

Transgender Policy Consultation

Summary Report



Background

Table Tennis England's Transgender Policy sets out our position on the inclusion of transgender and non-binary people in table tennis.

The previous policy was reliant on self-identification for eligibility to participate in regulated events at a nationally ranked level. The main changes outlined in the new policy surrounding eligibility is due to come into effect at the start of the 2026/27 season. Non-regulated events and recreational activity remain unchanged.

The new policy states that;

- Eligibility in the women's competition is for biological women only
- Eligibility for transgender women (biological men) and cisgender men is in the 'open' competition
- Eligibility for transgender men (biological women) is in the 'open' competition

To gather people's thoughts on the policy and understand how it may affect their participation in the sport, a consultation was launched in early July 2025.



Methodology



Executive Summary

- Online survey gathered 2,020 responses, with an overall positive response to the proposed changes within the draft policy and 78% of respondents saying they would continue to participate in the sport as usual after the policy had been implemented. However, there is a portion of respondents who strongly oppose the draft policy – including all 30 transgender or non-binary respondents and a cohort of cisgender individuals who stand in solidarity with transgender participants.
- Interviews conducted with 4 organisations, with differing opinions on the draft policy. Advice was given around language, terminology, legal considerations, and ensuring we are acting with humanity and compassion.
- Interviews conducted with 8 individuals, who all participate in the sport, with various demographic backgrounds. Several key themes emerged from the interviews, including protecting the women's category, the displacement of women and girls, exclusion and discrimination, and table tennis as a gender-affected sport.
- A narrative review was conducted to explore current academic research surrounding transgender participation in sporting activities, to understand the evidence behind gender-affected sport based on a safety and/or fairness issue. In addition, policies in other sports were explored to understand the current landscape amongst other sporting organisations, as well as looking into media coverage and representation of transgender athletes.
- The various methodologies and subsequent data and insight collected during this comprehensive consultation have been taken back to the working group and presented to the Table Tennis England Board. It was agreed to continue with the draft policy, which has now been approved and will be implemented for the 26/27 season.



Online Survey

2,020 respondents



Summary



1.64% of respondents were transgender or non-binary

13 transgender women, 3 transgender men and 14 non-binary individuals completed the survey out of a total of 2,020 respondents



Vast majority of tran or non-binary respondents are actively involved in table tennis

90% have played table tennis in the past 12 months (70% play regularly), 85% have been members of TTE, 51% have previously played in regulated events, 15% are members of the table tennis workforce



Transgender and non-binary respondents are against the policy

All areas of interest were marked as a negative change, with strong commentary opposing the policy and claiming it is exclusionary and targeting transgender women



Positive overall response to the policy

Overall, areas of interest were marked as a positive or no change by the majority of all respondents. However, this differs when looking at different groups – specifically those who identify as transgender or non-binary



78% of all respondents would participate as usual

Overall, participation in table tennis is unlikely to be affected by this policy. This falls to 50% of transgender and non-binary respondents, with 23% saying they would participate less and 23% stating they would not participate.



Participation in regulated events mostly unaffected

85% of those who have previously competed in regulated events would continue to do so. Of those who have not previously competed, 61% would still be interested in doing so. For both groups, 10% of respondents would not compete due to the policy.



Summary



Stark difference between all vs transgender or non-binary respondents

There is a strong difference in opinion when comparing results from all vs transgender/non-binary respondents. For example, 11% of all respondents said they would participate less or not at all due to this policy compared with 46% of transgender and non-binary respondents. Additionally, areas including inclusivity, equality, representation and perceptions of TTE were all rated as a negative change for transgender and non-binary respondents, compared to being rated as a positive or no change for all respondents. Differences in workforce were also seen.

Clear divide in opinions from those supporting vs opposing the policy

Open commentary throughout the consultation shows a clear divide between those who support the policy and those who oppose it. Those who support the policy made comments affirming their acceptance and pleasure with the new rules, whilst those who oppose the policy often had strong comments surrounding their displeasure for the policy and its exclusion of transgender women, as well as for TTE as the governing body of the sport.

Solidarity with transgender women from others with different gender identities

There was a strong sense of solidarity from those who identify as transgender men, non-binary and women towards transgender women. Many respondents commented on how the policy actively excludes transgender women, which they feel is morally wrong. Several also commented how they would strongly consider not participating in table tennis anymore due to this policy and their view of TTE not being an inclusive organisation.

Lack of equality and inclusivity cited by respondents

A common theme from open comments relating to equality referred to transgender women not being allowed to compete as their identifying gender, however transgender men are allowed to do so. The inclusivity of the policy was frequently questioned, with several respondents stating this being a backwards step for the sport in terms of inclusivity.

Some misunderstanding of what's changing and calls for grass roots rules

Comments from a minority of respondents showed misunderstanding or a lack of clarity on the changes the policy will bring. Some mention that transgender men should not be allowed to compete in women's competitions, which is what the policy would enforce. Others questioned which levels of competition would be affected by the policy, with several respondents arguing the policy should be stretched to all levels of the game, including grass roots and recreational play.

Derogatory language and attitudes commonly shown with supporters

Those who were in support of the policy commonly showed derogatory language and attitudes towards transgender people. The word 'woke' was seen 40 times in open commentary, along with comments of mental illness, not being 'normal' and suggestions of further segregation for the entire LGBTQ+ community.



Affect of the Policy on...

