropriate behaviours such as abuse, bullying, and maltreatment in sport (see supporting evidence 1-3, 6-8, 10). It is also imperative that behaviours that have been normalised such as ‘banter’ are fully understood for their potentially negative repercussions.
- Education will be culturally developed and delivered, such that matters of integrity are prioritised at the individual (within interactions between different people), contextual (within sports clubs/teams), and systemic levels (e.g., the governing bodies) of each sport (see supporting evidence 2 and 10).
- As part of education around whistleblowing and welfare, sports will share case study examples of high-profile individuals who have been celebrated as agents for change. These examples will be inclusive and represent under-represented (e.g., sport performers with a disability, female sport performers, ethnically diverse sport performers, coaches, parents) and over-represented (e.g., white male sport performers) groups who are involved in sport.
- Interventions aimed at strengthening the integrity of sport over the next 10 years will not constitute educational initiatives alone (see supporting evidence 1-3, 6-8, 10).

Sport organisations will develop mentor support systems for every individual operating in their sport. Professional sport league associations will monitor and evaluate sport clubs on a quarterly basis for safeguarding cases and wrongdoing. Sport national governing bodies will monitor, evaluate, and be monitored and evaluated on a quarterly basis for safeguarding cases and wrongdoing. In line with 2.1 of the DCMS 'Get Active' strategy, international sporting events that are hosted in the UK will require clearly communicated policies and procedures pertaining to safeguarding and whistleblowing, and appropriate staffing at events to address unforeseen welfare issues during major sporting events.

- A whistleblowing register (see supporting evidence 3 and 8) will be created for the human resources teams working for the DCMS, sport organisations, professional league associations and clubs to raise concerns when organisations are looking to appoint individuals to sport leadership roles (e.g., coach, performance director, CEO, safeguarding officer).
- Everyone involved in sport will be accountable and continuously challenge, and not accept, the prevailing culture that exists (see supporting evidence 2 and 8). We agree that the benefits of elite and professional sport [outlined in section 2.1 of the DCMS Get Active strategy] must be celebrated. However, these benefits must be celebrated in such a way that those who report wrongdoing are championed (see supporting evidence 2 and 8), rather than ostracised, and the perspectives of victims of abuse and/or bullying are prioritised rather than the perpetrator's view.
- National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and professional leagues will have close working relationships with broadcast, print, and social media to identify abusive behaviours. Media organisations will be accountable in cases where abuse is not addressed or normalised.
- The sporting environment will be more "psychologically safe" where challenging discussions around integrity can be held and individuals invested in sport have confidence that those in leadership positions will address their concerns, particularly around the "grey areas" of sporting integrity (see supporting evidence 2, 3, 5, 8 and 10).
- Policies and procedures connected to integrity in sport are publicly accessible, visible, transparent, and continuously updated to current findings both in practice and research. All people involved in sport at individual, contextual, and systemic level are accountable for their actions in relation to these policies and procedures.

Please provide any additional comments related to the handling of sport integrity issues that you have not yet had the opportunity to cover. Please do not provide details of specific cases or concerns and do not provide any personal information.

Based on our published research on psychological stress, well-being and bullying in UK elite and professional sport environments (see supporting evidence 1, 5, 6, 9), and in line with Sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the DCMS Get Active strategy, it is clear that the desire to "win well" reaches its most demanding periods for sports people during heavy competition and training schedules, such as the 12 months leading up to major sporting events. These are periods when integrity issues related to welfare, mental health and bullying tend to be inadvertently illuminated. We recommend that monitoring processes are implemented at a systemic level to capture integrity issues during the most stressful periods of sporting seasons, especially in the lead-up to major sporting events (e.g., Olympic / Paralympic Games). In addition, NGBs that are publicly funded should apply a similar approach to monitor integrity issues in the lead up to major sporting events for individuals involved in youth and junior sport participation.

From our research in UK elite and professional sport environments (see supporting evidence 1, 2, 3, 5, 6-8, 10) we agree with many of the points raised in Section 2.3 of the DCMS Get Active strategy, such as:

- Research indicating that discrimination is present at a systemic level.
- Investigations into high profile complaints suggest ingrained cultural issues that have developed over many years.
- The lack of confidence complainants have in how allegations will be investigated, as well as the fear of penalty for doing so.
- The lack of resources for dealing with complex complaints/allegations.
- The lack of appropriate action taken as a response to allegations of wrongdoing that are made.

While we also agree that the expansion of Sport England's Safeguarding Case Management Service and the advent of Sport Integrity roles with UK Sport is a positive step, we have provided further recommendations from our research with multiple sporting populations to improve how integrity matters are currently handled:

- The priority in Section 2.3 around education is correct but the education and training which is delivered needs to be more meaningful. Specifically, education programmes need to be tailored to the club/organisation they are focused on, rather than being delivered from the "top-down" (see supporting evidence 1-3). For example, coaches, sport performers, safeguarding/welfare staff, and sports psychologists need to co-construct education and welfare policies at a club level with the support of their appropriate governing body (see supporting evidence 8).
- Whistleblowers need to be celebrated and rewarded, rather than being penalised for their actions. The fear of ridicule for speaking out expressed by some in our research (see supporting evidence 2, 6-8, 10) needs to be removed and individuals need to be incentivised to whistle-blow.
- "Sporting organizations need to be more diverse in terms of their people in positions of power to encourage greater reporting of wrongdoing" (see supporting evidence 2, 10). By achieving this ambition, it will support the government in "being proactive in tackling discrimination and setting the standard for the sector" as outlined in Section 2.5 of the Get Active strategy.
- Governing bodies as well as sport clubs/organisations need to provide transparent information about how complaints are resolved (see supporting evidence 8). Where confidentiality permits, a complaints' handling procedure should be open to the public, and form part of a whistleblowing register. Individuals and organisations need to be fully accountable for their roles in handling these complaints. This recommendation should not create a culture which vilifies individuals but helps individuals can learn from their mistakes.

