**The Brighton Conference on Women and Sport**

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**Abstract**

This article is the first detailed academic analysis of the background, organisation, content, and immediate outcomes of the first World Conference on Women and Sport which took place in Brighton, UK, between 05-08 May 1994. Women and sport conferences are now commonplace in many parts of the world. Yet in the mid-1990s, Brighton was ground-breaking and the result of concerted activism for women and sport by agents who had participated in various advocacy organisations for decades.

Titled ‘Women, Sport, and the Challenge of Change’, the Conference convened approximately 280 delegates, including representatives of major sporting and non-sporting organisations, based in over eighty countries. They contributed toward establishing a more coordinated and purposeful international strategy for women and sport.

However, confusion and competition between existing organisations advocating for women and sport is apparent before and during Brighton. The Conference has also encountered criticism for Western ethnocentrism and liberalised political outcomes. This article contributes to understanding the galvanisation of a collective identity and politicisation of advocacy for women’s sport, and the salience of conferences as sites enabling this.

Archival document analysis and interviews with key agents involved with the advocacy were employed to understand the relations, politics and significance of the Conference.

# Introduction

The International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG) hosted its seventh World Conference on Women and Sport in May 2018. These conferences have occurred every four years and, with its secretariat, have moved around the world. Working backward, Gaborone, Botswana (2018), Helsinki, Finland (2014), Sydney, Australia (2010), Kumamoto, Japan (2006), Montreal, Canada (2002), Windhoek, Namibia (1998) have all hosted the conference after the first World Conference in Brighton, UK, in 1994. From 2018, the IWG secretariat is based in Auckland, New Zealand ahead of the eighth World Conference in 2022. The IWG states it is ‘the world’s largest network dedicated to empowering women and girls and advancing sport’.[[1]](#endnote-1)

Each conference has produced a legacy. For the majority, this has been a text-based document to be used by governments, organisations and groups to advance women and sport. The most prominent has been the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport, a set of ten principles that when adhered to will ‘develop a sporting culture that enables and values the full involvement of women in every aspect of sport’.[[2]](#endnote-2) In 2014, it was updated by the IWG to become the Brighton plus Helsinki 2014 Declaration to reflect developments over the previous twenty years. The document has over 550 signatories, including the International Olympic Committee (IOC). The IWG also monitors progress made for women and girls in sport and physical activity via its progress reports.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Nevertheless, the IWG, its conferences and their legacies have received scant scholarly attention.[[4]](#endnote-4) Moreover, all originate from the Brighton Conference; an event that has received even less scholarly focus. In women’s sport history generally, conferences, policy formulation, and national and international coordination that have provided opportunities for activism to transform into change have largely been ignored.[[5]](#endnote-5) Often, these crucial events are briefly cast-aside as simply ‘occurring’, without thorough explanation for why events happened, where groups came from, and what impact, if any, the actions have had toward addressing women’s experiences in and through sport.

This article is structured around three objectives. Firstly, the article explores the origins of the Brighton Conference and particularly the significance of the politics and planning that influenced the Conference. In certain parts of the world, women’s sport was becoming increasingly professionalised and it was more common to see females engaging in physical activity. Nonetheless, sports organisations were providing scant attention to the development of women’s sport and women in sport.[[6]](#endnote-6) For example, Pape states that it was not until the early 1970s that female Olympic athletes ‘benefited from the existence of a Programme Commission with an explicit mandate to reform the Olympic competition program and women’s place within it’.[[7]](#endnote-7) The late-1980s and early-1990s were a vitally important time in the development of politicised organisational activism for women in sport. It was during this time that continental and international organisations, who were to have a significant impact on lobbying for women and sport, were formed. Often, these were established owing to the passionate energies, commitment and experiences of people, predominantly women, who had been involved in national organisational activism for up to twenty years beforehand.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, separate collectives of American, Australian, British, Canadian, and Nordic women lobbied nationally against discrimination experienced by women in sport, predominantly through the formation of national non-governmental organisations (e.g. the USA Women’s Sports Foundation in 1974; the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport in 1981; the UK Women’s Sport Foundation in 1984; WomenSport Australia in 1991). Margaret Ann Hall has written the most extensive analysis of these four advocacy organisations. She explored how their different societal contexts, as well as their distinctive governance, organisation and funding structures, influenced the origins and developments of each group.[[8]](#endnote-8) They advocated by collating and mobilising resources such as personnel and research, raising consciousness of issues through networks and conferences, formulating formal and informal groups, and eventually engaging with the dominant sporting structures in their countries by enacting policy change.

It was often annual national conferences of these groups that afforded the opportunity to network and share resources. Conferences dedicated to women in sport that were hosted by sporting organisations were much rarer. It is worth noting that in 1978, the Central Council of Physical Recreation – the umbrella organisation of two hundred national sport and recreation groups for the UK – organised the ‘1st International Conference on Women and Sport’. Opened and closed by HRH Princess Anne and the UK Minister for Sport and Recreation, the 163 delegates from 28 countries, as well as representatives from the IOC, the Council of Europe, and the Equal Opportunities Commission, were given the opportunity to ‘provide an almost complete understanding of the way in which contemporary sport treats women’.[[9]](#endnote-9) It is assumed that the limited recommendations resulting from the conference meant little traction was gained. But key agents of future women and sport organisations were attendees and speakers.

National events were often attended by domestic attendees, meaning globalised connections were difficult to establish. Moreover, each country faced diverse challenges, meaning different political manoeuvrings were required to ensure progress.[[10]](#endnote-10) Assistance was not always to be found from the broader Women’s Movement either. For example, United Nations (UN) Conferences for Women subsumed sport and physical activity under women’s health, and generally considered the former ‘somewhat tangential to the “serious” concerns of women’s lives’ such as poverty, literacy, war, genital mutilation, and human trafficking.[[11]](#endnote-11) It was not until after the Brighton Conference that the women and sport agenda was directly manoeuvred into major non-sporting discourse.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Apart from some personal connections, it is important to note that national women and sport groups were often working in isolation of each other during their formative years. Nordic and British networks soon understood how important it was to suit favourable political opportunities and in turn receive funding, resources and support, for example. Nevertheless, this often came at the expense of their original radical feminist agendas.[[13]](#endnote-13) Rather than continue to only focus nationally, domestic organisations reacted to new opportunities and turned their attention to regional and global change for women in sport.

The major stimulus for European women and sport advocacy was a Council of Europe seminar at Bisham Abbey, UK, in 1989. A working group, eventually called the European Sport Conference Working Group on Women and Sport (ESCWGWS), emanated from this seminar and lobbied within the structure of the European Sport Conference – ‘a consultative conference organised every two years and constituted of leading representatives of national government and non-governmental sports organisations from most European countries’.[[14]](#endnote-14) ESCWGWS existed for two biennial terms, the first chaired by Sweden. In 1991, the chair moved to the UK with Margaret Talbot becoming chairwoman and Anita White joining due to her role at the Great Britain (GB) Sports Council – which was developing the concept of sports equity. Talbot was a physical educator and White had been a field hockey international. Both had extensive experience in UK higher education and were to go on and be highly influential in professional sporting networks for the next two decades. From 1994, the group became European Women and Sport (EWS) and ‘provided significant opportunities for women to gain the kind of international experiences which are required for further development and advancement’.[[15]](#endnote-15) In 1995, EWS was officially confirmed as a free-standing body by the European Sport Conference.