Group Comparison

| | All respondents | Transgender/non-binary | Competed in regulated events | Transgender/non-binary and competed in regulated events | Current members (24/25 season) | Currently plays (at least once a month) | Table tennis workforce |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Inclusivity of table tennis | 44.17% positive change | 80% negative change | 39.28% positive change | 85.71% negative change | 42.27% no change | 43.31% positive change | 41.81% no change |
| Equality in table tennis | 53.04% positive change | 80% negative change | 47.42% positive change | 85.71% negative change | 51.83% positive change | 53.32% positive change | 50% positive change |
| Representation in table tennis | 44.67% positive change | 72% negative change | 39.12% positive change | 78.57% negative change | 43.57% no change | 44.29% positive change | 43.10% positive change |
| Table tennis being a welcoming environment | 45.25% positive change | 76% negative change | 40.53% positive change | 78.57% negative change | 44.27% no change | 44.72% positive change | 43.97% no change |
| Your perception of Table Tennis England | 46.53% positive change | 60% negative change | 41% positive change | 64.29% negative change | 44.04% no change | 45.38% positive change | 48.28% no change |
| Your desire to be a TTE member | 51.54% no change | 60% negative change | 51.33% no change | 71.43% negative change | 58.44% no change | 54.95% no change | 60.78% no change |
| Your desire to participate and compete | 52.68% no change | 60% negative change | 51.49% no change | 78.57% negative change | 58.68% no change | 55.82% no change | 59.91% no change |



Affect on General Participation

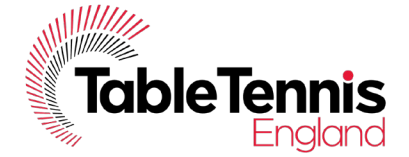


| | All respondents | Transgender/non-binary | Competed in regulated events | Transgender/non-binary and competed in regulated events | Current members (24/25 season) | Currently plays (at least once a month) | Table tennis workforce |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Would participate in table tennis as usual | 78% n=1,425 | 50% n=15 | 81% n=640 | 53% n=8 | 87% n=741 | 86% n=793 | 91% n=211 |
| Would participate in table tennis less than usual | 4% n=75 | 23% n=7 | 4% n=31 | 20% n=3 | 4% n=34 | 4% n=37 | 2% n=4 |
| Would not participate in table tennis | 7% n=127 | 23% n=7 | 7% n=58 | 20% n=3 | 3% n=24 | 4% n=32 | 2% n=6 |
| Not sure | 11% n=197 | 4% n=1 | 8% n=61 | 7% n=1 | 6% n=48 | 6% n=57 | 5% n=11 |

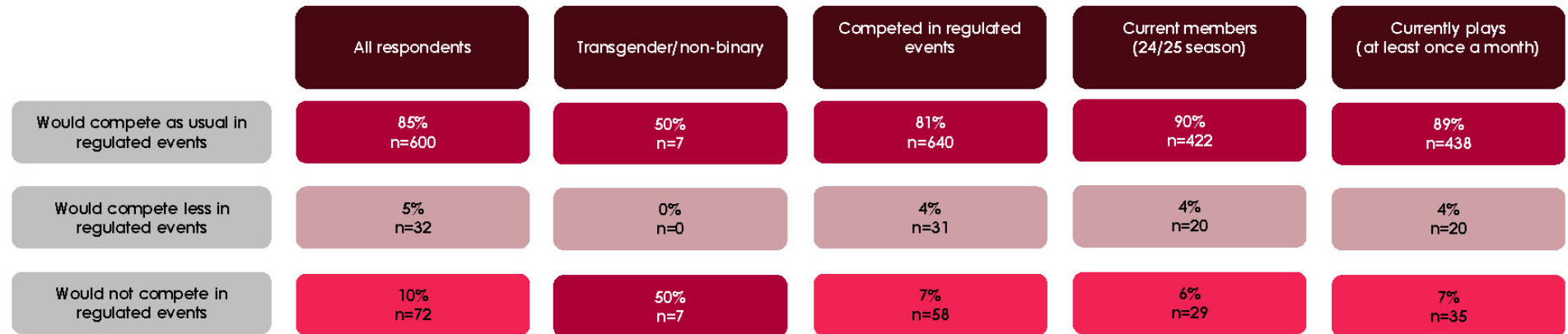
Depicts most common answer
Depicts second most common answer
Depicts least common answer



Affect on Participation in Regulated Events



Those who have competed in TTE regulated events



Depicts most common answer

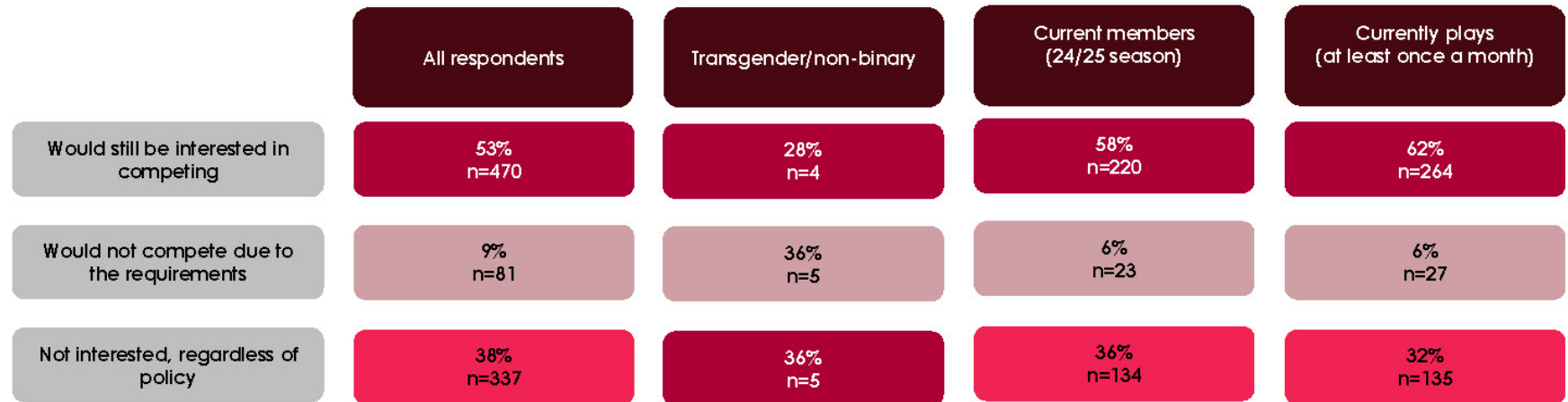
Depicts second most common answer

Depicts least common answer



Affect on Participation in Regulated Events

Those who have **not** competed in TTE regulated events



Depicts most common answer

Depicts second most common answer

Depicts least common answer



Transgender and Non-Binary Respondents

(n=30)

Summary



Affect on general participation

50% would play as they usually do (n=15), 46% would play less or not at all (n=14). Commentary mentions lack of fairness for transgender women and the policy not being in the inclusive nature of the sport.