In line with Section 2.4 of the DCMS Get Active strategy (i.e., “No medal, trophy or prize is worth the sacrifice of people’s welfare” (1-5, 10--11), our research evidence along with anecdotal stories published in autobiographies, media reports and docuseries spanning youth sport participation through to elite levels of sport, contrasts unfavourably with the above ideal.

Participation in sport historically and culturally has involved individuals adhering to mantras of be “resilient” and a “win at all costs” mentality, and these mantras have historically been reinforced systemically by leaders and others operating in sport. A desire to win or achieve individual excellence has regularly been incorrectly correlated with the need to “win at all costs”, which encourages individuals to take unnecessary risks, engage in anti-social behaviours in sport, or cheat (e.g., dope). Although we agree that “No medal, trophy or prize is worth the sacrifice of people’s welfare”, this is an ideal that will take a generation to amend culturally, through tighter monitoring of welfare issues, greater funding of welfare officers in sport across all levels of participation, and greater punitive actions.

Please attach any supporting evidence that you would like us to consider. Please do not provide details of specific cases or concerns and do not provide any personal information.

Please see overleaf

Sport Integrity – Call for Evidence

A response provided by:

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Supporting Evidence

#	Published Research Evidence	Online Location
1	Newman, J. A., Eccles, S., Rumbold, J. L., & Rhind, D. J. A. (2022). When it is no longer a bit of banter: Coaches' perspectives of bullying in professional soccer. <i>International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology</i> , 20(6), 1576-1593.	https://doi.org/gq7kwb
2	Newman, J. A., & Rumbold, J. L. (2023). <i>FIFA research scholarship final report: The co-design of an adult safeguarding education programme in football</i> . FIFA	Professional video and expert statement available from Dr James Newman on request
3	Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Stone, J. A., & Rumbold, J. L. (2021). Coaches' experiences of morality in English professional football environments: Recommendations for creating a moral atmosphere. <i>International Sport Coaching Journal</i> , 9(2), 211-221.	https://doi.org/gn943j
4	Higham, A. J., Newman, J. A., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2023). You wouldn't let your phone run out of battery: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of male professional football coaches' well-being. <i>Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health</i> . Advance online publication.	https://doi.org/kvd9
5	Rumbold, J. L., Fletcher, D., & Daniels, K. (2018). Using a mixed method audit to inform organizational stress management interventions in sport. <i>Psychology of Sport and Exercise</i> , 35, 27-38.	https://doi.org/gc6d39
6	Newman, J. A., Warburton, V. E., & Russell, K. (2021). Conceptualizing bullying in adult professional football: A phenomenological exploration. <i>Psychology of Sport and Exercise</i> , 54, 101883.	https://doi.org/ghf2
7	Newman, J. A., Warburton, V. E., & Russell, K. (2022). It can be a "very fine line": Professional footballers' perceptions of the conceptual divide between bullying and banter. <i>Frontiers in Psychology</i> , 13.	https://doi.org/kxcn
8	Newman, J. A., Warburton, V. E., & Russell, K. (2022). Whistleblowing of bullying in professional football: To report or not to report? <i>Psychology of Sport and Exercise</i> , 61, 102177.	https://doi.org/gq7mhq
9	Rumbold, J. L., Newman, J. A., & Carr, S. (2023). Coaches' experiences of job crafting through	https://psycnet.apa.org/doi/10.1037/spy0000328

organizational change in high-performance sport.
Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology.
Advance online publication.

- 10 Newman, J. A., Lickess, A., & Higham, A. J. <https://shura.shu.ac.uk/id/eprint/32328>
(2023). Fighting the system: Sport psychologists' experiences of maltreatment, and their recommendations for practice. *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*. Advance online publication.
 - 11 Rothwell, M., Rumbold, J. L., & Stone, J. A. (2020). <https://doi.org/gf4kvm>
Exploring British adolescent rugby league players' experiences of professional academies and dropout. *International Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 18(4), 485-501.
 - 12 Rumbold, J. L., Madigan, D. J., & Didymus, F. F. <https://doi.org/kxdv>
(2023). A daily diary study of primary appraisals, emotional exhaustion, and turnover intentions in sport coaches. *Journal of Sports Sciences*. Advance online publication.
 - 13 Rumbold, J., Fletcher, D., & Daniels, K. (2020). An <https://doi.org/ghc9tw>
experience sampling study of organizational stress processes and future playing time in professional sport. *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 38(5), 559-567.
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