
Prepared for Northern Rowing Council Executive 30th January 2023.

UMPIRES COMMENTS/NOTES REGARDING BR NON-BINARY AND TRANS POLICY

Northern Region umpires were asked for comments regarding, but not exclusively, how any British Rowing Non-Binary and Transgender Policy will affect racing. Responses received are summarised below. Two respondents asked for their full reply to be included as well.

A number suggested that British Rowing should consult widely to ensure that a full range of opinions/concerns are taken into account.

Respondents were mindful that rowing should be an inclusive sport for all, and very much appreciate the difficulty in navigating this sensitive topic.

SUMMARY

The perceived main concern is for those born Male but who now identify as Female in a crew. The opposite scenario carries less performance advantage, if any.

Noted that British Rowing Rules of Racing have an Open and Women's category for entries. Plus mixed crews must have a minimum of 50% Women members (cox excluded). This is already a recognition of the natural general imbalance in power/strength for those born as Male.

A competition/umpires would need a way to investigate eligibility enquiries for entries. This has the potential to be a very sensitive issue and would need a clear way to investigate and escalate any non-resolved queries. *Editors note. Presumably this would follow the same escalation procedures via National Competition Committee as currently exist.*

Concern that any unresolved complaints/queries could end up reflecting badly on a competition/officials. Not only would this adversely affect perception of the sport but equally it could discourage volunteers from providing their time.

CRI may not reflect the speed of a NB/transgender crew (but that does assume that there is a natural strength/power imbalance that has not been accounted for in the policy/rules).

When we compete in sport we use our bodies not our identities.

Essentially I disagree with the allowance of competition once testosterone levels are below 5. The advantage gained in developing more muscle mass during puberty and training will probably go on for a much longer period than 1 year, if not for life. Other medical conditions not relating to sex may well also confer an advantage. Insulin is an anabolic steroid and may give an advantage. Also Growth hormone which has strict controls.

I appreciate that from a sports science perspective this is a rapidly evolving field. It is, however, my opinion that it has not been proven that testosterone levels alone are sufficient to establish eligibility to compete in a women's category event. I believe that this will negatively impact on cis-female athletes to compete fairly in meaningful events.

I am also concerned that a further consequence of this may be an increase in performance enhancing pursuits, even at a regional level, as young cis-females in particular seek to try to level the playing field.

For every transwomen in a race a woman has been left on the bank. More than that women are probably even less likely to put themselves forward to train and compete.

Need to consider how changing/toilet facilities are affected. These are often limited at competitions anyway.

OTHER NOTES

Grassroots opposition to World Athletics' transgender proposals

<https://athleticsweekly.com/athletics-news/grassroots-opposition-to-world-athletics-transgender-proposals-1039964500/>

The Real Science of Sport Podcast

S3 E8: Why Transgender Athletes Threaten Fairness in Women's Sport

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2d22gJwDZE8kzim8ffWbp?si=Mdk0b7AwSweyNcTrznIkHg>

Respondent 1

My immediate thought was that as BR has an open category and a Women's category then that was enough except for a definition on those who are eligible to enter the women's category.

Reading the policy BR seem to be trying to do this, however, I do have my reservations about who this can be done fairly to all, from a biological/physiological point of view.

Taking an extreme example let us say an Olympic champion male 6'6" 18 stone with twenty years of training under his belt, felt to need to trans, which they would be perfectly entitled to do, as long as they followed the guidelines they could be racing in the women's category after twelve months of low hormone levels. Would this be fair as they would have the underlying musculature that they have built up over they years of training with full male hormones? Or maybe I have miss read the policy.

At the end of the day we won't know how fair this policy will be until several years down the line but my preference has always been to keep things simple. I would be looking at data, which presumably BR and the World rowing have about changes in performance before and after transition, and until a proper evidence based solution could be produced I would keep the categories as they are, as Open (for all) and Women's for those who were designated female at birth to ensure that by trying to "level the playing field" for the few BR don't actively discriminate against the 52% of the country who are female.

So having considered the policy I revert back to my original thought until there is scientific evidence to support the changes proposed in the BR policy.

We all know from experience that BR have very little regard for rules and imposing them, see the debacle at CLSARC which BR should have sorted out over ten years ago, so even if the policy is put into practice does anyone at BR actually think that they will be able to follow/enforce it.

Finally I note that the cost of the process is to be borne by the individual applicant, I fear that that will actively deter many from engaging with the policy as given the number of steps involved it is unlikely to be cheap.

Additions to above after more thought...

I do think that BR is stuck between a rock and a hard place on this issue, given that every sporting body in the UK and the world must be grappling with the same issue, should there not be an evidenced based approach taken globally and nationally, which BR then simply adopts rather than them trying to invent their own version of the "wheel".

Thinking my comments over last night, BR's policy especially the bit where the applicant is responsible for the costs, I feel that this could be interpreted as being BR's way of ensuring that they have a very small number of possible applicants as potential costs will exclude many. I can see this being tested in the Courts at some point by an equal rights group, as to my mind it could be considered to be discriminatory.

Having said all that in the eighties a very famous lady long distance runner discovered that running whilst pregnant enabled her to build muscle and stamina over and above her non pregnant ability, as a result of the additional hormones. That was never stopped, as it is a natural part of life. I even remember the commentators extolling the benefits of pregnancy on her improved times. With this in mind should we be dividing women's racing between those who have carried children and those who have not? and were is the equality in HRT in masters rowing?

Once you take the lid of the tin of worms they are often difficult to put back in.

If BR wish to develop this any further I am happy to assist.

Respondent 2

We have read through the inclusion policy that's in the email.

We object to the expression 'sex assigned at birth'. Sex is described and for the overwhelmingly majority sex is correctly observed and recorded at birth.

We strongly object to being described as 'cis' and finding we've become a subsection of our sex.

Whether we like it or not biology matters and cannot be identified out of existence or reality.

When we compete in sport we use our bodies not our identities.

Sporting competition must attempt to be fair and equal or it is pointless.

To ask women to compete with transwomen is unfair as the physical advantages of a male body, even with testosterone reduction, are clear.

For every transwomen in a race a woman has been left on the bank. More than that women are probably even less likely to put themselves forward to train and compete. Why bother if the racing includes people with a built in, retained, physical advantage?

In its efforts to be inclusive British Rowing forgets that womens sport will be disadvantaged by trans inclusion in the women's category.

Why haven't the women members of BR ever been consulted on these changes? This should be addressed with some urgency.

We see nothing wrong with using the open category to deal with this issue. British Rowing should adopt similar policies to swimming, rugby union and rugby league that prohibit trans women from competing against women.