Affect on participation in regulated events

52% have previously competed in regulated events (n=15), of these 46% would not compete due to these regulations (n=7). Of those who have not competed before (n=14), 35% would not compete due to the regulations (n=5).



Thoughts on inclusivity, equality and representation

Inclusivity of and equality in table tennis were both rated as a negative change because of the policy (80%, n=20). Representation in the sport was rated as a negative change (72%, n=18).



Table tennis being a welcoming environment

76% rated a negative change in table tennis being a welcoming environment due to the policy (n=19), with commentary of transphobia and reinforcing existing attitudes being mentioned.



Perception of Table Tennis England

60% rated a negative change in their perception of Table Tennis England as a result of the policy (n=15), commentary mentions this being a backwards step and the NGB 'following the crowd' rather than being 'forward thinking'.



Desire to be a member and to participate in the sport

Both desire to be a member and desire to participate or compete in the sport were rated as a negative change (60%, n=15). Comments included not wanting to be affiliated with a sport or NGB that excludes certain groups.



Respondents who have previously competed in regulated events

(n=790)

Summary



Affect on general participation

81% would play as they usually do (n=640),
11% would play less or not at all (n=89).



Affect on participation in regulated events

75% would compete as usual in regulated events (n=600), 9% would not compete due to the regulations in the policy (n=72).



Thoughts on inclusivity, equality and representation

All areas were all rated as a positive change due to the policy. Between 22.54% - 23.79% of respondents rated these areas as a negative change.



Table tennis being a welcoming environment

40% rated a positive change in table tennis being a welcoming environment due to the policy (n=259), with 20% rating as a negative change (n=133).



Perception of Table Tennis England

41% rated a positive change in their perception of Table Tennis England as a result of the policy (n=262), 20% rated a negative change (n=131).



Desire to be a member and to participate in the sport

Both desire to be a member and desire to participate or compete in the sport were rated as no change (51%). 17% rated this area as a negative change due to the policy.



Transgender and Non-binary respondents who have previously competed in regulated events

(n=15)

Summary



Affect on general participation

53% would play as they usually do (n=8), 40% would play less or not at all (n=6).



Affect on participation in regulated events

50% would compete as usual in regulated events (n=7), 50% would not compete due to the regulations in the policy (n=7).



Thoughts on inclusivity, equality and representation

All areas were all rated as a negative change due to the policy, ranging between 78% - 85% of respondents answering this way.



Table tennis being a welcoming environment

78% rated a negative change in table tennis being a welcoming environment due to the policy (n=14).



Perception of Table Tennis England

64% rated a negative change in their perception of Table Tennis England as a result of the policy (n=9).



Desire to be a member and to participate in the sport

Both desire to be a member and desire to participate or compete in the sport were rated as a negative change (71% - 78%).



Current TT Members

(n=847)



Summary



Affect on general participation

87% would play as they usually do (n=741), 7% would play less or not at all (n=58).



Affect on participation in regulated events

75% would compete as usual or would be interested in competing in regulated events (n=642), 6% would not compete due to the regulations in the policy (n=52).



Thoughts on inclusivity, equality and representation

Inclusivity and representation were rated as no change (42% - 43%). Equality in the sport was rated as a positive change by 51% of respondents.



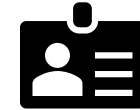
Table tennis being a welcoming environment

44% rated table tennis being a welcoming environment as no change due to the policy (n=375). 42% rated this as a positive change (n=358).



Perception of Table Tennis England

44% rated their perception of Table Tennis England as a result of the policy as no change (n=373). 12% rated a negative change (n=110).



Desire to be a member and to participate in the sport

Both desire to be a member and desire to participate or compete in the sport were rated as no change (58%). 10% rated this as a negative change.



Previous TT Members

(n=218)



Summary



Affect on general participation

70% would play as they usually do (n=153), 21% would play less or not at all (n=26).



Affect on participation in regulated events

58% would compete as usual or would be interested in competing in regulated events (n=149), 30% would not compete due to the regulations in the policy (n=77).



Thoughts on inclusivity, equality and representation

All three areas were rated as a positive change (46% - 55%). Between 23% - 26% of respondents rated these areas as a negative change.



Table tennis being a welcoming environment

50% rated table tennis being a welcoming environment as a positive change due to the policy (n=109). 22% rated this as a negative change (n=49).



Perception of Table Tennis England

54% rated their perception of Table Tennis England as a result of the policy as a positive change (n=118). 24% rated this as a negative change (n=53).



Desire to be a member and to participate in the sport

Both desire to be a member and desire to participate or compete in the sport were rated as a positive change (40% - 42%). 20% - 23% rated this as a negative change.



Non-Members

(n=253)



Summary



Affect on general participation

75% would play as they usually do (n=190),
10% would play less or not at all (n=25).



Affect on participation in regulated events

53% would compete as usual or would be interested in competing in regulated events (n=136), 9% would not compete due to the regulations in the policy (n=23).



Thoughts on inclusivity, equality and representation

All three areas were rated as a positive change (58% - 67%). Between 13% - 15% of respondents rated these areas as a negative change.



Table tennis being a welcoming environment

61% rated table tennis being a welcoming environment as a positive change due to the policy (n=160). 15% rated this as a negative change (n=38).