The Brighton Conference was planned as the logical conclusion to the second term of the ESCWGWS, who would share their work with a wider audience.[[16]](#endnote-16) However, the UK was able to ‘seize the day’[[17]](#endnote-17) and utilise its ‘very special position in both Europe and the Commonwealth’[[18]](#endnote-18) to facilitate the conference. As will be demonstrated, this both challenged ESCWGWS preconceptions about when their work would be internationalised, as well as impact upon other national and international women and sport groups.

Secondly, the content of the Conference programme is important because Brighton aimed to ‘break new ground as the first conference to specifically address the issue of how to accelerate the process of change to bring about equality for women in sport’.[[19]](#endnote-19) Attendees included policy and decision-makers, as well as representatives of major organisations and governments globally, and the conference resulted in a number of crucial self-produced resources located within an International Strategy for Women and Sport, including the Brighton Declaration. The structure of the conference allowed the opportunity for many in attendance to network with their peers from around the world for the first time. As such, relations with the dominant white, Western discourse that had influenced women and sport advocacy were negotiated.[[20]](#endnote-20)

Finally, this article will explain the immediate outcomes of the Brighton Conference, particularly the International Strategy. The Strategy was split into four parts: the Declaration, international co-ordinating mechanisms, regular conferences and the origins for what was to become the IWG. Elements of the strategy certainly influenced the direction of women and sport advocacy throughout the 1990s, and, though beyond the scope of this article, it is noted how challenging it is to determine the longitudinal causal impact of Brighton. Nevertheless, the Conference was significant because it brought people together, meaning the disconnected groups of the 1970s and 1980s now had, for the most part, a platform from which to advance forward together.

# Archival records and interviews

An interpretive thematic analysis of documents housed in the Anita White Foundation International Women and Sport Archive at the University of Chichester formed the majority of the data set. Just over one hundred EcopHant archival quality storage boxes belong in the archive and contain data on the origins and development of many of the leading women and sport/physical activity organisations globally and regionally from the 1970s as well as their relations with organisations at the forefront of sport and women’s development more generally.[[21]](#endnote-21) The documents include private and public correspondence, meeting minutes, reference papers, books, journals, magazines and research publications. Almost all the documents have been donated by women who have held dominant positions across women and sport activist organisations or have been successful scholars. Indeed, some documents directly criticise another group or person but the donors, many who were then interviewed, stated that it was important to document the reality of developments for women and sport to benefit future understanding.

The scope and content of the archive covers the origins and development of the International Association of Physical Education and Sport for Girls and Women (IAPESGW)[[22]](#endnote-22), American and British activist organisations of the 1970s and 1980s, the origins and development of EWS, international organisations in the early-1990s, and continental organisations throughout the 1990s. Further, the archive was recognised by the IWG as the ‘central repository for historical documentation about the IWG in May 2010’[[23]](#endnote-23) and materials continue to be donated from its quadrennial secretariats. The archive is a practical example of calls to preserve and better understand women’s marginalised position in sports history.[[24]](#endnote-24)

In total, sixty of the 105 boxes were analysed in full over a six-month period. Content that was not included in analysis were research papers and the history of the UK Women’s Sport Foundation. Approximately 450,000 words of notes were taken from analysing the documents, with key content and quotes typed onto a laptop in the archive. Apart from policies, research papers and books that can be viewed via the internet, none of the archive material is digitised, meaning the themes outlined above were solely interpreted by the researcher. All typed data from the archive was collated and chronologically ordered into time periods (e.g. late-80s, early-90s, mid-90s) to gain control over the large data sets. This data formed part of a broader project analysing the origins and developments of organisational activism for women and sport. Thus, data was interpretively thematically analysed through the use of higher and lower-order themes into categories influenced by literature on organisational activism and postcolonial feminism, such as: the processes involved with the formulation and development of activist organisations; their changing relationships between each other and institutions inside and outside of sport, and; examples of Western dominance over non-Western groups and countries. This information was used to situate and make sense of the arguments made by key agents during different time periods and supplemented the questions asked of the interviewees.

The archival analysis is complemented with data from twenty-one semi-structured interviews with 24 key personnel from women and sport organisations. Only two works have published from interviews with women and sport national advocacy organisation agents before.[[25]](#endnote-25) It is important that the voices of those to have contributed to the development of organisational advocacy for women and sport are heard. Interviewees were selected on the basis that they had been principally involved in and/or throughout the development of women and sport organisations generally, including if they had played a major role in organising the Brighton Conference. Interviews were conducted in-person or via Skype and recorded onto Dictaphones. Data was manually transcribed and then emailed to the interviewee for reciprocity throughout the research process.[[26]](#endnote-26) The central themes for the interview questions were similar to the documentary analysis but asked for reflections and more information about key events, such as the Brighton Conference. Similar higher and lower order themes to the documentary analysis were applied to interview data to complement a broader understanding of organisational activism for women and sport over time.

# Planning and politics

### *Power battles pre-Brighton*

Planning meetings for Brighton took place as early as November 1992[[27]](#endnote-27) and by January 1994 the conference programme was in draft form, speaker invitations were sent, and infrastructure, logistics, and first delegate payments had been secured.[[28]](#endnote-28) Written by White, an invitational brochure for Brighton circulated in 1993 included details of an international consultative group on women and sport comprised of women in sport leadership positions, many of whom had advocacy organisation experience: Sue Baker-Finch (Australian Sports Commission), Kari Fasting (Norwegian Confederation of Sport), Marion Lay (Sport Canada), Kereyn Smith (Hillary Commission, New Zealand) and Kristina Thuree (Swedish Sport Confederation). This executive group was aided by a supporting committee of representatives from the IOC, ESCWGWS, the GB Sports Council, the UK Women’s Sport Foundation, and other disability sport, coaching, and sports science organisations.[[29]](#endnote-29) Five key objectives for the conference were outlined, including: exchanging best practice to bring about change at national and international level; wider sharing of ESCWGWS work; agreement on international strategies for the development of women and sport; development of an international network for women and sport; and, establishing a biennial international women and sport conference.[[30]](#endnote-30)

These objectives signify an underlying issue leading into the Conference. There were still limited connections between many of the groups in existence who were advocating for women in sport. The disconnection is portrayed in separate EWS, Brighton planning, and international women and sport meetings in February 1994 which demonstrated competing ideas underpinning the planning of the conference. For example, EWS had met the day before the international meeting to clarify its role and plan for expansion,[[31]](#endnote-31) because, according to Fasting, it had long-intended that a conference similar to Brighton would signify its progress:

‘Brighton was to be the first EWS Conference and at a meeting in London, the people from the UK asked if it was OK to make it international because they had just had a meeting with this Commonwealth organisation so we had people coming in and participating in the meeting from New Zealand and Australia, so that was the way it was made international’.[[32]](#endnote-32)

White was a leading figure behind the international meeting and claimed it ‘was the right time to bring together’ EWS’s achievements in coordinating European advances (of which she was now Chair), GB Sports Council attempts to have an international influence in the development of sport and sports equity, and strategies from other Commonwealth countries to be a catalyst for international women and sport work.[[33]](#endnote-33) The next day, an international women and sport meeting discussed ‘how international strategies on women and sport could best be developed’.[[34]](#endnote-34) Baker-Finch circulated a draft International Women and Sport Strategy, claiming:

