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'Where' Are the Children in Safeguarding Policies of Sport? An Analysis of National and International Discourses in Policy Documentation

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ABSTRACT

Within sport governance, there is increasing recognition of the significance of policy in protecting athlete welfare. However, there has been a distinct lack of research evaluating the messages conveyed in policy text. This research evaluated safeguarding policies of sport governing bodies nationally and internationally to understand how the concept of 'safeguarding' and child protection are constructed, the location of 'children' in text and the implications this has for practice. The study analysed safeguarding policies of Sports Receiving Funding from Sport England—National Governing Bodies (NGBs) and Global equivalents of these organisations—International/Global/World Governing Bodies. The study analysed data using Foucauldian discourse analysis to evaluate meanings conveyed through language as constitutive. Findings demonstrated World Governing Bodies attended to elite athlete equality with NGBs focusing on shared responsibilities of all involved in child sport environments. This is considered from perspectives of legal requirement and moral imperative. 'Children' in policy were identified as a group to be represented by adults with limited attention to their own agency. A shift towards acknowledgement of children's rights with good practice requires attention to holistic development of the child. Policy included accessible reporting mechanisms although lacked guidance on managing power relations in reporting processes.

1 | Introduction

1.1 | Identification of the Problem

Within sport governance there is increasing recognition as to the significance of policy as a means of protecting the welfare of athletes and preventing abuse (Moustakas et al. 2023; Rhind et al. 2017). The content and focus of policy contextualises the work of all involved in supporting children in playing sport and frames attitudes and action in implementation. It is crucial in defining how participants understand the value

and significance of ensuring positive experiences of sport in alignment with the United Nations' Convention on Children's Rights (UNCRC) (UNICEF UK 1989). Nevertheless, there has been a distinct lack of research evaluating the messages being conveyed in policy text. This study evaluated the discourses in policy being designed by sports governing bodies in order to understand how the concept of safeguarding is being constructed by institutions, exploring the key meanings being consumed by those involved in children's sport. This paper therefore makes a unique contribution to our understanding of policy designed to protect the vulnerable and advocate for

Summary

- Good practice in policy considers not only the safety of athletes in sport but also the holistic development of the child.
- Policy text providing links to reporting mechanisms is valued; however, there is a lack of guidance as to how power relations that may lead to abusive situations need to be managed.
- Future policy making should consider involve children in the design and implementation of Safeguarding Guidance.

the need to ensure representation, in this case to align to the requirements of the UNCRC and create a rights based approach to policy development.

1.2 | Child Abuse in Sport—The Context

Participation in sport has been identified as having positive physical, social and psychological benefits (Baker and Byon 2014; O'Gorman and Greenough 2017). Nevertheless, in recent years the presentation of sport as a wholly beneficial activity has also been exposed as politically motivated idealism that can mask cultures that systematically abuse children (Brackenridge 2003; Everley 2020, 2022; Papaefstathiou et al. 2013). The response to highlighting concerns with safeguarding in sport led in the UK to a National Action Plan for Children in Sport, ratified in 2000 (Papaefstathiou et al. 2013) with the following establishment, in 2001, of the Child Protection In Sport Unit as part of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (Brackenridge 2003; Brackenridge and Rhind 2014). Through this process, the UK was the first country to have a state funded safeguarding in sport body (Rhind et al. 2017). However, we still see the exposition of safeguarding violations in sport and there is a recognition that, for some sport, cultures had been significantly flawed over a protracted period—investigations into abuse in football (Sheldon 2021) and gymnastics (Whyte 2022) highlighted this as both an historic and contemporary cultural phenomenon.

Research investigating abuse in sport has frequently attributed power relations between coach and child athlete as problematic (McMahon et al. 2018; Parent and Demers 2011). In many instances sport culture itself has been found to rationalise abuse, particularly in elite performance contexts (O'Gorman and Greenough 2017; Lipman et al. 2021). The acknowledgement that the organisation of sport creates an environment that promulgates maltreatment of children (Everley 2022; Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2022) has underpinned an acknowledgement that demands a robust response if sport is to establish its integrity and adequately protect participants. This therefore leads us to consider the subsequent emphasis on the need for policy development within which is the inevitable question of creating substantive change wherein there is institutional action. The

location of children within this is essential for understanding the interpretation of the needs of minors by organisations and the meaning this creates around children in sport.