Perception of Table Tennis England

63% rated their perception of Table Tennis England as a result of the policy as a positive change (n=160). 13% rated this as a negative change (n=34).



Desire to be a member and to participate in the sport

Both desire to be a member and desire to participate or compete in the sport were rated as no change (47% - 48%). 12% - 13% rated this as a negative change.



Organisation Interviews

Conducted with four organisations



Emerging Themes

Process concerns

Concern was raised on how the consultation occurred after the policy had been approved, rather than conducting a consultation prior to creating the policy or having a draft policy or set of principles for consultation.

Exclusion of biological women

As outlined in the policy, biological men, transgender men and transgender women are eligible to compete in the 'men's' category, with only biological women being eligible to compete in the 'women's' category. During discussions of naming conventions for these two categories, it was raised that calling the current men's category something that infers it is available to everyone (e.g. 'open') would not be appropriate as this category would not be open to all due to biological women not being eligible to compete in this category.

Gender self-identification isn't 'secure'

It was raised that gender self-identification in the current transgender inclusion guidance and the omission of all non-regulated events and activities from the transgender policy is not 'secure' and does not protect against individual swapping their gender self-identity for competitive gain. It was suggested that the guidance surrounding self-identification needs further clarity regarding timelines of when self-identification can come into effect – for example, is the individual actively living as this gender in all aspects of their life.



Emerging Themes

Need to extend across the entire sport

It was stated how the policy should be for all areas and level of the sport, not restricted to regulated events. It was argued the Equality Act and subsequent Supreme Court Ruling on definitions has no distinction between elite, competitive and grassroots sport, therefore it applies to every situation where something is called 'male' or 'female'. Reference was made to an effect on insurance policies if there is a material risk that isn't disclosed, for example if a biological female is competing against a transgender woman resulting in injury, it could be deemed as unlawful and the insurance company would not accept the claim.

"The best way to support maximum participation in table tennis is to give clear guidance at the grassroots level. Local clubs and event organisers do not necessarily have access to correct legal advice and, given the degree of misinformation and confusion on the issue, it is the responsibility of the governing body to help them avoid legal and insurance risk"

Affect on transgender players

Organisations recognised that transgender players would be directly affected as a result of this policy;

"I am aware of people who... are now living an acceptable life as the alternative gender... in every other aspect of their life, they are one gender and when turning up at one of our tournaments they are [the other], and I worry about the impact that would have on an individual, particularly if they have found [table tennis] is their happy place where they feel included. I don't feel competent and comfortable in making those [decisions]."



Emerging Themes

Humanity and Compassion

Organisations understand the complexity and sensitive nature of the topic of transgender inclusion within sport, one that is extremely difficult, and arguably impossible, to get right for everyone. "It's impossible to find a right solution for this, all you can do is find the best solution". Putting an emphasis on inclusion, rather than exclusion, was encouraged and ensuring decision makers are doing everything they can to make transgender people feel they belong in our sport;

"If you take a genuine principle of inclusion [as an organisation], it doesn't mean everybody gets to do everything in the same way, but it means you're thinking all the time about 'how do we actively seek to make sure that people feel like they're welcome and that they belong'. It isn't a very nice time to be trans in the UK and therefore this is going to – even where there are legitimate aims to achieve proportionate means – it isn't always going to feel like that."

Clarity over definitions and decisions

The language used throughout the policy needs to be clear and consistent, with definitions being provided at the start of the policy. For example, transgender women, transgender men, non-binary etc.

In addition, it was recommended to be clear on what the grounds are on the decision to only apply the policy to regulated events, is it safety or fairness? If there is a safety element, why does this not apply to all levels of the sport and only regulated events



Emerging Themes

Evidence based

Two organisations urged for the policy to be based off scientific evidence and data that is specific for table tennis. In addition, it was highly recommended for Table Tennis England to discuss and agree if table tennis is a gender affected sport, using guides such as UK's Sports Councils Guidance for Transgender Inclusion in Domestic Sport Decision Making Framework.

Legal grey areas

It was highlighted how the recent Supreme Court Ruling did not talk about sport specific matters and how the Government did not conduct any research into transgender inclusion in sport before making the ruling. It was also mentioned how gender affected activity is a grey area, stating how legislation has evolved over many years, but the current 'definition' of gender affected activity comes from legislation acted in 1975.

The legal principle of proportionality was discussed in how decision makers must consider individuals circumstances, choose the least restrictive option and make reasoned decisions – including why they consider any restriction on human rights to be justifiable. TTE are urged to be clear on what our objective of the policy is, and are the restrictions we put in place in the policy justified to achieve those objectives?



Emerging Themes

Opportunity to lead the way

A couple of organisations made mention of Table Tennis England having the opportunity to lead the way on transgender inclusion, by not implementing restrictions for transgender players but by going down a path of true inclusivity. Several questions were raised for Table Tennis England to consider off the back of the consultation process;

“What are the risks? What are the costs? Are you causing more harm than good?”

“What is the essence of table tennis as a sport?” – if it is inclusivity and ‘a sport for all’, does this policy go against that?

“What kind of sport do you want to be? How do you want to be perceived?”



Individual Interviews

Conducted with eight individuals



Interview Participants

Of the 20 individuals invited to participate in the interview phase, a total of eight individuals responded and took part in an interview with two Table Tennis England staff members. An overview of the demographics of the participants is shown below:

- **1 transgender woman, 1 non-binary, 3 cisgender men and 3 cisgender women**
- **All age ranges from 16-24 through to 75+**
- **4 participants are part of the table tennis workforce**
- **All participants were current members, currently play table tennis and have participated in regulated events**
- **4 participants oppose the policy, 4 participants support the policy**



Emerging Themes

Governance concerns

A couple of participants raised governance concerns around the policy and consultation, referencing the consultation not occurring before the policy had been agreed by board or that the consultation should have been in relation to a draft policy rather than an approved policy. Concerns were also raised about the governance and democracy to which Table Tennis England are asserting their transgender policy and guidelines.

