# GOALBALL UK POLICY ON THE INCLUSION OF TRANS PEOPLE IN GOALBALL

Last Updated: September 2022

Next Review: September 2023

## INTRODUCTION AND PRINCIPLES

Goalball UK is fully committed to the principles *and practice* of equality of opportunity. This includes the opportunity of trans people to participate in Goalball as players, coaches, and other volunteering roles. The Goalball UK Equality and Diversity Policy applies generally to all players, volunteers, employees, and others involved in the work of Goalball UK; this specific policy is intended to set out clearly Goalball UK’s position on the inclusion of trans athletes, coaches, and other volunteers in the sport.

Underpinning this policy are two commitments which Goalball UK makes to all its participants:

As the National Governing Body for the sport, we are committed to the full participation of trans athletes, coaches, and other volunteers in domestic competitions which we organise or oversee, and

* As the body which prepares the national representative teams for Paralympic and other international competitions, we will, as far as we can, support trans athletes, within the parameters set by the International Blind Sports Association (IBSA), the British Paralympic Association (BPA), and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC).

This policy has been created within the legal and regulatory context of:

* Gender Recognition Act 2004
* Equality Act 2010
* The UK Sport guidance documents issued in September 2021
* The IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-Discrimination September 2021

In its guidance, UK Sport provided a set of questions to assist analysing the factors relevant to this policy. Annex 1 sets out the analysis Goalball UK has carried out using this guidance. It will be reviewed and kept up to date in the light of any relevant changes.

Goalball UK recognises that excluding trans people from participating in sporting events and activities has significant implications for their health, well-being, and involvement in community life. Where it has ultimate authority over a competition or event, Goalball UK will ensure that trans people are able to participate in the sport in their stated gender

Goalball UK is committed to providing a safe, fair, and inclusive sporting environment where people of all backgrounds can contribute and participate. People who identify as trans should be treated fairly and with dignity and respect at all times. This includes acting with sensitivity when a person is receiving medical or psychological treatment.

Section 2 of this policy applies to athletes competing in domestic competitions. Section 3 applies to athletes competing or training for international competition. Section 4 relates to all athletes, coaches, volunteers, and staff involved in the activities of Goalball UK as a national governing body. Annex A sets out Goalball UK’s analysis of the sport using the UK Sport guidance document.

### Terminology and Glossary

This policy uses the term “trans.” The term is used in the way described by Stonewall as:

“An umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.  
Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) transgender, transsexual, gender-queer (GQ), gender-fluid, non-binary, gender-variant, crossdresser, genderless, agender, nongender, third gender, bi-gender, trans man, trans woman, trans masculine, trans feminine and neutrois.”

The full Stonewall glossary can be found here: [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/glossary-terms](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/glossary-terms%20)

For clarity, the nine protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage & civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

## DOMESTIC COMPETITIONS

* 1. In domestic competitions, an individual player’s participation at Regional, Intermediate or Super League level is assessed by playing ability. The over-arching principle is to ensure that players participate at a level at which both they and those on court with them are physically safe to do so.
  2. An individual is deemed as belonging to the gender in which they identify rather than the gender they were assigned at birth'
  3. As well as club competitions, these principles will apply to competitions involving teams representing England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, or Wales where there are no teams representing countries outside the UK. These competitions will be considered “domestic” for the purposes of this policy. Competitive encounters involving any of the four UK countries against non-UK national teams are covered by the provisions in section 3 below.

## INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

* 1. At the time this policy was published, neither BPA, IBSA nor IPC have issued their own guidance on the participation of trans athletes. In September 2021, the IOC issued its Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-Discrimination.
  2. Goalball UK’s position is that an athlete 16 and over should be eligible to represent Great Britain and Northern Ireland (or one of the four constituent nations of the United Kingdom) in international competitions in their stated gender identity. Goalball UK will support athletes to do so within any policy set by the IOC, IPC, IBSA, or BPA that applies at the time.
  3. For athletes under 16, such representation will require a case-by-case assessment by Goalball UK through the Performance and Talent Group and the considerations that apply to all athletes under 16.
  4. Goalball UK has a talent pathway which develops athletes for international competition. As part of its support and guidance to all athletes on this pathway, it will work with individual Trans athletes as they prepare for international competition to ensure a full understanding of any IBSA or IPC requirements.