1.3 | Interpreting Policy Documentation

In 2005, Houlihan criticised sport policy analysers for failing to utilise major models and frameworks of policy analysis more broadly implemented outside of sport (Houlihan 2005). In 2023, Moradi claimed that there has been a distinct lack of research summarising current investigations in sport policy (Moradi et al. 2023). Where literature has sought to summarise sport policy research, over the last 30 years, it is identified as having largely focussed on concepts such as 'legitimacy' (Lindsey et al. 2023; Ronglan 2015; Slack and Hinings 1994) wherein the position of organisations' policy are justified on either symbolic (such as through name change or linking with a key identified 'cause') (Strittmatter 2018) or 'substantive' in the sense that they provide more evidence of specific designs in terms of institutional practice.

Clearly, concepts of artificially legitimising policy is significant to all policy evaluations; and creating genuinely legitimate text to support substantive safeguarding practice is crucial to protecting children. Yet, even where standard models of policy of analysis have been followed such as within Hoolihan's work in the early 2000s, the focus has not been on how the child is located within the text. Where the limited analysis of sport policy has taken place, this has been at meso level and arguably does not adequately consider the nuanced interpretations that occur at the points of policy consumption—the points where individuals actually act and make a difference to children.

The prevalence and recognised need for policy development quickly followed the acknowledgement of safeguarding as an issue in sport and we have seen the development of a range of policies that sports organisations have introduced to frame issues of safeguarding, both nationally and internationally (Brackenridge 2003; Everley 2020). Indeed, with respect to the United Kingdom, organisations funded by Sport England or UK Sport must apply standards for safeguarding and protecting children as set by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children's Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) and encourage a culture of listening to children (Everley 2020). This is largely seen to be achieved through the development of a sound Safeguarding Policy.

Policy, however, is not developed in a neutral space and is described in itself as 'truth making' through discourse (Mangion 2023); that is, the focus and wording of documentation tells us how a particular issue is being viewed by the authors. With respect to Foucault's discourse analysis, policy documentation can be seen as a site where knowledge, in this case, about what safeguarding 'is' is created—it is from this that sports organisations subject to such guidance can gain an understanding of the concept and how it should be managed in practice.

Within policy, it is argued that hierarchies and teleologies exist (Garratt et al. 2013) that will inevitably influence prioritisation

of action for those required to implement this 'text'. With criticism that policy writing is associated with the political elite in a broader sense (Hoppe 2019), for sport, this means taking particular care to attend to who is really being represented within the guidance and how. Therefore, policy content in safeguarding can inform us as to how children are being seen in a sports space. In many instances, although the text is about the safeguarding of participants, it is coaches who are placed at the centre of the prevention of abuse narrative with limited attention being paid to athletes themselves (Garratt et al. 2013).

2 | Methodology

The purpose of this research was to evaluate existing safeguarding policies of sport governing bodies nationally and internationally to understand how the concept of safeguarding and child protection are being represented and the implications this has for practice. The ultimate aim being to see where children are being located in policy that concerns them and how their experiences are being framed.

Because of the requirement by Sport England for those sports receiving their funding to adhere to guidance provided by the NSPCC's CPSU, this study analysed safeguarding policies (or their equivalent) of

- Sports Receiving Funding from Sport England—National Governing Bodies (NGBs)
- The Global equivalent of these organisations— International/Global/World Governing Bodies

As one of the leading authorities on child safeguarding and protection, the extent to which organisations are attending to the conceptualisation of children in their policy design becomes significant. Centralising children in policy considerations and creating substantive 'child first' texts is arguably crucial to ensuring child centred practice.

The research questions being addressed within this study were the following:

- Where are children identified in sport safeguarding policy text?
- What discourse is used to contextualise children in sport safeguarding?
- How does language position children with respect to their own safeguarding and protection?

In light of the evolving narratives of the place of children in sport and safeguarding, this study utilised Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) to evaluate the meaning being created within policy. Although not limited to analysis of text (O'Farrell 2005), FDA creates the potential to understand the key messages in the selection of wording and the indication of social contexts within which they are being created to present a particular version of meaning (Ahl 2006) enabling the understanding of language as constitutive (Strauss 2013). In this case, it is with reference to what good safeguarding for children should 'look like' in sport. Essentially, what is of interest is Foucault's interpretation that what is important is not purely the linguistic statements made but the consequences of them having been expressed.