‘There has been considerable progress made in giving an international focus to women and sport issues through the work of ESCWGWS. However, other international women and sport developments have been less coordinated. The next step is to achieve a more coordinated and purposeful international strategy which encompasses all regions and which will be endorsed by a range of government and non-government groups involved in sport development’.[[35]](#endnote-35)

The Strategy recognised interaction with political and institutional environments worldwide was needed because the processes involved with mobilising women’s collective action in sport had predominantly been located in North-Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand.[[36]](#endnote-36) Western groups were aware of their demographic constitution throughout their existence but struggled to enhance their diversity. Indeed, experienced American women and sport advocate and scholar Carole Oglesby remarked there was ‘always a wish to be inclusive’, but the networks were simply not in place to achieve this.[[37]](#endnote-37)

Therefore, the Strategy recognised a number of issues which needed to be addressed, including the potential contributions of government and non-governmental agencies to women and sport; the importance of stimulating awareness and commitment to women and sport issues; the value in extending the strategy across developed and developing countries; moving from policy to action; and formalising a working group.[[38]](#endnote-38) Most of these focused on the politicisation of women and sport issues and are further emphasised in the selection of bodies acknowledged under ‘possible strategies’ located at the end of the document.[[39]](#endnote-39) These included the UN, the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, international forums, governments, international sports umbrella organisations, international and national sport federations, and international women’s organisations. The Strategy was a new stage in the development of organisational activism for women and sport and two mechanisms were proposed to facilitate the transition from disconnected national organisations to a coordinated, politicised, global approach.

The first was a Women and Sport Charter which was the base for what was to become the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport. This resource could challenge sporting and non-sporting organisations for the work they were, or were not, undertaking on women in sport. Baker-Finch circulated the draft version which was based on documents she had come across through her job and claimed it ‘be not more than one page, ten statements in length’.[[40]](#endnote-40) The Charter was to be presented at the start, amended during, and finalised and presented at the end of the Brighton Conference.

In order to ensure the implementation and follow-up of the Strategy and any Charter which might accompany it, the second mechanism proposed was a steering committee.[[41]](#endnote-41) This was to eventually become the IWG. Some of the reasoning for a steering committee was based on progress made by a doping in sport working group within the European Sport Conference. EWS representatives recounted how the doping in sport working group had over time become a steering group and enacted measures to the executive of the European Sport Conference. The result was that each member-country had to show they were addressing the subject or be held accountable.[[42]](#endnote-42) Furthermore, the GB Sports Council had been ‘quite visionary’ when leading on doping control at the same time.[[43]](#endnote-43) Following literature that analyses socio-political advances, it can be argued that EWS and GB Sports Council members were sharing crucial political and structural expertise to acknowledge how women’s issues in sport could be tackled.[[44]](#endnote-44) Thus, the steering committee could use the Charter and the Strategy to begin to hold major organisations to account for addressing issues affecting women in sport.

### *The Fallout from the February Meetings*

Before and after the February meetings, White stated organisations needed to be ‘well-coordinated’ because it was ‘vital’ to avoid any confusion that it looked like more were being added to ‘an already crowded organisational list’.[[45]](#endnote-45) Indeed, in addition to existing national, regional and international groups, Brighton would herald an international strategy with a charter and steering committee, as well as the launch of WomenSport International. This period saw the beginning of tense relationships between groups that were to intensify throughout the mid-1990s.

In March 1994, an existing knowledge-exchange mechanism for women and sport combined with North American academic networks to become WomenSport International. It was led by a cohesive group of four women who had established a constitution, sub-structure (including an advisory board and task forces), aims, and objectives before the Brighton Conference. It was a membership-based non-governmental organisation with volunteerism at its core and had a distinctly radical and critical outlook toward changing sport given that it directly engaged with topics such as sexual harassment and abuse, the female athlete triad and homophobia in sport.

Three of its founders – Celia Brackenridge, Kari Fasting and Marion Lay – attended the international meeting because of their roles in other organisations. Each also had extensive national experience of activism and scholarship for women and sport in the UK, Norway and Canada respectively. Brackenridge’s report to WomenSport International colleagues portrays a frank acknowledgement of the tensions between the organisations, including the emerging working group. For example, IAPESGW were surmised as ‘intensely conservative, incestuous, aging and unwilling to notice that the world has changed around it’.[[46]](#endnote-46) IAPESGW had struggled to shift away from its physical education and dance origins since the increased professionalisation of women’s sport of the 1970s.[[47]](#endnote-47) These outsider perceptions of IAPESGW had been shared with the organisation during two keynotes at its very own World Congress in Melbourne, Australia, in 1992. Brackenridge and Talbot both reflected upon their politicised experiences of lobbying for women and sport in national, European and Commonwealth networks.[[48]](#endnote-48) They challenged IAPESGW to adapt to the changing world it was part of or face increased segregation. Despite a proactive President attempting to heed such calls, some of its members did not believe the organisation could change and decided to pursue the advance of women and sport issues elsewhere.

Elizabeth Darlison – the fourth founder – and recognised leader of WomenSport International and co-President of WomenSport Australia at the time, responded to the other WomenSport International co-founders with concerns ‘about the direction and nature of the way I understand things to be moving with respect to the international scene for women and sport and physical activity’, in particular how she perceived the steering committee was ‘becoming another organisation’.[[49]](#endnote-49) She was not prepared for WomenSport International to ‘act as a handmaiden’ to the Strategy and criticised the overtly government-driven, top-heavy approach throughout the international meeting as ‘unrepresentative of women generally’.[[50]](#endnote-50)

WomenSport International did not have plans to hold its own conferences, and its early financial struggles meant it was immediately constrained in its attempts to mobilise its task forces and lead major sporting organisations. Darlison recognised that there were opportunities for a non-governmental organisation and the governmental connections in the Strategy to exist in the same space.[[51]](#endnote-51) However, she wanted WomenSport International to be seen as the proactive agent resulting from Brighton and was wary that it was ‘already being perceived as an unforeseen problem to the development of the Strategy that most of us knew little or nothing about’.[[52]](#endnote-52) Sallie Barker worked for the GB Sports Council and was central to Brighton’s organising group. She admitted there was ‘big suspicion towards WomenSport International’ leading up to the meetings but nevertheless praised their input and ideas because it was a ‘different perspective and vision … it was great’.[[53]](#endnote-53)

Darlison also expressed disbelief that the proposal for the Charter had not been shared widely amongst sport and government networks.[[54]](#endnote-54) In response, Baker-Finch told Darlison that no other groups had a concept for moving forward; the Europeans in particular were ‘proprietorial and did not want to give any ground’ and overtly male-dominated international groups such as the Commonwealth Games Federation and the IOC were ‘just begging to be led’.[[55]](#endnote-55) For example, the Commonwealth Games Federation had recognised that ‘Brighton offers a chance to “in a safe way” address change’[[56]](#endnote-56) because the conference, and its outcomes, could be used as a political lobbying mechanism for change.

