Workforce Governance: Sport & Physical Activity Project
Executive Summary

May 2022

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Introduction

Exploring workforce governance within the sport and physical activity sector is an ongoing area of work, commissioned by Sport England (with support from UK Sport) to CIMSPA.

Subsequently, CIMSPA appointed Sporting People who were assisted by an independent expert panel to develop an understanding of the types of potential harm caused to participants and the sector's approach to mitigating and managing workforce-related risks.

Workforce governance is an emerging area within the sector and **the purpose of this phase of the project is to consider, understand and improve the structures, processes and systems that exist within it, to make engaging in sport and physical activity safer and more enjoyable for all participants.**

Background

Sadly, the previous 2019 Workforce Registration and Regulation consultation report added further validation to the undeniable body of research and evidence that shows harm can happen to participants who engage in sport and physical activity, and that the workforce can play a significant role in the harm caused.

Many sources of harm caused were considered to be a consequence of simple "human error", not dissimilar to other sectors such as aviation, rail transport and health. However, the consultation also highlighted the sector's desire to improve, and considered some of the potential methods and approaches to harm prevention, risk reduction and regulation.

Many valuable, potential and in-practice solutions have already been proposed and shared through the 2019 consultation, sector working groups and other ongoing projects, in addition to the contribution of other key stakeholder influences, such as the Duty of Care in Sport Review 2017.

The most recent phase of the Workforce Governance project developed our thinking further, to include a broader scope of harm prevention, workforce governance and workforce related risk management. It also explored the methods used in other sectors and countries to reduce workforce-related risks and improve the safety of participants.

The Findings Of This Piece Of Work Can Be Categorised Into Three Areas:

The sector's understanding of

Workforce Governance

Harm Prevention

Workforce Related Risk Management

Accountability for

Roles and Responsibilities

Reporting and Case Management

Independence

The sector's interconnection with

Communities and Networks

Learning and Best Practice

Transparency

About the Project

Ambition
To make taking part in sport and physical activity safer and more enjoyable for all participants.

Purpose
To understand how participant safety can be improved by considering the structure, processes and systems that are in place, and how they interact with the accountability, effectiveness and excellence of the workforce's culture and actions.

What Success Would Look Like

1. A sector that uses its resources effectively to maximise participant safety through workforce governance, harm prevention and workforce-related risk management.

2. An interconnected sector, with organisations and a workforce that interacts with structures, processes and systems that together support a culture that delivers safe sport and physical activity, and is accountable when harm occurs.

3. A sector-wide culture (including funders, policy makers and all key stakeholders) founded on actions that encourage reflection, adaptation and continuous self-improvement with regards to participant welfare.
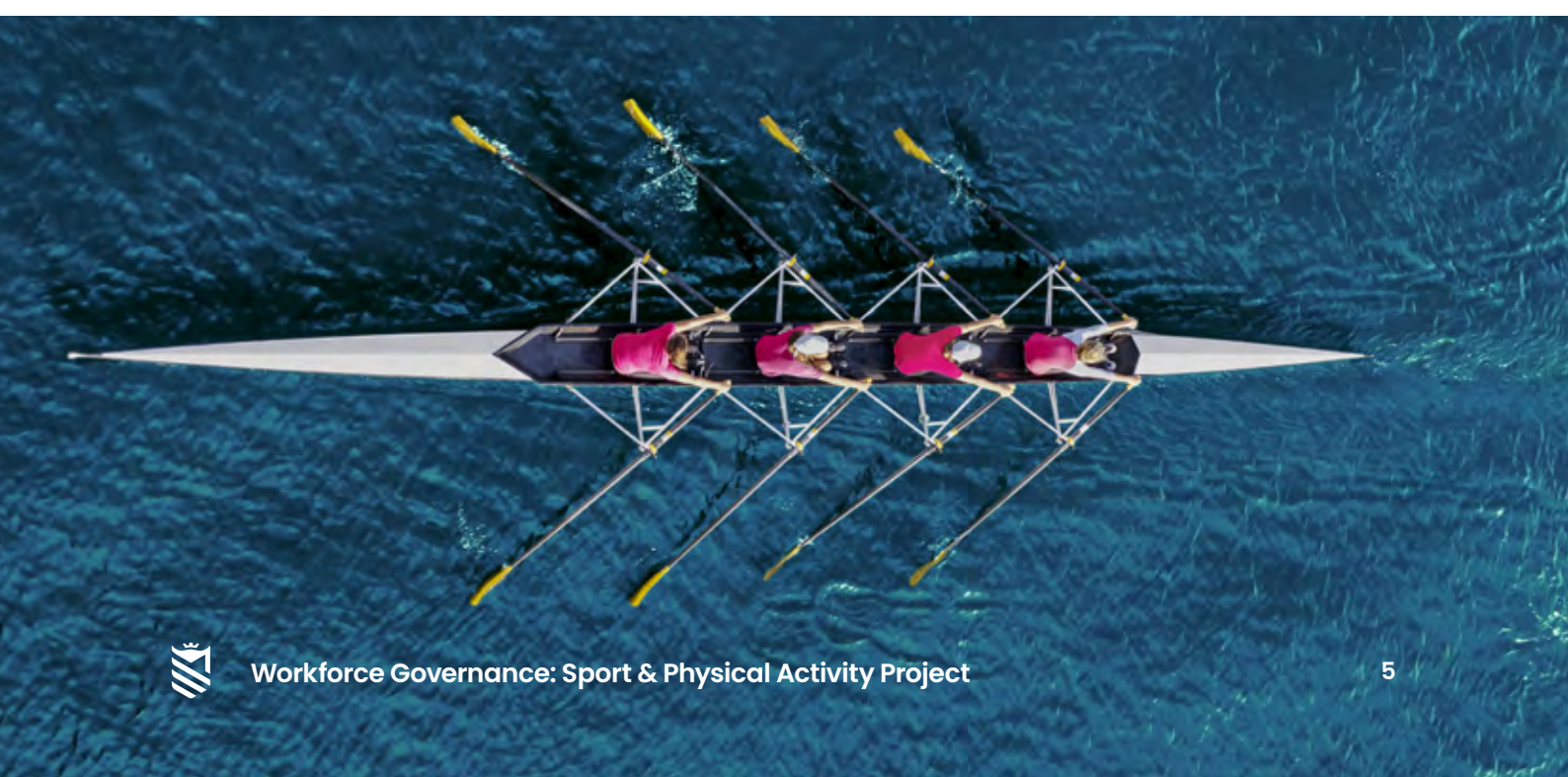
Approach and Definitions