Not just regulated events

One participant argued that the policy should also apply to non-regulated events, stating how local league competitions are mostly played mixed gender and that the policy should still apply in these instances – not just solely for regulated events. However, others have shown support for the policy only applying to higher levels of the game.

Safety of women

Safeguarding risks were mentioned by one participant, who gave concerns surrounding affiliated organisers being expected to apply guidelines of self-identification for all activity outside of regulated events. They referenced several concerns around self-identifying transgender women using women's facilities within venues, and how organisers seem to have a lack of discretion in relation to this matter under current guidance.



Emerging Themes

Fear of being labelled as transphobic

When discussing concerns relating to safeguarding of cisgender women, the participant stated how there is a fear of being labelled as transphobic if individuals 'speak out against' transgender people and raising concerns such as use of women's facilities by transgender women. They stated how the topic of transgender makes everyone vulnerable, not just those who are transgender.

On the other hand, one participant referenced how transgender people are automatically treated with a level of suspicion, particularly in reference to using toilets and changing facilities of the gender with which they identify.

Protecting the women's category

Several participants made a nod towards the need to protect the women's category;

"It's the logic of the situation where biological difference, which you cannot change, is relevant... with any high-level sport the idea of somebody born a man playing in a women's league is wrong, I don't think it's a level playing field"

"On the women's side of the sport, it's unfair to allow biological men – irrespective of any hormonal treatments – where strength and stamina is a factor in performance capabilities. Power, speed and size is a factor in table tennis. You don't want to stop people playing sport, far from it, but in a competitive environment, you have to look at fairness"



Emerging Themes

Displacement of biological women and girls

One participant questioned whether the policy covers training camps and noted how aspiring performance bound girls could potentially be displaced from the performance pathway by a transgender girl. They argued that self-identification is the issue, and it needs to be made clearer what aspects of the sport are covered by this policy, or by another policy – for example ETTU or ITTF. The individual made note that a parent has raised these concerns as they are committing a significant amount of time and money into their daughters training, and should she be displaced by a transgender girl would be extremely disappointed and frustrated, stating it is 'outrageous' this could be a possibility.

This was also discussed by another participant, who stated a transgender woman has significantly improved her game and is now beating top cisgender women at events. They discussed how there was some uncertainty and 'some feeling' about this amongst other cisgender women at an event, as well as mentioning the possible effect on women and girls' participation in the sport;

"If transgender women are allowed to play it could lead to several women saying they aren't going to compete anymore. Table Tennis England has put a lot of work into encouraging women and girls into the sport, so it would be counter productive"

"It would reduce the opportunity to win [including transgender women in the women's category], women would drop out"



Emerging Themes

Policy based on ideology and politics, not science

One participant stated how they believe the policy is based on ideology and not science. They own interpretation of the 'science' surrounding this topic strongly reflects on the reduction in strength in transgender women after being on hormone treatments for over two years.

"This [the Supreme Court Ruling] is not a scientific thing, this is an ideological thing, people who believe that trans people are not the gender they identified as is what is leading this. This is trying to marginalise an already marginalised group, to take them out of public life in any way they can. This policy the Government has put down has made TTE make a decision based on ideology and not on science."

Another participant shared their feelings that the policy is political, not based on facts but based on 'toxic baggage'

"It shouldn't be a policy by implication, what I'm seeing is there's a powerful voice being heard within organised structures that's a construct of convenience and a power grab. It doesn't concern many people, because they aren't transgender... but there's some people looking to use this opportunity for their own political ends. I'm worried that [TTE] is going to find itself in that position, and that's so different and misrepresentative of the vast amount of people who are playing, participating, umpiring etc., that's why I said toxic baggage, because I do believe it is toxic to [TTE] and its misrepresentative for where the sport should be heading"



Emerging Themes

Exclusion and marginalisation

Queries were raised on if it was known how many transgender individuals take part in table tennis or are members of TTE. It was assumed the number would be small, potentially less than 10, therefore was there really a need to proceed with this policy which would result in the exclusion and marginalisation of transgender people (transgender women in particular). In addition, the further exclusion and marginalisation of transgender people because of this policy was referenced;

"At every turn [transgender people] are being marginalised from public life, and told by every company, every restaurant, every sport they want to play, that their identity is wrong, and they shouldn't be allowed to be who they are at every turn – it isn't right."

"Its going to make at least a few people a little more miserable, a little bit less able to interact with the world in the way they want."

"In theory it's not supposed to be stopping them playing table tennis, but I think they're less likely to play the sport, and everybody should be able to play the sport they love and it's quite sad if they then feel they're not welcome when they're a tiny minority compared to the rest of people who play table tennis."



Emerging Themes

Lack of fairness and equality

As within the online survey, participants in individual interviews made note that the policy is only 'excluding' transgender women, however transgender men are permitted to participate in the gender category with which they identify. There was also mention of bias as the conversation is solely aimed towards transgender women, with transgender men being 'unaffected' by the policy – however it was discussed how transgender men are likely to be displeased with the policy and possibly participate less or not at all in the sport to support transgender women.

In addition, the implementation of an 'open' category that does not include biological women was questioned, with arguments that this is not truly an open category.

Creating unwelcome environments

The premise of 'forcing' transgender women to compete in an 'open' category, as well as other implications in terms of changing rooms, was argued to create an uncomfortable and unwelcoming environment for transgender women in particular;

"If you were a [transgender woman] you'd be feeling self-conscious every time you'd walk into a room or walk into a changing room and worry if people are going to be nasty to you or laugh about you behind your back."

"From friends I have and people I know [who are trans], it becomes incredibly difficult to operate as a trans women when you're being put in a predominantly men's category and not knowing the kind of reactions you're going to get, not having that community there."