Documents following the February meetings indicated that the Scandinavians were feeling the London EWS meeting was ‘hijacked’ by the Strategy which was not endorsed by the European Sport Conference.[[57]](#endnote-57) Indeed, fears about internationalising EWS work appear in the international meeting when a Swedish representative argues for further regional expansion and monitoring until 1996, which was when Sweden could then host an expanded ‘international’ conference.[[58]](#endnote-58) Talbot reflected:

‘It was fascinating because there was actually reluctance, particularly from the Nordic countries, to have this international conference…There was quite a lot of, “Why do we want to do this? Shouldn’t we be good enough?”, that sort of stuff. It was the Commonwealth women working with the UK particularly that pushed Brighton through and some good leadership from within those Commonwealth countries’.[[59]](#endnote-59)

Elsewhere, IAPESGW had also received the invitational conference brochure and realised Brighton’s importance.[[60]](#endnote-60) Throughout March 1994, when WomenSport International was formed, correspondence with IAPESGW illustrates the shifting leverage of power between two international non-governmental organisations at a time when the issue of women and sport was increasingly politicised. IAPESGW continued to rebuff the sustained approaches of WomenSport International to join them. Just two weeks before Brighton, WomenSport International tapered their request to IAPESGW from a complete merger to ‘a formal invitation to work with us on any project where you may wish to contribute your expertise’ to which IAPESGW’s president responded positively soon after Brighton.[[61]](#endnote-61)

The final complexity to emerge from the February meetings was how the US Women’s Sports Foundation felt ‘a snub from the rest of world regarding its successful work’.[[62]](#endnote-62) Since its formation in 1974, the organisation had achieved unprecedented national success in raising awareness and affording opportunities for women and girls in sport and physical activity. However, its activism for sport development was corporatised and not under state control, unlike European and Commonwealth counterparts who were overseen by governmental structures. Marjorie Snyder, twice interim-CEO of the organisation, noted that the focus and strength of domestic work meant that internationally, ‘we weren’t really talking with one another that much’.[[63]](#endnote-63) From archival correspondence in March 1994, Darlison hypothesised the organisation ‘seem to have next to no information about what is going on at Brighton’.[[64]](#endnote-64) Indeed, the US Women’s Sports Foundation had also considered hosting a world conference for women and sport in the early 1990s. A memo to participants at its annual conference in 1992 alludes to an international agenda for women and sport with clear aims cited.[[65]](#endnote-65) However, the conference eventually led to the establishment of a separate organisation, which was a pre-cursor to WomenSport International.

In March 1994, there were expectations that the US Women’s Sports Foundation would approach the UK Women’s Sport Foundation to form a global ‘Women’s Sports Foundation’.[[66]](#endnote-66) Instead, the threat of legal proceedings was presented by the former to the latter less than one month before Brighton. [[67]](#endnote-67) This was criticised by some interviewees. But the legal proceedings were simply an attempt to commercially protect the ‘Women’s Sports Foundation’ name for potential use in a ‘Women’s Global Games’ – an event strikingly similar in ideology to the Games of the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale in the 1920s-30s across Europe – which did not materialise.[[68]](#endnote-68) A nominal fee of $10USD would allow the UK Women’s Sport Foundation to acquire a license for the US Women’s Sports Foundation name, and access to its extensive research library, materials and sponsorship details.[[69]](#endnote-69) Snyder reflected:

‘Whatever it was we said, what we intended was that they just acknowledged that we granted permission to them to use the name. That was what we wanted and there was never any legal papers filed. And I am guessing that this came up at Brighton because we didn’t really have an opportunity to see each other face to face very often. That is just way blown out of proportion’.[[70]](#endnote-70)

The threat of legal action, and the taut relations between various groups generally, is an important aspect to consider because of how these relationships would have appeared to outsiders pre-Brighton. It is clear that many people were committed to ensuring Brighton was a success. However, what is also clear are the battles for power leading into Brighton because of the disparate ideologies pursued. Brighton was supported by the IOC through $15,000USD of Olympic Solidarity funding and this legitimacy was crucial for attracting organisations and governmental representatives.[[71]](#endnote-71) Should outside groups be aware of in-fighting, disagreements, and potential lawsuits between organisations associated to Brighton, it would have severely damaged its reputation before it had begun. Instead, the tensions were contained, according to Sue Neill, who worked for Sport Canada and was to become IWG co-chair from 1998-2002:

‘It is very easy for people to write things off if they feel it is “just those women fighting again”, you know, “those women can’t get their act together”, “forget it, they are never going to succeed”. I think it was pretty important that [the tensions] didn’t become public because it could have easily have just undermined the whole thing’.[[72]](#endnote-72)

### *Attendees*

It is often quoted 280 delegates from just over eighty countries attended Brighton but no delegate attendance data was ever collected during or after the conference.[[73]](#endnote-73) The best insight is a pre-conference delegate list. Overall the organising team were ‘pretty happy with the attendance, [but] it was biased towards Commonwealth countries’.[[74]](#endnote-74)

The list shows 266 people from 81 countries were to attend Brighton.[[75]](#endnote-75) The UK had the highest majority of attendees with 89 delegates making up 33.5% of total attendees. The USA (12/4.5%), Canada (11/4%), Norway (9/3.5%), Finland and Sweden (both 6/2%) followed to account for the dominance of North America and North-Western Europe. Every continent was represented and Europe had the largest presence with 29/81 countries in attendance. A further quarter (21) of the countries attending were from Africa. Oceania (5) and South America (3) had the least number of countries participating.[[76]](#endnote-76) Over half (149 delegates/56%) of the attendees were from Commonwealth countries.[[77]](#endnote-77) This was partly facilitated through contacts within the British Council, and combined GB Sports Council and IOC Solidarity funding to pay for some delegates’ attendance.[[78]](#endnote-78) Reflecting on her role in the invitation process, Talbot commented:

‘I wrote to every British Council representative across the world to get them to send somebody to Brighton, and we got 31 countries. I remember writing back to Pakistan because they wrote, “there’s no point sending anyone because there aren’t any women playing sport”, and I remember writing back saying, “that’s the point!”’ but I never got a response. We got a lot of people who wouldn’t have otherwise been there and Nabilah [Abdulrahman] was a fantastic example of that’.[[79]](#endnote-79)

When interviewed, Abdulrahman confirmed she received an invitation from the British Council of Alexandria who sponsored her attendance to Brighton.[[80]](#endnote-80) Examples such as this were to have far-reaching consequences for women and sport globally because women such as Abdulrahman, the Dean of Women’s Physical Education at the University of Alexandria, Egypt, managed to meet at Brighton, often for the first time, and discuss formations of regional groups. Interestingly, given the previous section, she claimed that ‘before the Brighton Conference I had no idea who the different organisations were. However, their good working relationships and successes were made very clear’.[[81]](#endnote-81)

However, the cultural, political and financial barriers were too challenging for many to attend. The conference itself cost just under £600 and would have been more if Brighton was not chosen as a cheaper alternative to London with close major transport links and comparable conference facilities.[[82]](#endnote-82) The intention of the conference can be seen in the tiered approach to those invited to attend the conference; as the following passage from the invitational brochure shows, the conference targeted decision-makers to attend over merely ‘welcoming’ the general public in order to have maximum influence:

‘The conference *will bring* together policy and decision-makers, at national and international level. Individuals who hold influential positions on national and international sports boards, committees and council, or who represent government ministries dealing with sport *are encouraged to attend*. The conference *welcomes* males and female delegates who are committed to the development of women’s sport.’[[83]](#endnote-83)

Indeed, Hargreaves has critiqued those who attended the conference as unrepresentative because they were ‘mostly paid administrators linked to local, national, government or inter-government agencies’, rather than general representatives of organisations.[[84]](#endnote-84) However, as the next section will outline, the structure and content of the conference allowed women and sport networks to connect with these powerful agencies, often for the first time.