2.1 | Approach

For each sport, the search terms 'Governing Body Name + Safeguarding Policy' were used in the first instance. All searches took place between 16/05/23 and 01/08/23 (inclusive). For international federations, this was generally not a term utilised, and therefore, alternative wording such as 'code of ethics' and 'integrity' were employed in order to locate policy. Where this search did not result in locating the policy, organisations were contacted by email to ascertain reasons. All policies were subsequently located excluding one which confirmed that, at the time of the study, they did not have a safeguarding policy but that it was anticipated that one would be introduced following consideration of the board.

In instances where the English organisation did not include a safeguarding policy on their website, either the GB or UK equivalent for that sport was utilised, for example, for England Archery: Archery GB was used. Table 1 displays NGBs ($n = 22$) included in the evaluation:

For each of the sports governing bodies above, the world governing body was also explored where they existed (Table 2) ($n = 21$):

2.2 | Analysis

Analysis focussed on specific elements of the text (see Table 1 below)—these concepts were selected to create a framework for the analysis of policy discourse and the identification, in accordance with Foucault, of how the narratives create the formation of what safeguarding 'is' to sports governing bodies and how 'the child' fits into this framing (Ahl 2006; Garratt et al. 2013). These are indicated through the language of policy title and key terms in content as well as prioritisation in summative comments. These form a 'corpus of statements' (Arribas-Ayllon and Walkerdine 2017) for analysis. The different elements of the text are then linked to establish what Foucault described as discursive formation; what was also identified are absences and what remained 'unsaid' (Foucault 1972). Herein, the implied respondent or actor is positioned relative to expectations. Thus there is an overall focus on 'discourse' generated through relational statements (Mills 2003). Here, since previous work in the field of safeguarding children in sport identifies the significance of power relations and the exposition of how these might be exercised in sport policy safeguarding documentation, this can establish an understanding of how texts could be developed to enhance the position of participants to be protected. Identifying reference to rights, action and the overall authorship that has controlled messaging is significant. Visual messaging through existence of image representation and how, for example, are children physically represented and in what way enriches the conceptualisation of discourse.

TABLE 1 | England-based sport safeguarding policy overview—GB/UK policies addressed where none exist for 'England'.

Sport	NGB	Policy title
Archery	Archery GB	Safeguarding Policy—Children and Young People
Athletics	England Athletics	UK Athletics & The Home Country Athletics Federations Child Safeguarding Policy
Badminton	Badminton England	Safeguarding and Protecting Young People in Badminton Policy
Basketball	Basketball England	Safeguarding Policy
Boccia	Boccia England	Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy
Bowls	Bowls England	Safeguarding Children in Bowls Policy
Boxing	Boxing England	England Boxing Safeguarding Policy
Canoeing	British Canoeing	British Canoeing Safeguarding Children Policy
Cricket	England and Wales Cricket Board	Safeguarding Children in Cricket—Safe Hands Policy Statement
Cycling	British Cycling	Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy
Disability Sport	Disability Sport—Activity Alliance	Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy
Hockey	England Hockey	England Hockey Safeguarding Policy
Football	Football Association	Grassroots Safeguarding Children Policies and Procedures
Goalball	Goalball UK	Goalball's Safeguarding Children and Child Protection Policy
Netball	England Netball	Safeguarding Young People in Netball Policy
Sailing	Royal Yachting Association	Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy
Rowing	British Rowing	Safeguarding Children and Young People Policy
Rugby League	Rugby Football League	Safeguarding Policy January 2023
Rugby Union	Rugby Football Union	Safeguarding Children Policy
Skateboarding	Skateboard GB	Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy
Swimming	Swim England	Wavepower 2020–23: Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures for Clubs
Tennis	Lawn Tennis Association	LTA Safeguarding strategy 2021–23

The narrative evaluation was based on four broad categories: Language use and consumption; action and responsibility; rights and investment and presentation linking to FDA (as explored above). The policies were read in their entirety with notes made against each criterion. Table 3 illustrates the content being analysed and the purpose of this particular selection:

3 | Results and Discussion

This section outlines key results and discussion; beginning with language use and consumption, the way in which the environment and experiences of children are framed are explored. Considering action and responsibility, the place of rights based rhetoric is discussed prior to identifying how children are formally located within policy and considered as rights holding participants in sport. Tone setting of policy is considered with reference to those responsible for design, authorship and endorsement before finally considering visually represented discourse of presentation formats.