Emerging Themes

Victimisation and discrimination

One transgender woman stated how since the Supreme Court ruling the 'legitimacy' of transgender people playing table tennis is being questioned. This has been accompanied with the feeling that some are now more openly displaying their dissatisfaction with her playing in the women's category as a transgender woman. These more open attitudes have left her feeling disturbed and hurt, which she feels are amplified by the media. She also noted to feeling she may need to pull back from her coaching and umpiring journey in the sport, before people's opinions change and become more negative towards her in a workforce capacity.

"It's almost like discrimination; they're being singled out and targeted to make them feel unwelcome and that they can't actually come and play."

Scale of circumstances

It was highlighted by a participant that circumstances and medical records for transgender individuals are widely varied, including conditions at birth such as intersex. Caution was advised in grouping everyone together into 'transgender women' or 'transgender men', as this might not resonate with everyone. In addition, they felt the policy stated transgender women are men, which will not resonate with, or be representative of, a lot of transgender people.



Emerging Themes

Humanity and compassion

The themes of humanity and compassion were referenced by several participants, with one participant making a statement for decision makers to consider several key things when creating policies;

“When they are making those decisions, they should be thinking about why they're doing it, who they're doing it to and what affect it's going to have. Not simply on the practicalities. Whatever they believe is the right decision is a matter of opinion, when it comes down to it they should be thinking about who its actually affecting – which is trans people.”

“It's not difficult to treat people with respect and dignity, the issue we have is trans people are treated with a certain amount of suspicion. People making these decisions [Government] are outwardly saying trans women are predators, as a sports institution you have to question if you want to listen to people like that.”

The compassion and humanity of the table tennis community was also referenced by the transgender woman participant;

“Even though there might be some people who will say ‘you’ll never be accepted’, there are some people who do accept me on a human level, they are maintaining ‘treat other people as you would treat yourself’. That's the humanity of why you do things and interact with people, table tennis is fantastic, and I want to be part of that.”



Emerging Themes

A sport of skill over strength or stamina

Several participants stated how they believe table tennis is more a sport of skill, rather than strength or stamina – factors which play a large role in a sport being gender-affected. It was understood that some sports have a clear safety issue, for example boxing, however sporting organisations must take the individuality of their own sport and define what they mean by safety and fairness.

“In terms of table tennis, I see it as having more unique identities, skill based, that allow them to maybe be more accommodating. You interact with someone [through] the ball and not physical contact. If TTE justified the sport is gender-affected by referring to [strength and] stamina, I'd say 'sorry I don't agree with that'... you're making a construct of convenience, and I don't agree with it. I see plenty of female players and the better male players play wonderful games because they appreciate each others skill. There are instances of Chinese players playing against each other [males and females], you see differences in game and maybe strategies, but you don't see differences in skill and the points are very close. Other sports that you may say have got skill levels where [stamina and strength] don't come into play, like darts and pool, they have transgender players who are high profile and both have issued bans on transgender individuals.”

“We play against men in local leagues all the time, so it's doesn't bother me what sex they are at birth or what they [identify] as now. There's a lot of strategy in table tennis, not just a physical ability on how hard you can hit the ball.”

“In terms of safety, it isn't really an issue. It's not like boxing or wrestling, the physicality of that wouldn't cause a safety issue in the sport.”



Emerging Themes

Affect on participation

The transgender and non-binary individuals interviewed said that the policy would likely negatively affect their participation in the sport, either due to being excluded from participating how they want to (i.e. in the women's category) or by standing in solidarity with transgender women and ending their affiliation with the sport and TTE as a governing body.

It was also noted by a transgender woman how she would rather not play in regulated events if she was 'forced' to compete in an 'open' category, as she would be forced to make a declaration of being transgender and would be given a label as such on a public scale. She also mentioned how she will feel deprived of a social connection by not being able to compete in the female category, and feels her female teammates will also be affected.

Others who are not transgender stated how although it wouldn't affect their participation, they would feel a level of unease in participating in a sport that excludes certain groups of society:

"I am not sure I would feel as comfortable being [officially] part of a sport that treats transgender people in the way this policy says it will. Do I want to be known as someone who plays in a sport who supports this?"

"It makes me feel less in love with table tennis... I just think it's not really very fair what [TTE] are trying to do, and I ask do I want to be associated with a sport that is basically making some people stop playing table tennis?"



Proposed Alternatives

Proposed Alternatives

Case by case basis

One proposed alternative put forward was considering transgender individuals on a case-by-case basis, with emphasis and any exclusion based on safety rather than if someone is transgender. Reference was made to Gaelic football and the use of a committee to make the decision; it was urged that transgender people should be given the opportunity to declare themselves and their case be reviewed.

"TTE has got a choice, does it want to go on that route saying it's convenient it's easier, or do we say we understand this is difficult and we're going to take it case by case." Table Tennis England could lead, the Supreme Court Ruling doesn't imply you should be prejudicial, and it doesn't imply that you should force and interpretation of the law. The forcing of a law, or a perceived law, transgender people are a minority, they don't have the money or volume of people [to fight this]."

Ranking based system

One participant proposed an alternative method to ensure inclusion and fairness through implementing a ranking based system. This approach would consider both ranking level and an individual's gender transition status, including non-binary players, rather than solely focussing on sex assigned at birth. Eligibility criteria would apply in relation to four ranking bands, based on ranking points and the gender identity of the individual taking part.



Narrative Review

Physiological and Biological Advantage

Scientific research demonstrating the physiological and biological differences between adults of the male sex have over adults of the female sex – and the subsequent sporting performance advantages – is indisputable ([Haizlip et al, 2015](#); [Handelsman et al, 2018](#); [Sandbakk et al, 2018](#)).

There is also scientific research that mostly agrees that the majority of the physiological or biological advantages seen during male puberty are retained (either wholly or partially) by

transgender women post transition. However, there is limited research to determine whether those retained advantages result in a retained sporting performance advantage for transgender women post transition ([Hilton & Lundberg, 2020](#) and [Harper et al., 2021](#)).