The approach to this project has been to consider participant harm in a broad sense, including **physical harm** or injury, abuse and discrimination.

It also considered **participants** in a broad sense, encompassing not just children and young people, but all participants who engage with the sector's workforce (encompassing athletes, learners, players and others).

The sector's **workforce** was defined as those in frontline roles and most likely to interact with participants.

This phase of the project has also considered an **entire systems approach**, which research has described as being hugely beneficial to other sectors as they developed their interventions and approaches.

Consideration was given to the system as a whole, its interconnected parts, interdependencies and the spaces in between. This included the workforce, individual organisations and sector-wide bodies, looking at how they approach workforce governance, harm prevention and workforce-related risk management.

Models

After an initial phase of research, it was established that there were existing models for safety and "human factor analysis" that were well evidenced in both academic and practitioner material.

Two of the most well-used models are Reason's 'Swiss Cheese' model (1990) and the Human Factor Analysis Classification System (HFACS) by Shappell & Wiegmann (2000).

These evidence-based tools are already extensively in place in safety-critical industries such as aviation, water transport and healthcare.
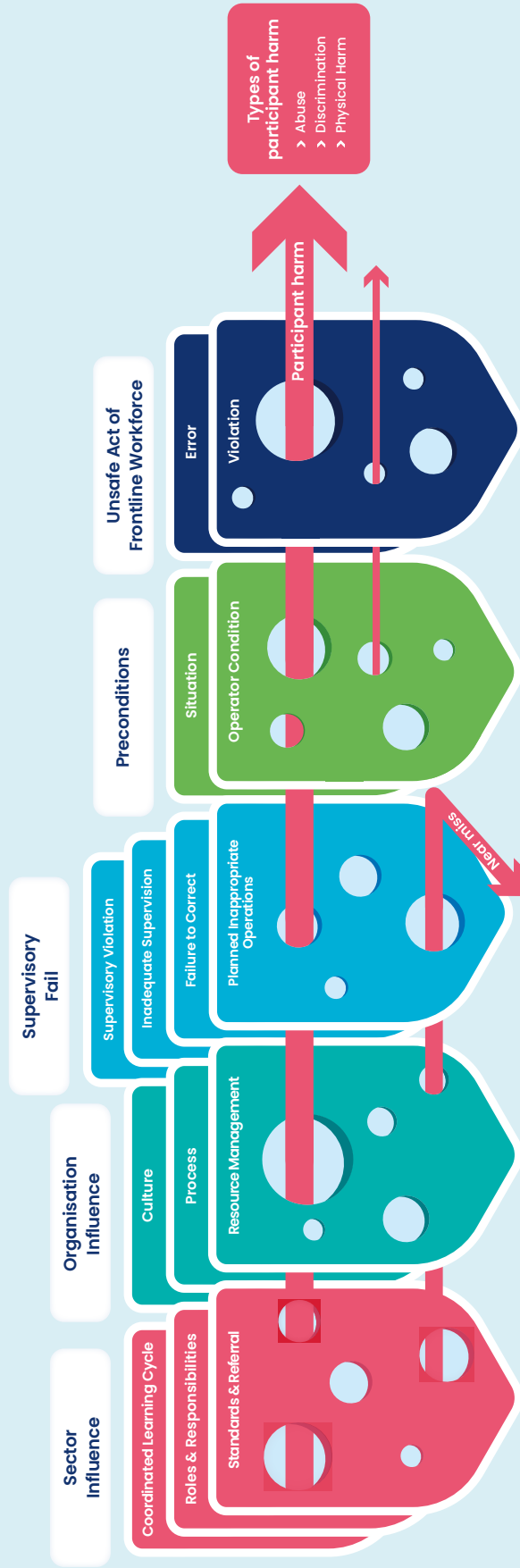
The models are based on identifying opportunities to reduce the likelihood of an adverse event (harm) from happening. The theories and research evidence propose that the more potential failures in the system that can be averted, the less likely it is that harm could happen, or that the impact of the harm could be reduced.