## GENERAL ISSUES APPLICABLE TO ALL CASES

4.1 Goalball UK will not tolerate any discrimination, harassment or bullying of a person who identifies as trans or who is thought to be trans. If a trans person feels they have been harassed or discriminated against by another person or organisation bound by this Policy, they may make a complaint. Goalball UK may also instigate a matter. The process will be set out within Goalball UK’s disciplinary rules applicable at the time of the matter.

4.2 As well as the statutory definitions of discrimination, examples of things that amount to harassment or bullying are:

* + refusing to use someone’s proper pronouns
  + spreading gossip about someone’s trans history
  + insulting someone based on their gender identity and gender expression.

4.3 Goalball UK holds its competitions and events at third party venues. Goalball UK will make every effort to use venues with consistent policies about use of facilities. Goalball UK will make information available about venues as part of its pre-tournament packs. Clubs and athletes, coaches and volunteers are encouraged to familiarise themselves with a venue’s own policies as well as this document.

4.4 Gender identity and recognition are sensitive matters and any persons involved in any case dealt with under this policy will respect the confidentiality of the matter and the individual’s right to privacy. All documentation containing information about a person’s past or present gender Transition will be managed in accordance with Goalball UK policies on information handling and in line with the Data Protection Act 2018, the equality Act 2010, and the Gender Recognition Act 2004. Special attention is drawn to the fact that, as well as standard Data Protection requirements, the law also provides extra protections about a person’s gender recognition, which includes criminal sanctions for disclosing specific types of information.

4.5 Gender recognition achieved under any laws operating in the jurisdiction in which the athlete obtained this recognition will be accepted by Goalball UK. Goalball UK recognises that the legal requirements for obtaining gender recognition is a devolved matter in the UK – the Scottish Parliament has the right to make different provisions for how a person achieves recognition of their gender than apply in England, Wales, or Northern Ireland. Goalball UK will not concern itself with these differences, nor with any differences in procedure applicable in a country outside the UK.

# ANNEX A

This appendix documents the matters considered by Goalball UK as it worked through the toolkit provided in the guidance issued by the five UK sports bodies in September 2021. This analysis is the outcome of discussions with and between staff, players, player representatives, coaches, board members and individuals outside Goalball with knowledge of the questions raised, from January to August 2022. It works through the analysis questions suggested in the September 2021 guidance, although it takes the questions in a slightly different order so as to group some of them together in a more thematic arrangement.

**Is your sport gender affected, and how is that manifest?**

**Does your sport reward greater strength, stamina, or physique?**

Goalball, at a domestic level in the UK, differs from many other sports in that it is played openly by all at all levels. The boundaries between Novice, Intermediate and elite are set on the basis of skill - a mix of offensive and defensive ability - rather than sex or gender. In the way the sport is organised on a general domestic level in the UK, Goalball is not gender affected.

However, Goalball as organised by GUK is a gender affected sport in specific contexts:

\* it has distinct talent pathways for women and men, a division which is necessary because of requirements set by international bodies

\* it occasionally organises events aimed at increasing participation by women and girls, in pursuit of policies which are common to many sports bodies, including UK Sport and Sport England.

Whilst greater stamina or physique is acknowledged by the player rating system, this is only one component in a player’s rating. The rating system - and through it, access to higher levels of play - also includes an analysis of defensive and overall playing ability.

**If some forms of your sport are not gender affected, what are the reasons to retain sex categories in the future?**

**What is the purpose of the sex categories in your sport?**

These are the current areas where a sex category is used, and a rationale for them:

(a) separate women’s and men’s international teams. The international game is organised on this basis so to allow for athletes to compete at this level, GUK must organise its teams in this way. The division of sports between women and men at international level is historically and socially conditioned; fair competition and competitor safety are components in this.

b) Talent Pathway. These programmes feed into the international teams and whilst not all persons on them will reach this level, are categorised by sex because of (a) above.

