

Gender reassignment and sport

About this learning note

Of particular relevance to this learning note, one discussion group was held with transgender people with experience of sports participation in Scotland. This learning note has been developed to provide a broad overview of the important issues involved in gender reassignment in sport, to provide an introduction to the topic. This approach has been taken based on feedback from the research with people in the sporting system in Scotland.

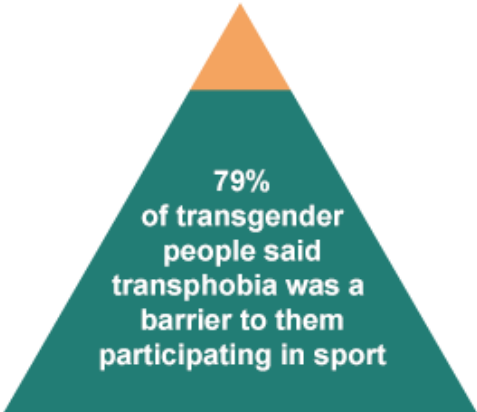
What are the important issues?

There is no data available on the participation of people who have or are undergoing gender reassignment in sport in Scotland. None of the existing household surveys ask about transgender status, meaning that the number of people who are transgender or are going through gender reassignment is not known nationally.

Barriers

1. Transphobia

There has been research into transgender people's participation in sport. The Equality Network conducted research¹ specifically into transgender participation in sport and found that transphobic bullying is a major problem.

<p>“...who wants to be teased, mocked and be made the butt of jokes in the showers, on the playing fields, in the pub?”</p> <p>Quote from Out for Sport</p>	 <p>79% of transgender people said transphobia was a barrier to them participating in sport</p>	<p>“Transphobia is accepted as funny, and a valid way of insulting and damaging a sports personality and excluding people from taking part.”</p> <p>Quote from Out for Sport</p>
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¹Out for Sport, Tackling transphobia in sport, Equality Network, June 2012.

Almost everyone who was involved in the research had experienced or witnessed verbal abuse while participating in or spectating at sports events. More than one in ten had experienced or witnessed physical abuse. In addition, seven per cent said they had experienced or witnessed other forms of sexual assault.

2. Gendered sports

Many competitive sports have separate categories for men and women. This can create barriers for transgender sports participants.

The Gender Recognition Act 2004 created a process to enable transgender people to get their UK birth certificates and legal gender changed. Section 19 of the Act relates to sport. The Act makes clear that the participation of transgender people in competitive sporting events may be legitimately restricted in order to ensure fair competition and the safety of competitors. This only relates to people participating in the sport as competitors.

The Sports Council Equality Group has recently jointly funded the development of guidance for national governing bodies to help them develop inclusive policies to enable transgender people to participate fully in local and competitive sports.² This guidance includes a ten point plan for inclusion, including a public commitment to inclusion of transgender people; leadership at the highest level in the organisation; building relationships with transgender people and associated organisations; having clear codes of conducts and policies; and staff training.

Example

Gabrielle Ludwig is a transgender basketball player in California. She is believed to be the first transgender person ever to play community college basketball in the United States. She began living as a woman in 2007. She was the subject of a national media 'frenzy' and transphobia from spectators. Critics also complained that Ludwig's height and weight gave her an unfair advantage.³

"My first game, I sucked... I was so nervous... There were reporters everywhere and in my face. Photographers would zoom in on things that were more masculine on my features or on my hands to sensationalize something."

3. Lack of appropriate facilities and changing rooms

² Equality at **sport**scotland, Mainstreaming the Equality Act 2010 duties, 2011

³ <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Unique-challenges-for-transgender-player-4319130.php>

Another key barrier is the lack of changing and leisure facilities which meet the needs of transgender people. Without gender-neutral changing facilities, private showers and toilets, transgender people can find it difficult to participate in sports⁴

What is already happening?

The Scottish LGBT Sports Charter

In May 2015, the Scottish LGBT Sports Charter was launched in Glasgow. The charter was developed in consultation with sports governing bodies (SGBs), other sports stakeholders and LGBT people⁵. It has five principles, focusing on actively involving and supporting LGBT people, developing inclusive policies and practices, and creating a positive and welcoming sporting environment. It is accompanied by a practical guidance document on how to put these principles into action.

Taurus Club, Manchester

Manchester Concord, a transgender social group have paid to have a changing facility specifically for transgender people installed in one of the local gay-friendly bars.⁶

Glenogle Swim Centre

In 2010, the LGBT centre in Edinburgh consulted with transgender people about gaps in services and found that there was an interest in transgender specific swimming sessions. Edinburgh Leisure agreed to provide sessions at Glenogle Swim Centre specifically for the transgender community and closed to the general public. Staff at the swimming pool were trained in transgender awareness before the sessions. The sessions have taken place twice a month since July 2010 and are well attended with participants travelling some distances to participate.⁷

"I hadn't been swimming for nearly 10 years and this helped me reconnect with the experience. It has improved my confidence and I've even managed to use some hotel pools. Without the trans swimming sessions, I couldn't possibly have tried this."

⁴ Transgender and Intersex Sports Provision at the University of Cambridge, 2013

⁵ <http://www.equality-network.org/sports-charter/>

⁶ <http://www.manchesterconcord.org.uk/taurus.htm>

⁷ Out For Sport, Tackling Transphobia in sport, Equality Network, 2012

Find out more...

Useful sources for finding out more include:

- the Scottish LGBT Sports Charter and Guidance - <http://www.equality-network.org/sports-charter/>
- the documents referenced throughout this Learning Note – as footnotes; and