# Programme content

Anita White officially welcomed the conference delegates by outlining the International Strategy and introducing the international consultative group first acknowledged at the February meeting earlier in the year.[[85]](#endnote-85) The group was now formed of nine white, Western women who were ‘aware that the ad-hoc group which met in February was not fully representative of international sport’.[[86]](#endnote-86) It included Lay, who admitted she had some knowledge of cultural differences but ‘no contacts and no practical experience of what it would be like in those countries’.[[87]](#endnote-87)

As Ferree and Mueller observe, conferences are important for activism because they offer an opportunity for subordinated experiences to be aired in influential settings.[[88]](#endnote-88) For Brighton, there was a deliberate focus on discussion and interaction over keynotes and presentations in order to allow an ‘organic’ conference where ‘the delegates were to be the activists’.[[89]](#endnote-89) This allowed greater networking and sharing of values via long breaks between sessions, including two hours for lunch, and smaller seminar groups to allow listening to, and understanding of, what was happening in different parts of the world.[[90]](#endnote-90) Fasting reflected:

‘We had a lot of time for discussion because if you open up for that you can really get dialogue and I think we did that. I remember there was research I was talking about and an African woman stood up and said, “In my country girls don’t have physical education, that’s the problem!”’[[91]](#endnote-91)

Brighton was comprised of four keynote lectures, three thematic workshops, eleven issues seminars, seven skills workshops, and a plenary which amalgamated the recommendations made from each of the previous sessions. Thirty-one women and three men undertook presenting/chairing duties and over two-thirds were Western institution-based, white women; again accounting for the dominant base of women and sport expertise and discourse in North America, North-Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand.[[92]](#endnote-92) French and Spanish translators were available, but interviewees acknowledged language was an issue for some throughout the conference.

The issues seminars occurred three times to allow delegates to attend a number of sessions which covered: equal opportunities; integration or segregation; cross-cultural themes; women, sport and Islam; challenging sexism; marketing; gender verification; sexual harassment; challenging homophobia; working in a male environment; and integrating women with disabilities. Some of the more sensitive issues such as sexual harassment and gender verification were being raised in public for the first time at Brighton.[[93]](#endnote-93) The expertise of agents and organisations facilitated these discussions and the seminars were chaired by eight white, Western women, one white, Western man and one Malaysian woman because:

‘Countries in different parts of the world, and at different stages of development, face many different issues related to women and sport. These seminars will explore some of these issues and will be led by people who have the knowledge and experience of how they may be tackled’.[[94]](#endnote-94)

Brackenridge stated ‘it is all too easy for those of us from white, wealthy, academic traditions to assume that we know best, to act as if we have a monopoly on sports science knowledge, on policy and best practice in sport for women’.[[95]](#endnote-95) The following examples from the issues seminars outline how different women openly *shared* their own oppressive experiences in and through sport, instead of being *spoken at* because of patriarchal conference structures dominated by men, such as continuous keynote lectures.[[96]](#endnote-96)

Brackenridge chaired the sexual harassment seminar and recounted:

‘My abiding memory is a Tanzanian man who came up to me saying people had never heard of or thought about sexual harassment before and I have had a number of African delegates at conferences over the years come up to me and say, “of course it happens, a woman can’t get on a team in my country if they have not slept with a coach”. This anecdotal evidence was amassing. This was at a time when I couldn’t get really good research access to data so it was very important for me to get contacts like that who would spill the beans’.[[97]](#endnote-97)

The ‘Challenging Sexism’ seminar was the only one led by a man, mainly because Jay Coakley, an American academic, knew ‘some of the strategies men used to exclude women and maintain the forms of exclusion that had been institutionalised over many years’.[[98]](#endnote-98) He had worked with White for a decade but claimed some of the organisers did not want to allow the opportunity for a male to dominate the proceedings. Coakley also thought this was the major reason why no one attended the first of his three sessions.[[99]](#endnote-99) Colleagues helped fill his second session and by the third he had over twenty delegates. This included many people from Africa and three veiled Egyptian women who placed their issues of dealing with institutionalised exclusion from sport by law at the centre of the seminar, meaning he was able to listen to previously unheard experiences. Coakley recounted:

‘As a result I was in a position I had never been in in my life to have women speaking spontaneously, women I would have never been able to talk to individually, about the issues they were confronting and I learned more in that hour listening to those women than I had ever known about women in certain, especially Muslim, countries in my entire life. After being a little disappointed in certain ways after the first session, this third one made up for any kind of disappointment because I remembered it in very distinct ways ever since’.[[100]](#endnote-100)

The ‘Women, Sport and Islam’ seminar was led by Shahizah Daiman who had held a number of key roles regarding women’s sport in Malaysia. The seminar outlined the main characteristics of Islam and the beliefs of most Muslim men and women. Daiman expressed concern that ‘many beliefs and practices have been labelled “Muslim” or “Islamic” without warranting those names … [with] … certain alien ideological intrusions on our societies, ignorance and distortion of the true Islam, or exploitation by individuals within the society’ forming damaging and false stereotypes of many Islamic and Muslim women.[[101]](#endnote-101)

These examples show reciprocity between experts in their topics sharing their knowledge with a diverse room of people who in turn, relayed their personal experiences to add to general understanding of the seminar topic.[[102]](#endnote-102) Moreover, Western women were also meeting and talking to each other for the first time. Snyder reflected, ‘what became really clear was that this was the first time that so many of these people from different continents had ever met each other, heard of each other, or knew that they were on the same continent so that was really incredibly exciting’.[[103]](#endnote-103) Moreover, American delegates were experiencing governmental and Commonwealth-oriented approaches to sport for the first time.[[104]](#endnote-104)

Darlene Kluka, an American activist and academic for women and sport who had led the Cross-Cultural Themes’ seminar, said the main trend emanating from the workshop and seminar interactions were ‘common denominators’ between women from all over the world.[[105]](#endnote-105) The ‘strength of feeling and sense of solidarity with women from different parts of the world’ surprised White and many of those interviewed who attended Brighton.[[106]](#endnote-106) Despite cultural differences, similar issues were recognised by all attending as affecting globally disparate women and creating barriers to their involvement in sport, including access and opportunities to participation, male domination and control, and under-representative media coverage.[[107]](#endnote-107) The conference was a collective gathering and acted as an ‘emotionally charged site where participants develop a shared sense of time, place, and common purpose that is central to the protest experience, and common identities’.[[108]](#endnote-108)

Crucially, these collective experiences had been aggregated and shared in a political environment.[[109]](#endnote-109) The conference was organised by the GB Sports Council, supported by the IOC, and many of its attendees were representatives of sports organisations and groups around the world. Brighton has been criticised for the low numbers of researchers in attendance, but the powerful delegates who attended facilitated further politicisation of lobbying for women and sport.[[110]](#endnote-110) White added that the conference was doing something different in not being overly academic.[[111]](#endnote-111)

The politicisation element was explored in the opening conference keynotes. Another Commonwealth contact of the GB Sports Council was the Minister of Youth and Sport for Namibia, Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana. She focused on the impact on gender equity away from patriarchal control in her native Namibia and applied this to sport by calling for democratic principles to be adopted as there had been little breakthrough in the UN agenda on gender equality and women’s emancipation.[[112]](#endnote-112) Additionally, Talbot reflected on the successes and challenges EWS had encountered since it originated, including ‘learning about other cultures and other sports structures and legislative systems’, and the tactics employed in order to get women into those spheres.[[113]](#endnote-113) The Conference therefore acted as a mechanism to share various experiences and understanding between diverse attendees. This adds legitimacy to arguments that conferences are under-researched sites for women where repertories of collective activism are shared.[[114]](#endnote-114)

Calls to mobilise and politicise collective activism for women and sport continued in the plenary sessions. Brackenridge utilised her decade of national, regional and international experience to state how networks of volunteers could exercise a ‘freedom of association’ to exert pressure for social change as opposed to vested interests by those within government seeking to maintain their elected position.[[115]](#endnote-115) The Director of the GB Sports Council, Derek Casey, claimed the International Strategy that White was soon to explain was ‘designed to represent and harness the views of very differing people. It will not represent every view which every individual holds but let us hope it represents our collective view of the way ahead’.[[116]](#endnote-116) The International Strategy was a resource mobilised in a politicalised environment to legitimise the ‘collective view’.

