

Rt Hon Oliver Dowden MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson MP
Secretary of State for Education.



June, 2021

Dear Secretaries of State

Open Letter: Equalise Gender Opportunity in Physical Education

This open letter is devised by a 16-year-old secondary school pupil and proffered by a partnership between Professor Eric Anderson, of the University of Winchester, and Stacy Hart on behalf of the Women's Equality Party.

In February, 2021, petitioner, 16-year-old Katherine Allen, received an unsatisfactory parliamentary response to her petition of over 10,000 signatures (<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/331930>). The petition emerged from Katie's schooling experience that boys alone were offered football. Using a Freedom of Information Request, Professor Eric Anderson received data from 288 English Secondary Schools to examine for sports that are offered. Results revealed that among the top ten activities delivered to each sex, many are the same, but that boys tend to be offered football, cricket, basketball, and rugby union, whereas girls are offered netball, gymnastics and dance.

Katie's petition—supported by her parents—proposed that the government should establish an educational code mandating that *whereas any sexed physical activity is provided to one sex, it should also be offered to the other*. Parliament's response, conversely, argues that schools have freedom of choice as to gender equality on this issue. This is because the Equality Act holds up school sport and PE as an exception to its mandates.

Specifically, the current law, Under the Equalities Act of 2010, only stipulates that schools must 'regard' matters of unequal distribution of resources to children; in Physical Education they must offer equal opportunities to participate in *comparable* sporting activities. What is comparable, and fair, becomes a matter of headteacher's choice, informed by cultural association of female physical inferiority and male disinterest and thereby perpetuates those stereotypes anew, with the bullying and negative health implications that accompany them for those that transgress gendered norms. This exception to the Equalities Act therefore diminishes opportunities for children of both sexes.

Given that:

- 1) Gendered expectations of Physical Education inform gendered lives and promote harmful gendered stereotypes.
- 2) Males benefit from their experience with male-dominated sports in hiring [practices](#).
- 3) Males who partake in sport alongside females, upgrade their evaluation of female athleticism and leadership [skills](#).

We, the undersigned, propose a new education code mandating equal sport offerings between the sexes. This code will continue to permit schools to offer sports appropriate to their culture and facilities and will still allow schools to protect children from undue physical risk. We note structural variables of sexed-maturation are accommodated by the following, ensuring both children's safety and that a new code does not impede or complicate PE offerings in schools:

- 1) providing the same sport in separate sexed teams.
- 2) barring enough interest for a separate-sexed team, mixed sports that accord for weight and ability without consideration to sex.
- 3) that many physical education activities (like dance) are not significantly impacted by sex, maturation or ability.

This provision would promote equality of athletic opportunity between the sexes and promote inclusion of non-binary, trans, and intersexed children as well.

Katie Allen
Student

Professor Eric Anderson
University of Winchester

Stacy Hart
Women's Equality Party

The goal for signatures is to have over a hundred academics and professional female footballers sign this open letter.

Name:	Organisation:
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