3.1 | Language use and Consumption: Framing the Environment and Experience of Children

All UK-based organisations utilised the term 'Safeguarding' directly in its policy titles and all policies refer to 'welfare' and 'wellbeing' with this usually in the context of 'promoting' a sense of these concepts (e.g., Bowls England). Significantly, the language of policy operated on two levels for UK organisations—the first being the contexts provided for children involved in sport and the second, consideration of the development of the child.

The first set of language use referred to the context within which sport occurs, referring to the following:

- 'secure environment' (Boccia England, England and Wales Cricket Board)

- 'supportive environment' (Boxing England, England and Wales Cricket Board)

- developing appropriate 'cultures' (Boxing England)

TABLE 2 | World sport governing body equivalence.

Sport	World Governing Body	Policy title (equivalent)
Archery	No world governing body	
Athletics	World Athletics	World Athletics Safeguarding Policy
Badminton	World Badminton	'I am badminton' Integrity Campaign
Basketball	World Basketball (FIBA)	FIBA Safeguarding Policy
Boccia	World Boccia	Safeguarding (Young People and Vulnerable Adults) included in the 'Code of Ethics'
Bowls	World Bowls	Code of Ethics (No Safeguarding Policy)
Boxing	World Boxing	World Boxing Safeguarding—The Prevention of Harassment and Abuse in Boxing Policy (PHAS)
Canoeing	International Canoe Federation	Prevention of Harassment and Abuse in Sport Policy (PHAS)
Cricket	The International Cricket Council	The International Cricket Council Safeguarding Regulations
Cycling	Union International Cyclistes	Safeguarding Policy
Disability Sport	No Single International Equivalent	
Hockey	Federation International Hockey	International Hockey Federation Safeguarding Policy
Goalball	International Blind Sports Federation	No policy equivalent on website
Netball	World Netball	Safeguarding
Sailing	World Sailing	No Policy in place as on 31st July 2023—email communication confirmed this was in the process of being written and due to be assessed by the board in August 2023
Rowing	World Rowing	World Rowing Policy Safeguarding Participants in Rowing from Harassment & Abuse
Rugby League	International Rugby League	IRL Safeguarding (Children & Vulnerable People) Policy
Rugby Union	World Rugby	World Rugby Safeguarding Policy
Skateboarding	World Skate	Safeguarding Policy
Swimming	Federation Internationale de Natation	FINA Rules on the Protection from Harassment and Abuse
Tennis	International Tennis Federation	Safeguarding Children Policy

The second set considers the obligations of organisations referred to surrounding children with a positive environment with the emphasis on what is 'provided for' participants:

- 'moral duty of care' (British Canoeing)
- 'culture of safeguarding' (England and Wales Cricket Board)

Therefore, there is a sense of context and action in these instances. Others combine the two with England Basketball stating that all athletes have the right to compete in a

- 'safe, healthy and stimulating environment'.

The third set of terminology concerned concepts seen within human rights legislation (UNCRC):

- 'fairness' (British Cycling)
- 'dignity' (British Cycling)
- 'inclusive' (Activity Alliance) (World Rugby)

In terms of children and their development, terms had a much more dynamic tone to ensuring not only 'safety' (e.g., physical, emotional and psychological) but embodied a clearer sense of subjective experience and evolution within sport: Here, examples of language are

- 'empower' (Basketball England)
- 'enjoy' (England Athletics, Bowls England, British Cycling, Activity Alliance, England Hockey)
- 'fun' (Royal Yachting Association)
- 'flourish' (Boxing England, England and Wales Cricket Board)
- 'friendly' (Activity Alliance)

Some sports utilised their own initials/campaigns to emphasise the association with their activities, for example, England Netball encouraged: ENjoy, ENtrust, ENsure. Swim England referred to 'Wavepower 2020–23'—this would appear to potentially link with identities and facilitate relatability.

TABLE 3 | FDA-informed evaluation focus and purpose.

Focus	Purpose
Policy title	Identification of key words recognised by the body and intent of policy
Key terms used	Identification of common language that is currently being used to communicate
Who is the intended audience?	Indication of where reporting is assumed to come from and where perceived responsibility lies
Summary of key points	Are key issues presented separately to aid interpretation
Who is being asked to act?	Where is the responsibility for reporting and responding considered to lie and the implications of this
What response is promised?	Explore the reassurances that those who find them in a position to report are given as an indicator of how they are likely to manage their action—where does power lie in this process
What rights/responsibilities are referred to?	Identification of whether policy is taking a rights based approach; the nature of responsibility that is identified in safeguarding children
Who is responsible for the authorship of the policy/being overtly associated with it?	Understanding of potential investment that those with positions of power might have with the policy. Indicative of the investment of the sport has in that policy as potentially indicating the response of the reader to its expectations
Presentation format	Descriptive account of accessibility/navigability, use of visual representations to frame and signify messaging
Additional notes	Opportunity to provide additional observations such as those linking the policy to other areas of the governing body's work and overall approach being taken with respect to safeguarding

Note: Orange: language use and consumption; blue: action and responsibility; purple and green: rights and investment and presentation linking to FDA.