This project adapted these models to create a model relevant for the sport and physical activity sector, referred to as the Participant Safety Model.

Participant Safety Model

The Participant Safety Model on the next page (Figure 1) depicts the amalgamation of the Swiss Cheese, HFACS and additional areas identified as part of this project. It is designed to provide an analysis tool which will allow the sector to understand what systems, policies and processes are in place and how effective they might be in mitigating the risk and potential for harm to occur.

Figure 1 Participant Safety Model

The model displays, from left to right, layered stages leading to participant harm:

Sector Influence
- Coordinated Learning Cycle
- Roles & Responsibilities
- Standards & Referral

Organisation Influence
- Culture
- Process
- Resource Management

Supervisory Fail
- Supervisory Violation
- Inadequate Supervision
- Failure to Correct
- Planned Inappropriate Operations

Preconditions
- Situation
- Operator Condition

Unsafe Act of Frontline Workforce
- Error
- Violation

Participant harm → **Types of participant harm**
- Abuse
- Discrimination
- Physical Harm

Near miss

Limitations

The scope of workforce-related harm to participants is very broad and, although existing literature and evidence obtained through this project has provided further insights, there are still significant gaps in areas that are less organised, hard to engage with, and those that are operating largely outside of the 'known' and connected areas of the sector.

A limitation of the model used (and a potential area for future consideration and research) is the notion that an adverse event that leads to harm caused to participants could be eradicated if all layers of the model were sufficiently covered.

It is recognised that harm caused to participants will always be subjective to that individual and could happen at any stage of the trajectory highlighted within the model, however this subjectivity is not reflected in the model itself. The model also fails to fully consider the intentionality of the workforce member who may be the source of the harm caused.

Even within these limitations, this paper and the adopted model still present illuminating findings, recommendations, shared learnings and the opportunity for a system analysis tool that can be used by the sector in the future.

The model can effectively conceptualise where harm may occur when layers of opportunity for prevention are not in place or breached, and the role that the workforce can play in being both the source of and the preventative measure to participant harm.

Project Findings

1 **Harm happening is not only a historic problem**

The notion of harm is often framed as a historic or non-recent phenomenon due to the significant focus placed on some of the high-profile cases from previous years and decades. It is acknowledged in academic literature that little data exists regarding the prevalence of harm to participants, particularly in relation to abuse and discrimination. There is also limited data on the role of any frontline workforce in harm cases unless they are named in a legal or policing process. Despite these limitations, the evidence that is available creates a concerning picture that shows abuse, discrimination and physical harm or injury continues to occur at unacceptable levels.