# Immediate outcomes

### *The International Strategy for Women and Sport*

The Brighton Conference had a number of important outcomes to address issues women encountered in sport. White closed the conference by introducing the finalised version of an International Strategy comprised of a Declaration, international co-ordinating mechanisms (an added element requested by the delegates), regular conferences, and a small working group to ‘communicate, monitor progress, and advise’.[[117]](#endnote-117) All had been heavily influenced by the recommendations put forward from each conference session and by the thoughts of the steering group who wanted better coordination in future work.[[118]](#endnote-118)

The Strategy was aimed at all governments, non-government organisations, groups and agencies in the hope that ‘through the development of such an internationally strategic approach, model programmes and successful developments can be shared between nations and sporting federations, so accelerating change towards a more gender equitable sports culture’.[[119]](#endnote-119) In doing so, the Strategy was a self-produced mobilising resource aimed at generating coordinated lobbying at governments and sports organisations globally.[[120]](#endnote-120) The Declaration would be the first central pillar to the Strategy and it was hoped the principles would be endorsed by governments and organisations quickly, although a target number was never considered.[[121]](#endnote-121) For monitoring of the Declaration to occur, a working group was established to continue the work of the steering committee from the draft Strategy. There was no formal advice to follow within the Strategy, rather, a series of points that when followed would exert pressure on dominant sporting and non-sporting organisations in favour of women.[[122]](#endnote-122)

### *The Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport*

The idea of a Charter of principles had been premised at the February 1994 meeting by Baker-Finch who ‘was very keen that there was some kind of outcome from Brighton and not just a sort of feel-good factor of getting people together and then all going away again’.[[123]](#endnote-123) The content for the initial draft came from a plethora of sources because recurrent women and sport issues had been well-known to North-Western Europeans, North Americans, Australians and New Zealanders for over twenty years.[[124]](#endnote-124) At the same time Brighton was being planned, the UK Policy Frameworks for Action were being formalised by White and GB Sports Council colleagues. Separate Frameworks focused on young people, women, disabled people and ethnic minorities and were premised on equity and changing the culture and structure of British sport to be fairer and more accessible to all. However, they ultimately had little impact because they did not align with the shifting interest of the Conservative government with sport over the next few years.[[125]](#endnote-125) When asked if the Brighton Declaration was based on the Women and Sport Policy Framework for Action, White responded, ‘yes, to a certain extent’.[[126]](#endnote-126) The Policy Framework had been developed over a long consultation process so there was overlap between it and planning for Brighton. Yet there was also an acknowledgement that in the year between the Policy Frameworks being published and the hosting of the Brighton Conference, there had been limited immediate impact in the UK.[[127]](#endnote-127) However, White’s colleagues at the GB Sports Council such as Casey and Julia Bracewell had wider national and international policy understanding so could draft the Declaration with an ‘emphasis on universal principles’ and not necessarily action strategies more suitable to nation-specific policy frameworks.[[128]](#endnote-128) The phrasing and language used was another example of politicised experiences being applied to women and sport.

The Conference and its structure offered a vehicle to achieve wider contributions and collaboration from every delegate because each was given a printed version of the draft Declaration to critique over the three days and feedback to members of the drafting group:

‘It was really, really cool for me to be able to add something to that document. Then when it got to the upper levels, they went, “oh we forgot this!”, and they put it in. That for me was a personal delight because what I was asking for was something that other people had not thought of’.[[129]](#endnote-129)

For example, handwritten notes on original drafts question why girls in addition to women are not mentioned throughout.[[130]](#endnote-130) Bracewell revealed the final Declaration was deliberately kept universal and generic in its language to adhere to the UN Forward Looking Strategies and the Olympic Agenda, particularly toward women’s health.[[131]](#endnote-131)

Thus, although originally first produced in English by the GB Sports Council and heavily informed by white, Western-dominated women and their associated sport ideology, the Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport had been ‘internationalised by discussion’ between over eighty countries at the Brighton Conference.[[132]](#endnote-132) That said, White believed there had been no ‘new’ women and sport issue which emerged from discussion that had not previously been known before Brighton.[[133]](#endnote-133) It was approved by the delegates during the closing session after brief discussion, with the overriding aim being ‘to develop a sporting culture that enables and values the full involvement of women in every aspect of sport’.[[134]](#endnote-134)

The Brighton Declaration resulted in a universally agreed central document containing ten guiding principles that could be used to inform positive policy change for women and sport. It could not yield any direct power because it was not a legislative document, but it was an important political document because of the ‘illusory power’ a group or organisation could use to acknowledge their awareness of the issues that affected women in sport.[[135]](#endnote-135) This was crucial because when referring to Latin American delegates, people whom American activist and academic Chris Shelton had worked with closely, she said ‘I remember going to Anita and saying “they can’t speak English but this is what they are thinking, this is what they need”. They needed a letter, something they could take back with them’.[[136]](#endnote-136) In addition, Lay commended how it was written ‘through a women in sport lens… by women in sport, for women in sport’. She continued that it allowed the women to ‘stop being labelled as the complainers that are constantly talking about women in sport. We can now present from quite a different position’.[[137]](#endnote-137) Women had power in the form of a professional, presentable resource that had tangible links to powerful UN rhetoric.[[138]](#endnote-138)

However, the Declaration’s impact was seen as less influential by others. Different countries and organisations were in different positions when it came to addressing women and sport as an issue. For example, Fasting observed that 'some of the Nordic countries had already done most of it but not everything of course, and you can always do things better’.[[139]](#endnote-139) And Snyder commented:

‘I don’t think it was as important a document for the US Women’s Sports Foundation. We already had our Blueprint [for Change], we already had a pretty well-formulated advocacy platform, we had Title IX and the Amateur Sports Act. So we already had some legal things in place and because we weren’t government funded, there wasn’t going to be anything like trying to get our government to sign onto the Brighton Declaration. So we were already acting upon a lot of those things’.[[140]](#endnote-140)

In the first two comments, both Fasting and Snyder do not deny the importance of the Declaration, mainly because in 1994 no single group or country had addressed all ten principles, but they felt that it was not as important for their region of the world as it was for other places. For example, Title IX was signed in the USA in 1972 as a law that prohibits discrimination based on sex in education programmes that receive federal money. Later in the decade, the 1978 Amateur Sports Act shifted the governance of American sport to governing bodies organised under a newly-established National Olympic Committee. Despite these events, a document called ‘the Blueprint for Change’ emanated from the 1983 New Agenda Conference organised by the US Women’s Sports Foundation. Snyder claimed the document was ‘in some ways like the Brighton Declaration in that we were supposed to be using it and referring to it when we wanted to know what our priorities were’.[[141]](#endnote-141) Thus a decade before the Brighton principles were formulated, some countries had measures in place for advocacy, though substantially more did not and could be lobbied using the Declaration.