Significantly here, there is an indication that it is insufficient to provide 'only' a safe environment but that, if a sport is to grow and experiences are to be positive, children need to be seen as active participants with agency who will respond subjectively to their sports participation. This therefore moves beyond the call for the most basic requirement for policy to 'keep athletes safe' (Moustakas et al. 2023) in sport to a call that challenges this to make reference to a child's right to enjoy and develop through their participation. Crucial to this is the attention to the participant as child first, performer second. With reference to the concept of 'Safeguarding' as a search term—some world organisations did not have a titled 'safeguarding' policy (indeed, some languages such as Spanish do not have a word for safeguarding) but alternatively had 'Codes of Ethics' and/or Codes of Conduct (World Archery, World Boccia)—safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults included within their Code of Ethics (World Bowls). If language is a reflection of 'wider society' (and, in this case, sports governing bodies and their institutional orientation towards child protection and welfare) the focus is placed on the behaviours of those around the child making them 'subject' in this sense rather than active agent.

Safeguarding was a term used internationally where organisations are UK based (World Netball, International Rugby League, International Tennis Federation). The distinction between UK-based and global organisation, utilised language around children that attended to concerns regarding fair competition. This is arguably due to the elite nature of participation for which such organisations might be responsible although there is a distinct absence of the athlete as a child. However, the difference between reference to safeguarding and 'codes of ethics' reflects also a distinction between having a focus on 'framing' experience and response and focusing on the experiences itself which is lacking in much global policy.

At this level of governance additional terminology is regarding the maintenance of

- 'dignity' (World Athletics, World Bowls)
- 'respect' (World Athletics)
- 'value' (World Athletics)
- 'fairness/fair play' (World Boccia, World Bowls)

The concept of fairness/fair play is used in regards to an absence of performance enhancing drugs rather than moral concepts of playing fairly within the performance environment as seen in much research in sport (Lopez Frias 2017; Mccalla and Shepherd 2014; Schneider 2017). There was also reference to the prevention of malicious behaviours such as

- 'exploitation' (World Athletics)
- 'hazing' (World Basketball)

This is clearly reflective of an awareness of pre-existing issues that require addressing in sport already identified at elite level (Aina et al. 2021; Donnelly 2023). Other organisations seek the identification of the reader with the sport; inviting the individual reader to conceptualise the protection of children as a means of personal identification with the sport. In the case of badminton, this is framed within a wider 'I am badminton' Integrity Campaign (World Badminton).

At this level, there is also a consideration of the reputation of particular sport disciplines where individuals are required to

- 'not use any form of communication which brings the game into disrepute' (World Boccia)

Specifically, positive reputation is seen to be necessary for continued growth, presenting child protection as a means of establishing or preserving and growing the sport:

- 'The ICC recognises that ensuring the welfare of all those participating in cricket is important in its own right, but for the good reputation of cricket and its long-term health and vitality at all levels'

  (International Cricket Council)

- 'Safeguarding our athletes from abuse, harassment and exploitation is not just the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do when you have ambition to grow your sport'

  (World Athletics)

Underpinning this sentiment is the identification that sports see themselves as needing to be without malicious activity establishing a 'non-violent environment' (FINA) 'free from'

- 'all forms of abuse and harassment' (International Canoe Federation)
- 'harm' (ICC)

This is evident where organisations also use the Prevention of Harassment and Abuse in Sport (PHAS) Policy (International Canoe Federation). Internationally, absence of abuse is identified as key to providing safe play with the ICC utilising the term 'Safeguarding Regulations'.

What again, is seen at this level is further needed in a 'prevention of' sense is

- 'victimisation' (England Athletics)
- 'forms of harm' (Archery GB)
- 'bullying' (Boccia England)
- 'abuse' (Boccia England)
- 'poor practice' (British Canoeing)
- 'neglect' (British Canoeing)

- 'degrading treatment' (British Cycling)

Policy text is not, however, completely devoid of reference to the development of children; the example of the International Rugby League refers to children learning 'important values such as tolerance, fair-play, developing a health way of life as well as contributing to their social inclusion, education and personal development' (IRL). Therefore, children are being identified in a more holistic sense, with attention to their existence both within, and outside of, sport.