[Hilton & Lundberg's study](#) reports that the performance gap between males and females becomes significant at puberty, often amounting to 10-50% depending on the sport. This

performance gap is more evident in sports relying on muscle mass and explosive strength, particularly in the upper body. They also report that 'longitudinal studies examining the effects of testosterone suppression on muscle mass and strength in transgender women consistently show very modest changes, where the loss of lean body mass, muscle area and strength typically amounts to approximately 5% after 12 months of treatment'. Therefore, the muscular advantage seen in transgender women

is only minimally reduced when testosterone is suppressed.

Lundberg also contributed to research by [Wiik et al. \(2019\)](#) looking at muscle strength, size and composition following 12 months of hormonal treatment. The study found that 1 year of gender-reaffirming treatment resulted in robust increases in muscle mass and strength in transgender men, but modest changes in transgender women.



Physiological and Biological Advantage

The systematic review of 24 studies, conducted by [Harper et al.](#), found transgender women experience significant decreases in all parameters measured (including lean body mass, muscle cross-sectional area, muscular strength and Hgb/HCT levels) over varying amounts of time. They report that;

- After 4 months of hormone therapy, transgender women have Hgb/HCT levels equivalent to cisgender women
- After 12 months of hormone therapy, significant decreases in strength, lean body mass and muscle area are seen
- Longer term effects (3 years) of hormone therapy and any further reductions in measures are unclear
- Despite these findings, values for strength, lean body mass and muscle area in transgender women remain above those of cisgender women despite hormone therapies for a duration of up to 3 years

Other research focusses on changes in grip strength in transgender people following hormonal treatments. A study by [Scharff et al. \(2019\)](#) found that after 1 year of hormonal treatment, grip strength decreased in transgender women and increased in transgender men. In transgender men only, change in grip strength was associated with change in lean body mass.



Societal and Health Considerations

Aside from the physiological arguments, there are also important societal and health elements to consider. The effect of physical activity on mental wellbeing is well known, for transgender people [The National Centre for Sport and Exercise Medicine](#) note how physical activity can be particularly important, as they often experience poorer mental health than cisgender people.

A study by [Muchicko et al \(2015\)](#) found transgender individuals were less physically active and received lower social support with a negative self-image compared to their cisgender peers. The results highlighted the need for inclusive leisure settings and programmes, as well as increased social support for

transgender individuals to maximise time being physically active. The potential impact on reduced participation levels in all levels of table tennis because of an 'exclusionary' transgender policy could have a subsequent detrimental impact on the physical activity levels of transgender individuals – possibly for those currently involved in the sport and potential future participants.

[Gleaves and Lehrback \(2016\)](#) argue that physiological rationale on transgender inclusion has "significant limitations" including emphasis on sport as a comparative test. In its place, they discuss how "narrativity" (considering narratives and lived experiences of transgender people and recognising

the value of participation over competition) demonstrates how the exclusion caused by physiological rationale is misguided and undesirable, being detrimental to those excluded and the sport itself.

Conversely, [Fair Play For Women](#) argue how cisgender women and girls are being adversely affected by policies allowing transgender women to compete in women's sport categories. They document effects on key areas including unfair competition and demoralisation, risking physical safety, losing out on ranking opportunities, and not consenting to a mixed-sex environment.



Transgender Inclusion Research

Despite the scientific research, other researchers have supported the inclusion of transgender women in women's sport categories.

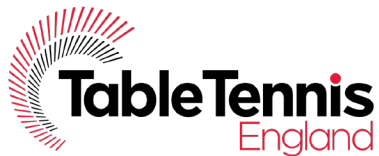
[Bianchi \(2007\)](#) explores the complexities of including transgender women in female sports categories, arguing for a more nuanced approach that considers both inclusion and fairness. Bianchi acknowledges the perceived athletic advantages of transgender women may possess due to their pre-transition biology, however, argues that simply excluding transgender women based on their gender identity is ethically problematic and potentially harmful. In addition, Bianchi discusses the 'skill thesis' which suggests that sports should primarily reflect athletic skill and effort. If the idea of this 'skill thesis' is a priority, she suggests a handicap system (potentially based on testosterone levels) to mitigate genetic advantages in both cisgender and transgender athletes.

Furthermore, [Torres et al. \(2020\)](#) argue that discussions regarding transgender inclusion in sports should move beyond solely focussing on physiological criteria and should also consider 'embodied experience' and 'embodied advantage'. **Embodied experience** refers to the lived experience of an individual's body, shaped by social, cultural, and personal contexts – including how someone perceives their body, how they move and how they interact with the sporting environment. **Embodied advantage** acknowledges that an individual's embodied experience can create advantages or disadvantages in sports, potentially affecting their performance. The paper recommends that policies should be flexible and adaptable, acknowledging the diversity of embodied experiences and seeking to minimise potential disadvantages, whilst maximising inclusion.



Policies in other sports

Other sports policies



British Rowing – eligibility relating to competitive activity only. Women's category eligibility is only for those assigned female at birth, the open category eligibility is for transgender, non-binary and all other individuals, mixed category allows a combination of male and female rowers in a crew with a minimum of 50% being registered female at birth.

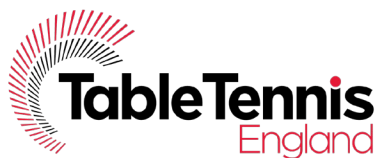
The FA – effects open-age football as a gender-affected activity. Boys and girls from U7 to U18 age groups play mixed-sex matches. Transgender individuals must complete an application form to be reviewed by The FA to determine if eligibility criteria are met. Eligibility in the men's game is reliant on completion 'assumption of possible addition risk' forms, whereas eligibility in the women's game is reliant on hormonal testing.

Basketball England - Transgender men and transgender women are eligible to compete in their affirmed gender or mixed-sex domestic competition, often reliant on hormonal testing.