(c) formal programmes aimed at female participation. For example, sessions arranged specifically for women the “This Girl Can” scheme, etc. These are specific programmes aimed at encouraging participation by women as a recognition that fully open competitions or sessions can act as a bar to participation. At this level, in this case, Fairness is the main driver, as the aim is to provide a route into the game that is fairer to women, although Safety - by the exclusion of stronger male players - has a secondary role.

(d) Top Goalscorer award. This is a GUK specific practice of recognising the top female and male scorers at a competition. This is a specific example of addressing the need to encourage and recognise female participation.

Beyond these matters, GUK currently does not see a need to divide participants by reference to sex or gender.

## Do you consider Inclusion to be the first priority? Is Fairness paramount to your sport? Is Safety paramount to your sport?

Goalball as a sport was developed to enable those excluded from other sports to participate in a competitive game designed for them. It has always had rehabilitation and social inclusion as key aims.

Since the inception of Goalball UK, the social inclusion benefit of sport has been a priority, and the domestic game has always been played on an open basis, without reference to any of the 9 protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

A player rating system and separate competitions for players with different ratings means that player safety and fair competition is managed through providing appropriate competition standards. In addition, ad hoc decisions can be taken by Tournament Directors to require individual players to modify their play if they are considered too strong for an opposing team, if there is risk of injury, or if there is any abuse of the player rating system.

There is no evidence that safety and fair competition is compromised with an entirely open approach to participation by trans athletes.

**Could your sport offer alternative competitive models which may be specific to Inclusion or Fairness, but not necessarily both?**

**Does your sport currently make accommodation of female characteristics?**

**Does your sport have modified rules for females, males, or other categories such as Juniors?**

**Does, or could, your sport offer modified versions of your playing rules?**

**Are there some versions which are more specific to categorisation for competitive fairness … and others to Inclusion?**

GUK has the power, as an NGB, to modify rules. It does this to different degrees at Novice and Intermediate, levels already, to allow players to experience competitive sport at a level appropriate to them. The competitions are currently organised on a fully open sex basis, so are fully Inclusive.

However, linked to its other priorities, GUK could organise competitions using sex as an entry category to allow for development of the women’s game and participation in general. This would gravitate towards Fairness as its main aim, rather than Inclusion. However, even in this context, there is as yet no evidence that the inclusion of trans athletes would raise any safety or fair competition issues, because of the other mechanisms Goalball UK has to hand, such as they player rating system and Tournament Directors’ powers to take ad hoc action.

Goalball makes no distinction in the type of play, equipment, or length of game between women and men. Even the GUK player rating system ignores this, rating each player against a performance scale. However, of course, the elements of rating linked to shot power and other speed-related aspects of the game allow for generally higher ratings amongst men compared to women.

There is no difference in the game play based on sex. Modified forms, including a softer ball, smaller court, etc. are made at a Junior level, and rule relaxation is present at Novice and Intermediate level to both promote greater participation and Safety.

**Do you think the emphasis on Inclusion and Fairness should be different between grass roots and competitive levels?**

**Do you believe your categorisation gives fairness?**

The division between women and men in the high-performance programmes is required because of the way the sport is organised internationally by third parties. Goalball UK’s ability to organise these programmes is therefore driven by matters beyond its control.

Domestic programmes aimed at women and girls, in order to develop their participation in the sport, is a recognised policy goal of many sporting bodies, including UK Sport. There is no evidence that such programmes create unfairness.

**Does your sport offer secondary or consequential reward? Is this due to Fairness or Inclusion?**

**Is your sport able to offer non-competitive outcomes?**

Better players are given the opportunity to compete at the highest international levels, but these are by definition subject to sex categorisation.

Domestically any player can play at the highest level they can achieve as an individual, regardless of sex, although access to talent pathways and the support they give then become determined by sex categorisation.

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