3.2 | Action and Responsibility—Child Rights Based Rhetoric

Although not 'traditionally associated with either sports or children' (Aine et al. 2022, 95) the extent to which safeguarding in sport policies emanate from a rights based platform is arguably indicative of a recognition of agency of the child, particularly where they have the right to 'enjoy' their sport (England Hockey, Goalball UK, British Rowing, Swim England). Action associated with most rights based rhetoric is targeted at adults working with children:

- 'All young people have a right to play the game of basketball in an enjoyable and safe environment' 'Young people have a right to expect appropriate support in accordance with their personal and social development with regard to their involvement in the game of basketball'

  (England Basketball)

- 'A child's rights and opinions should be protected and promoted'

  (England Athletics)

- 'It is our duty to protect the rights of children and young people to live free from abuse, harm and neglect'

  (England and Wales Cricket Board)

Nevertheless, there is also inclusion of the right of a child to be listened to, for example, World Athletics identifies that children have the right for their 'voices to be heard'. Some of this rhetoric is couched in language of 'legal responsibilities' to provide a duty of care (Archery GB, Badminton England, Boccia England) potentially indicating obligatory motivation to act.

Direct reference is made to the UNCRC in many of the policies national and internationally where UK based (British Canoeing, England and Wales Cricket Board, Rugby Football League, World Rowing, World Rugby, World Skate, the International Tennis Federation). This is linked to the creation of positive cultures (England and Wales Cricket Board, Activity Alliance). Implicit in this, however, is also the sense that it is those who are around them that need to ensure the exercising of those rights. In terms of those who are being spoken to in policy, nationally, in terms of positive practice, many sports identify that everyone who is involved in and around children playing sport are responsible for actioning safeguarding policy. For example,

- 'Every person involved in basketball has a legal and moral responsibility to protect young people from abuse and neglect'

(England Basketball)

There is also, however, an emphasis on adults in sports environments rather than acknowledging that children themselves can be coaches, officials and wider volunteers:

- 'An adult has a moral and statutory duty for the care, custody and control of any person under the age of 18 under their supervision'

(England Basketball)

Whilst children may not be legally responsible for each other, there could be the potential for them to have an understanding that can serve to support the welfare of others. Historically, research has focused on the coach as perpetrator and athlete as victim (Mountjoy et al. 2015). This meant that actions to address issues of safeguarding targeted this relationship. However, latterly it is recognised that all actors in and around sports environment are potential perpetrators (Everley 2022). Therefore, identifying who is being asked to comply with safeguarding policy becomes significant and an indicator of an awareness of safeguarding considerations and collective responsibility.

With a shift in consciousness following widely publicised safeguarding breaches in a number of sports, all of the national policies indicated a collective responsibility for all adults involved in a sport in any way (including as spectators/volunteers) to be aware of Safeguarding policies and the duty to (1) abide by them and (2) report violations thereof.

In most examples, required action is identified as reporting in the first instance to Safeguarding or Welfare officers who will subsequently determine the 'appropriate' response, thus acknowledging the individual, nuanced nature of concerns that may be raised. Again, the implications in all language of these policies is that of an 'adult' actioning a concern.

Language around anonymised reporting mechanism online (included in all national policies)—all attended to the 'reporting of a concern "about" and some regarding a concern "experienced"' (e.g., Archery GB, Basketball England). One organisation attended to the wider impact that the reporting of a concern in dealing with the consequences by all affected (Basketball England) recognising the broader consequences that violations are likely to have on all operating within particular sports environments. This acknowledged the shared nature and impact of any safeguarding violation.

For international organisations, direction is given to local national governing bodies to action any concerns that are likely to arise in international/global competition. Therefore, there is a devolution of responsibility from world to national governing bodies and direct responsibility to the child does not feature in considerations.