A third comment, by Anita DeFrantz, a vice-president of the IOC who helped to form its Women and Sport Commission in 2004, also recognised its importance but for primarily government-oriented audiences:

‘The Brighton Declaration was a very positive thing because it woke up government to the importance of having women have access to sport… it was a government-based organisation and the IOC is basically an association which is non-governmental’.[[142]](#endnote-142)

Nevertheless, the Declaration would soon contribute to growing pressure exerted onto the IOC to change its relation with gender discrimination in sport throughout the 1990s.[[143]](#endnote-143)

For others, the Declaration did not go far enough. Brackenridge echoed comments she made about the UK Policy Framework for Women and Sport in stating that ‘none of those principles were too radical…they are all nice liberal objectives aren’t they?... There is nothing in there about sexual violence as I recall’ – an issue she was researching at the time.[[144]](#endnote-144) Hall argued ‘very little of the research and scholarship readily available was incorporated into the conference programme, although several recommendations vaguely addressed the need for more research’.[[145]](#endnote-145) Therefore, the Declaration can be perceived as a liberalised approach laced with a radical agenda. It was a starting point to access organisations and institutions and begin to influence them and lever change. For Hall, an original founder of WomenSport International, it was not radical enough and she both critiqued this progressive step and somewhat distanced herself from future involvement that was being conducted; providing an example of the complexities experienced between scholars and activists.[[146]](#endnote-146)

### *International Co-ordinating Mechanisms and Regular Conferences*

International co-ordinating mechanisms were regional or continental groups that could continue to pressurise and lobby for the advancement of women in all aspects of sport. For the Commonwealth Games Federation and EWS, this was continuation of work they were already conducting but as was made clear to delegates, these were the only such examples. During the course of the conference, the long breaks and helpful organising team led by Barker facilitated meetings between countries and with groups. From the conference proceedings, three continental groups were informally established: the African Women in Sport Association (AWISA), a Pan-American Women and Sport Group, and Asian Women and Sport.[[147]](#endnote-147) Further study is needed of the development and impact of these groups.

The foundations of AWISA are directly linked to Brighton’s structure. A group of African delegates led by the ‘phenomenal’ Iivula-Ithana[[148]](#endnote-148) had previously struggled to be able to meet together.[[149]](#endnote-149) The conference programme was slightly amended, a room and time were secured, and delegates were notified of the meeting details. The meeting established a network which aimed to bring about positive change in the participation of women in sport and the development of women sports coaches, administrators, leaders, and decision makers at national and international level.[[150]](#endnote-150) These unplanned consequences facilitated the third part of the Strategy. Conference organiser Barker reflected:

‘I think we had hoped it would continue and I remember us discussing and I know what the people round the table were thinking, including myself, “well wouldn’t it be nice to go to a non-Western and non-European country?” And Iivula-Ithana was part of it … so it was natural we were looking to her and there may well have been conversations’.[[151]](#endnote-151)

During Brighton’s closing session, Iivula-Ithana announced the ‘notable achievement’ that AWISA had been formed which was ‘enthusiastically received’ by the delegates.[[152]](#endnote-152) She then announced Namibia would like to host the next World Conference on Women and Sport – an unexpected but welcome surprise to all in the room.[[153]](#endnote-153)

The original Strategy idea was to have a world conference every two years. This was seconded by many of the Brighton delegates. But the steering committee believed this was too often because of the increasing focus academic and non-academic conferences were placing on women and sport as a theme.[[154]](#endnote-154) In the final Strategy, it was proposed a world conference would occur every four years. Indeed, Iivula-Ithana’s offer was followed-up as the second World Conference on Women and Sport was hosted in Windhoek, Namibia, in May 1998.

### *The International Working Group on Women and Sport*

The fourth part of the strategy was to establish a working group to coordinate and monitor the three other parts of the International Strategy and make sure it ‘did not fade from consciousness after the conference’.[[155]](#endnote-155) How and why the IWG was formed was a point of disagreement among the interviewees. One interviewee anonymously stated the working group idea had been cooled in favour of working on the Declaration during the Conference. But as the collective feeling among delegates grew, ‘a man from the GB Sports Council suggested [the group] and that came as a shock to some of us and of course that was very well received’. White also admitted that ‘the idea [for IWG] may have come up just before the conference in a meeting, but it was certainly only worked out at the conference itself’ because the Strategy needed guidance.[[156]](#endnote-156)

Due to increased delegate calls for something to be formed, the working group idea was resurrected. In the conference proceedings, it is stated that for ‘continuity, some of the individuals [from the international women and sport group] involved might serve on the group’ but that others were needed, preferably a more diverse mix with ‘appropriate governmental backing and support’.[[157]](#endnote-157) Iivula-Ithana was one of four non-Western women suggested to be invited to the consultation group to determine the Strategy during the conference.[[158]](#endnote-158) Iivula-Ithana was to become ‘very involved’ but due to time constraints, the working group was unable to be formalised at Brighton so future contact would be made with interested parties.[[159]](#endnote-159)

As for its initial role, it is admitted the working group ‘goes some way beyond the functions which were outlined at the beginning of the conference’.[[160]](#endnote-160) The following is dialogue with Anita White as to why the IWG was formed:

AW To work on the strategy and to monitor the implementation of the Brighton Declaration, and to keep the momentum going, we felt that a working group was needed. We weren’t trying to form another organisation because we knew the organisations were already there, but it needed to be a group of activists and people who would make it happen who were also to a point representative of different parts of the world and different organisations.

*Author* Did you not think that maybe one of the other groups at the time could have taken it on and done that role?

AW Yes they possibly could have done but I think we thought it needed state funding in order to be viable. So it was a working group, not an organisation, I think that is an important point, we weren’t trying to turn it into an organisation.

*Author* And having that financial and huge resource background was a major part.

AW Yes.[[161]](#endnote-161)

White seemed unaware of WomenSport International’s intentions to be a major group post-Brighton, although she did acknowledge their official launch at the Conference.[[162]](#endnote-162) Delegates also knew that the international women and sport meeting group would not exist after Brighton and that ‘a new organisation, WomenSport International, will be announced’.[[163]](#endnote-163) Its core members all attended and even chaired sessions at Brighton, yet it is unclear how much promotion there was.[[164]](#endnote-164) Fundamentally however, WomenSport International did not have a resource as advanced as the Declaration, did not have the powerful base of resources and finances like the GB Sports Council, and did not have as strong governmental links as the working group. When compared to the emerging IWG, it is understandable that tensions arose regarding the perceived intention of the newly-formed group on the international stage for women and sport.