England Netball – transgender female and non-binary participants (whose biological sex is male) are not eligible to participate in the female category. Those whose biological sex is female are eligible to participate, with conditions for female participants who have previously used testosterone treatment. Transgender male and non-binary participants are eligible to participate in the male category. All participants are eligible to participate in the mixed category.



Other sports policies



LTA – women's category eligibility is for cisgender women, transgender men who have not commenced gender-affirming hormone treatment, and non-binary individuals who were assigned female at birth and have not commenced gender-affirming hormone treatment. Men's category eligibility is for cisgender men, transgender men, transgender women, non-binary individuals (assigned either male or female at birth)

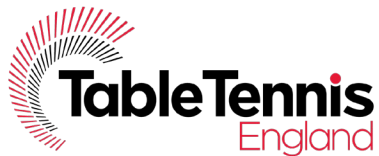
Badminton England – competitions that have the potential for players to secure ranking points have eligibility to ensure fairness of competition (e.g. county competitions, local league and club tournaments). Only players assigned female at birth are eligible to compete in the female competition, all individuals are eligible to compete in the 'open' category (which replaces the men's category).

Bowls England – transgender or non-binary members must notify the NGB of their change of gender identity, pass hormonal testing for international, national and local competition. For international competition, their gender identity cannot change for a minimum of 4 years. For national and local competition, their gender identity cannot change mid-season. For other local, intra-club and friendly competition, individuals are required to notify the NGB of their gender identity change and cannot change gender identity mid-season. For the men's category, members must complete an application and notify the NGB of their gender identity change, which cannot change mid-season.

Darts Regulation Authority – encourages mixed-gender events, the only exceptions are the Women's Series and Women's Matchplay operated by the Professional Darts Corporation in which transgender or non-binary members must notify the DRA or relevant organisation of their change of gender identity, as well as passing hormonal testing. For the men's category, members must complete an application and notify the DRA of their gender identity change, which cannot change mid-season.



Other sports policies



England Hockey – specified competitions fall into a female or open category. Eligibility for the female category is for those recorded female at birth, however, once someone has commenced or undergone transgender hormone therapy they will no longer be eligible to participate in the female category. Eligibility for the open category is for those recorded male at birth, transgender or non-binary, and those recorded female at birth (regardless of whether they have undergone hormone therapy).

Swim England – female category eligibility is for those declared female at birth. Open category eligibility is for those declared male at birth, transgender and non-binary athletes.

British Fencing - Domestic licenced competitions must offer a female category and/or a mixed category. Female category eligibility is for those assigned female at birth and have not started female to male hormone treatment. Mixed category eligibility includes transgender individuals and anyone eligible for the female category. For GB selection, only those assigned female at birth and have not started female to male hormone treatment are eligible.

Licensed recreational events organisers are permitted to restrict participation based on protected characteristics, which must be clearly stated on joining instructions. Where no guidance provided by organisers, transgender and non-binary participants may take part in the gender they wish to.



Transgender inclusion in the media

Transgender inclusion in the media

[Laurel Hubbard: The reluctant history-maker at the centre of sport's transgender debate](#) – transgender weightlifting athlete Laurel Hubbard became history after being the first openly transgender athlete to compete in a different gender category to that which they were born at an Olympic Games. However, her involvement and success in the sport as a female has caused controversy and accusations of unfairness (August 2021)

[Boris Johnson: UK Prime Minister says transgender women should not compete in women's sport](#) – video of previous UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson saying he does not believe transgender women should compete in female sporting events (April 2022)

[Lia Thomas: Transgender athletes 'not a threat' to women's sport](#) – American transgender swimmer Lia Thomas has stated transgender athletes 'are not a threat' to women's sport and that athletes did not transition to gain a competitive advantage (June 2022)

[British Triathlon becomes first UK sport to create 'open' category for transgender athletes](#) – for athletes over the age of 12, competitive women's events will be reserved for biological women, whilst implementing an 'open' category "for all individuals including male [male and female] transgender and those non-binary who were male sex at birth" (July 2022)

[Transgender boxer Danny Baker on how sport changed his life](#) – video interview with transgender amateur boxer stating how 'boxing changed his life' after transitioning at the age of 21 (February 2023)



Transgender inclusion in the media

[BBC Elite British Sportswomen's Study 2024: Athletes on 'difficult' transgender debate](#) – more than 100 elite British sportswomen told the BBC they would be uncomfortable with transgender women competing in female categories in their sport. The questionnaire was sent to 615 athletes in 28 sports and received 143 responses, meaning the results cannot be taken as representative of elite British sportswomen across the board (March 2024)

[IOC needs to 'protect female sport', says Lord Coe](#) – after Algeria's Imane Khelif won women's welterweight boxing gold at the Paris Olympic Games, Lord Sebastian Coe (president of World Athletics) stated how 'the International Olympic Committee needs a very, very clear policy in this space... and the protection of the female category, for me, is absolutely non-negotiable' (November 2024)

[Olympic boxer Imane Khelif takes legal action over male chromosomes claims](#) – after winning Olympic gold amid a gender eligibility row, Algerian boxer Imane Khelif took legal action over media reports allegedly detailing her leaked medical records claiming her to have XY (male) chromosomes (November 2024)



Transgender inclusion in the media

[Transgender pool player loses discrimination case](#) – after the English Blackball Pool Federation banned transgender women from its women's competitions in August 2023, Harriet Haynes (a transgender woman) took the organisation to court on the grounds of 'direct discrimination' against her. The court ruled in favour of the EBPF saying her exclusion was the only 'reasonable' way to ensure 'fair competition' (August 2025)

[Transgender cyclist wins discrimination case against UCI](#) – in 2023 the UCI introduced that transgender athletes must prove they began transitioning before puberty in order to compete in the women's category and for transgender women to display low testosterone levels. A transgender cyclist who was born male sued the UCI after arguing that the 2023 regulation that prevented her participation constituted discrimination – with the Brussels Civil Court ruling in her favour (July 2025)