3.2.1 | Formal Location of Children

Direct reference in national policies is made to children and the need to respond to their voices:

- 'The views of children will be listened to, valued and respected'

(England Bowls)

There is also the recognition of the need for different parties to work together, in some instances this is across different 'stakeholders':

- 'The best ways to promote the wellbeing, health and development of a child is to work in partnership with the child, parents/carers and other relevant organisations'

(England Athletics)

This is reflective of the recognition that it is policy implementation that is of significance here (Basketball England has a separate section on advice for children and a direct line for them to report) (although not anonymised). Other organisations have specific representatives of young persons at their events. For examples, the Lawn Tennis Association has Young Person's Welfare Ambassadors—aged 12–24 years to present young person's voice and perspective to promote safeguarding and welfare at their venues.

On an international level, World Athletics encourages children to voice their concern regarding their own or another child's welfare. In other instances, there is the acknowledgement that young people might be best placed to advocate for one another. Internationally, there is also one example where the language of policy directly speaks to child participants. International Rugby League refers directly to children and the need to listen and respect them, 'promoting their rights, wishes, and feelings' (IRL) and for Rugby Union:

- 'If something in your rugby community does not seem right, or you are worried, please email confidentially @ worldrugby.irg'

(World Rugby)

3.3 | Explicit Reference to Rights and Responsibilities

Many UK-based organisations utilised the language of 'rights' within their policies:

- '...right to play basketball in an enjoyable and safe environment' (Basketball England)

- '... right to enjoy' (England Hockey, Goalball UK, British Rowing, Swim England)

- '...right to live free from abuse or neglect' (British Canoeing, England and Wales Cricket Board)

- 'A child's rights and opinions should be protected and promoted ...' (England Athletics)

Some directly refer to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Rugby Football League), addressing the legal framework UNCRC 1989 and The Children Act 2004, Working Together to Safeguard Children, the Care

Act 2014. Increasingly, the rhetoric of 'rights' is acknowledged within sports contexts (Aine et al. 2022; Lang 2022), and there is a sense of increasing accountability with reference to children's engagement in sport and how rights that are considered in broader contexts feature within sporting activity.

As regards international contexts the UNCRC is directly referenced by the International Rugby League and World Rugby extends their statement on 'All have rights' to coaches, players, officials, staff and volunteers. World Rowing refer to the UNCRC and UN declaration of human rights. Other statements include reference to the:

- Fundamental right of the individual to be in a safe and respectful environment

    (World Skate, International Tennis Federation)

and

- 'promoting … rights, wishes and feelings' (International Rugby League)
- 'children (having) the right for their voices to be heard' (World Athletics)

3.4 | Design, Authorship and Endorsement—Setting the Tone

A crucial element in terms of likely success of initiatives in sport to promote safeguarding is the concept of the 'tone from the top' and identification of authorship and endorsement of design become significant in policy (Carska-Sheppard and Ammons 2021). For UK-based governing bodies, in some instances, individuals responsible for the authorship of the policy are identified (Archery GB, Chairman, Safeguarding Strategic Advisory Group; Athletics, UK Athletics Lead Safeguarding Officer; Boccia England, Lead Safeguarding Officer, Swim England Chief Executive Officer. Tennis, the NTC Welfare Officer); in others, no author is specifically identified (e.g., Bowls England, Skateboard England). There are also instances where the collaboration between the sport and the NSPCC's CPSU is identified (Basketball England, British Canoeing, Goalball UK, England Netball, British Rowing, Swim England) and other organisations such as the Ann Craft Trust in policy development (Basketball England). England Netball has a Case Study Management Group that set the strategic direction of their safeguarding work and therefore policy development and the Lawn Tennis Association has an NTC Operations Team each advising their chief welfare officers.

The reviewer of the policy for the Activity Alliance is identified as the National Events Manager. In the case of Badminton England and Activity Alliance a statement of approval by the board is included as endorsement.

For global organisations, most do not identify authorship or influence. Some include endorsement by boards (World Badminton, World Skate, FINA) and one a foreword by its president (International Tennis Federation) indicating a range of approaches and investment in 'public' declaration of support and associated investment.

World Basketball identifies a safeguarding Council to address Safeguarding matters for FIBA, the ICF has an integrated working group drawing on representations from athletes, medical, legal diversity and inclusion sectors within the organisation.

This would indicate that national policy interpretation can be impacted by association with hierarchies of an organisation; the recognition of investments in development with recognised expertise may act as a feature of legitimisation; association with key figures may add weight to expectations of compliance and value.

3.5 | Presentation Formats

For the presentation formats of UK based organisations, each policy varied beginning with bullet pointed text only formats (Archery GB, Badminton England, England Hockey) and some with predominantly text but incorporating logos (British Canoeing, England and Wales Cricket Board, British Cycling, Goalball UK, England Netball, British Rowing, Rugby Football Union). Some of these more limited presentations of text did, however, include links to other sources of information that can act in support of the implementation of policy (Archery GB to the CPSU). This utilises pre-existing advice although could be interpreted as representative of the organisation.