The role of IWG is positioned under the section entitled ‘Co-ordinating and Monitoring the Strategy’ in the International Strategy and had five aims, paraphrased below:

* Continue developing the International Strategy and provide a focus for international women and sport work;
* Provide advice and coordination to conferences addressing the issue of women and sport;
* To act as a contact and reference point;
* To coordinate with international and regional coordination groups, organisations and governments;
* To monitor progress on women and sport issues internationally and the application of the principles in the Brighton Declaration.[[165]](#endnote-165)

Its immediate tasks were to establish representatives to sit on the group; approach leading sport (e.g. the IOC) and non-sport (e.g. the UN) bodies to adopt the Brighton Declaration; coordinate initial planning for Namibia; and most crucially when relating to other women and sport organisations highlighted thus far: ‘undertake work at the international level (e.g. with international sports federations) to secure the adoption and implementation of the strategy at the international level; and liaise with other multi-national governmental and non-governmental organisation bodies which share common concerns and interests with respect to women, and women and sport’.[[166]](#endnote-166)

Over the next few years, correspondence between WomenSport International and the newly formed IWG reflected how both negotiated new opportunities facilitated by the growing focus on women and sport. Privately, these communications were sometimes conflictual.[[167]](#endnote-167) Publicly, both were directly engaged in lobbying the UN, the IOC, and other networks globally. This lobbying resulted in the recognition by some of the most powerful sporting and non-sporting organisations in the world that work needed to be done to stop the barriers women were encountering in sport. Further scholarship is needed to explore these complex relations during the 1990s and beyond.

Measuring the impact of the Brighton Conference, the International Strategy and the Declaration is very challenging.[[168]](#endnote-168) Much has happened since 1994 and the causality to one event, strategy or document is almost impossible to achieve, especially when other conferences and actions by the IWG and organisations like the IOC have since occurred. Indeed, ‘endorsing the Conference in order to be politically correct does not mean, necessarily, that the will is there, or the resources are available, to implement practical changes in line with philosophy’.[[169]](#endnote-169)

What is clearer to demonstrate is the impact on the identities forged as well as the empowerment of those in attendance. Those who attended outlined an energy, excitement and atmosphere[[170]](#endnote-170) to the conference and how ‘we felt we were on the cusp of something new’.[[171]](#endnote-171) Talbot argued the issue of women and sport gained ‘legitimacy…an identity and a position that it hadn’t had before’.[[172]](#endnote-172) Interviewees who did not attend Brighton also heralded the event and its legacy.[[173]](#endnote-173) Hargreaves reflects on the empowerment of delegates and the ‘sense of community which encouraged them to go home and work for improved conditions for women in sport in their own countries’.[[174]](#endnote-174)

# Summary

Leading into the 1990s, women’s participation in sport and physical activity was increasing yet still encountered significant socio-cultural, political and systemic marginalisation, trivialisation and discrimination around the world. National, regional and international advocacy groups for women and sport existed yet were not explicitly connected to each other. Thus, their work was disparate and somewhat uncoordinated.

Snyder thought that ‘the Brighton Conference is where most people will point to and say that was really the “moment”, if you will’.[[175]](#endnote-175) This ‘moment’ she refers to was the establishment of a collective identity through the amalgamation of decades-worth of resources that were to positively influence the trajectory of development for women in sport and physical activity thereafter. The resources shared at the Brighton Conference were multi-facetted. They were experiences, publications, ideas, research, policies, reflections, challenges and opportunities and were sometimes being shared or listened to for the first time. Some were shared by individuals and organisations representing sporting and non-sporting organisations from around the world. The fact that many stories were surprisingly similar in content, despite being from different parts of the world, helped to affirm a cohesive common bond of women’s subordinate position in various aspects of sport. For many delegates, the opportunity to do this had never existed before.

Many of the existing women and sport advocacy organisations did not have the resources or expertise to achieve such a feat. Brighton did not emerge from one person or one organisation, nor was it a linear process. Up to a year before Brighton occurred, groups were engaged in conflictual relations with each other in order to position themselves favourably in a context undergoing ‘very rapid development’.[[176]](#endnote-176) Neill agreed with Hargreaves’ claim that such groups were self-conscious about their identities, meaning middle-class white Westerners wanted to ‘reach out’ to non-white, non-Westerners to improve the representation of advocacy.[[177]](#endnote-177) But Neill also highlights how such women now had the resources and political opportunities to be able to reach out and establish communication with more global contacts for women and sport than ever before:

‘It was the right credentials and the right resources. I don’t think it’s fair to be critical of that group at that time. I mean it’s true it was white, Western women but what else could they do? They were who they were! They were a bunch of colleagues who thought it might be interesting to do something’.[[178]](#endnote-178)

Thus, the Brighton Conference was spawned from the increasing politicisation of women and sport as a topic. Scholars have demonstrated how the original foundations of advocacy organisations were more radically-oriented yet were gradually tapered and liberalised to suit institutional agendas of those who controlled sport.[[179]](#endnote-179) Nevertheless, those working within political structures recognised opportunities to exploit the resources available to them and, to repeat the words of White, ‘seize the day’.[[180]](#endnote-180)

Brighton can be described as the product of organic circumstances which, in turn, produced positive intended and unintended consequences. The collective identity was, for the most part, legitimised via the production of the Brighton Declaration – a set of ten principles which when addressed would help to develop a sporting culture that enables and values the full involvement of women in every aspect of sport – which was one part of an International Strategy for Women and Sport to emanate from Brighton. The Declaration served as a professional and symbolic tool, with tangible links to powerful UN rhetoric, to mobilise activism and actions thereafter.

The formation of regional groups and the IWG, as well as greater understanding of other groups working around the world, helped to bring together a previously disconnected collective.[[181]](#endnote-181) The galvanised lobbying facilitated by the Conference did contribute to positive developments for women in sport and physical activity thereafter, though to measure the extent of this definitively is exceptionally difficult.[[182]](#endnote-182) Instead, further research of these organisations and their work is required to better understand how activism in sport is cultivated to influence change. Research should also explore the role that seminal conferences have had for other issues in sport.

# Endnotes

1. IWG, ‘About’, https://iwgwomenandsport.org/about/ (Accessed July 02, 2019). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. IWG, *Women and sport: From Brighton to Windhoek, Facing the Challenge* (London: UK Sports Council, 1998). [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Kari Fasting and others, *From Helsinki to Gaborone: IWG Progress Report* (Gaborone: IWG, 2018). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See Johanna Adriaanse and Inge Claringbould, ‘Gender equality in sport leadership: From the Brighton Declaration to the Sydney Scoreboard’, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport 51*, no. 5 (2016): 547-566; Jennifer Hargreaves, ‘The “Women’s International Sports Movement”: Local-global strategies and empowerment’, *Women’s Studies International Forum 22,* no. 5 (1999): 461-471; Darlene Kluka, ‘The Brighton Declaration on women and sport: A management audit of process quality’ (PhD diss., University of Pretoria, 2008). [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. See Susanna Hedenborg and Gertrud Pfister, ‘Introduction’, *Sport in Society 15*, no. 3 (2012): 283-286; Carol Osborne and Fiona Skillen, *Women in Sports History* (London: Routledge, 2011); Roberta Park and Patricia Vertinsky, *Women, Sport, Society: Further Reflections, Reaffirming Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Routledge, 2011); Jaime Schultz, *Qualifying Times: Points of Change in U.S. Women’s Sport* (Illinois: University of Illinois, 2014); Jean Williams, *A Contemporary History of Women’s Sport, Part One: Sporting Women, 1850–1960*. (London: Routledge, 2014). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
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