Some had more interactive representations with images presented in tiles for information to be subsequently accessed (England Netball). Many included process maps that clearly set out the direction of possibilities in reporting concerns (England Athletics, Basketball England, Boccia England, Bowls England, Royal Yachting Association, Rugby Football Union, Swim England). This clearly set out expected actions in an assumed logical progression. In particular instances information boxes using graphics were employed (Boxing England—'bullying', 'mismatching opponents'). Thus, the discursive creation included imagery to support engagement.

The limitation of much of this discourse is indicative of the value being placed on communication and potentially indicative of a lack of investment that may also be omitted in the text itself reflecting the constrained perceived value of the policy and what is absent here becomes important.

The direction as to action and process maps suggests an invitation (and expectation) to take action and identified response, potentially giving reassurance. However, this falls short of an examination of the realities of reporting and challenges that may result from the power imbalance that has led to the abuse in the first instance. Lack of attention to the nuances of organisational operations on an interpersonal level arguably fall short of that which is needed in practice. Therefore, using Foucault's identification of individualisable statements, this is indicative that the nature of representation is actually reflective of the power relations that are ostensibly needing to be challenged (Mangion 2023; Poorghorban 2023).

The presentation of global policies can be categorised on similar lines with a range of visual quality in presentation.

Organisations that use predominantly text only are World Badminton, World Boccia (one paragraph), the International Cricket Council, UCI Federation International Hockey, World Netball and World Rowing. As most procedural matters associated with Safeguarding are guided back to local policies, a smaller proportion present process maps (World Athletics, World Basketball FIBA).

4 | Conclusion

Perhaps predictably, because of the different levels of responsibility, world governing bodies attend to elite level considerations with evidence of the athlete as a child being very limited. Within national policy it is seen as incumbent on all individuals involved in sport to take responsibility for safeguarding issues. This is indicative of a move to recognise the need for everyone in the sports environment to notice and report any concerns—taking ownership of children's experience. This is sometimes presented as a response to legal expectations—whilst necessary, there is perhaps an argument that, in such instances, this indicates a degree of detachment rather than genuine investment in children's safeguarding.

'Children' in policy were identified as a group to be acted on behalf of in most instances. This is to be welcomed although greater acknowledgement of the place of children's agency and how this can be supported would align with calls to hear children's voices more clearly in sport. Related to this, in terms of what might be identified as 'good practice', there is a shift towards acknowledging children's rights and that, although it is necessary to ensure 'safety' there is really a need for sport to move beyond this to ensure a positive contribution to the holistic development of children.

This study has therefore identified the need to recognise in policy, children as active agents who should be considered as participants to engaged with, rather than act upon. Taking an approach to collaboratively develop policy ensuring shared meaning and to develop specific child-friendly policy could create a situation for far more effective safeguarding in sport. Herein, in alignment with broader calls for listening to children's voices in sport (Everley 2022) this may lead to the potential to highlight lower order concerns that could lead to abuse situations. Indeed, it may also be argued that beyond sport policy texts, taking such an approach to policy analysis could lead to a more secure targeting of any participants policy is aiming to protect.

5 | Recommendations

Next phases of research would benefit from exploring ways to involve children in the development of policy, particularly as they are ordinarily omitted from such processes (Lindsey et al. 2023).

Whilst it is positive to see processes of reporting identified, further attention to the practical challenges that individuals (both adults and children) may face in terms of taking first steps to do this is required. Links to explanations as to support that might be provided in this process is likely to help, particularly where there is a challenge to existing power relations.

Arguably, therefore, a significant feature is in those policies that reference the need to provide a cultural environment that enables child athletes to thrive and develop and it is this desire that is perhaps likely to be most powerful in practice, particularly as the implied expression of voices to avoid abuse in the first instance creates an empowering context for children.

It is inevitably important to acknowledge that any policy is only as good as its implementation and therefore further exploration of how policy is interpreted and enacted is needed—this could help ensure a relationship between institutional rhetoric and practice. Significantly here, there is an indication that it is insufficient to provide 'only' a safe environment but that, if a sport is to grow and experiences are to be positive, children need to be seen as active participants with agency who will respond subjectively to their sports participation.

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