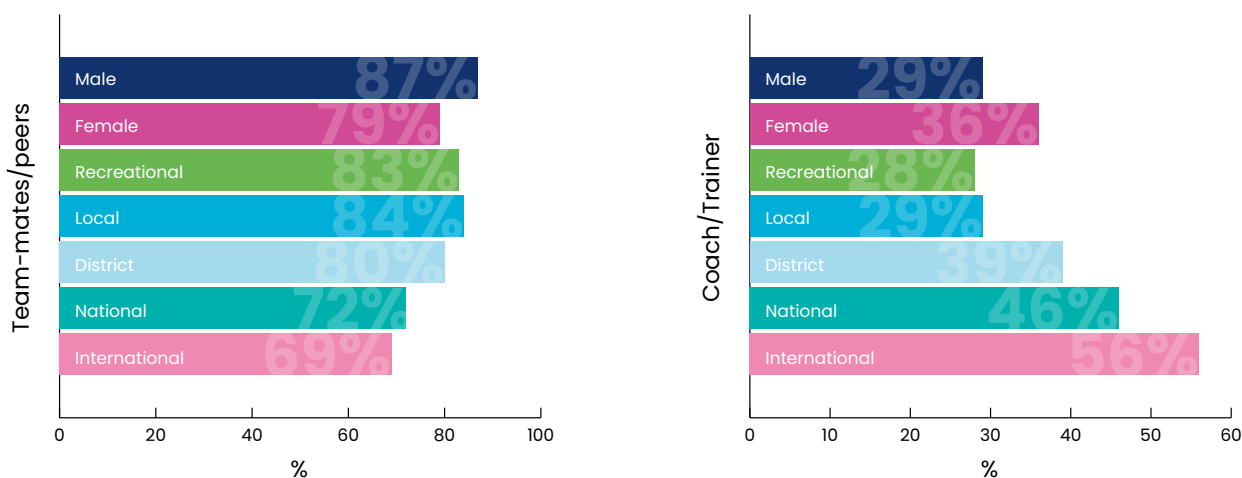**2** **Harm continues to occur at unacceptable levels**

At a global level, Project CARE (2021) found that 37% of athletes had experienced physical abuse as a child in sport and that 61% had experienced emotional abuse.
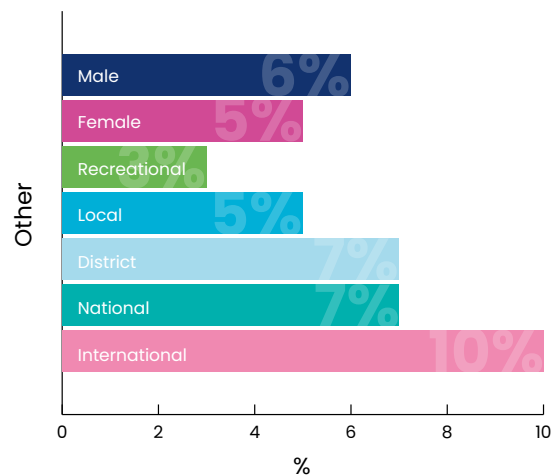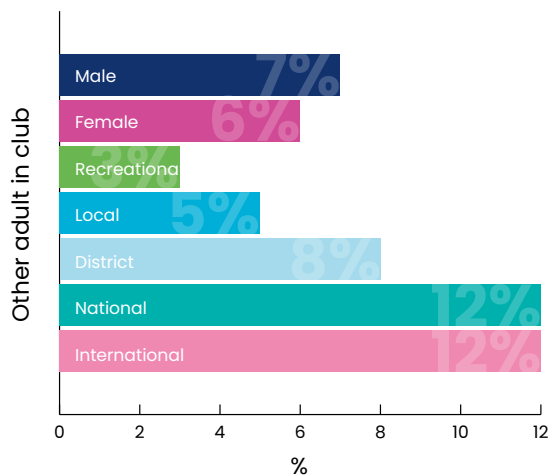
In the UK, studies have shown the prevalence of emotional-psychological abuse of children in sport to be as high as 75%, with 24% of young people surveyed reporting physical abuse of some form. (Alexander et al., 2011).

The same report (Alexander et al., 2011) found that 29% of children surveyed had experienced sexual harassment in sport, with 3% experiencing child sexual abuse. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to experience sexual harassment and abuse.

Stafford et al. (2015) found that 36% of young women and 29% of young men in the UK reported experiencing emotional harm from a coach or trainer, with the frequency of emotionally harmful behaviour increasing as young participants rise through the competitive ranks as seen in *table 1*.

Table 1: Perpetrators of emotionally harmful behaviours in main sport by gender and level of sport participation of respondents. (Stafford et al., 2015)

Other adult in club — %

Category	Value
Male	7%
Female	6%
Recreational	3%
Local	5%
District	8%
National	12%
International	12%

Other — %

Category	Value
Male	6%
Female	5%
Recreational	3%
Local	5%
District	7%
National	7%
International	10%

3 There is clear evidence of underreporting

All studies, government and third-sector reports that present statistics on violence and abuse in or beyond sport acknowledge that reported rates are likely to be significantly underestimated (see NSPCC Prevalence Study (2011), The Truth Project (2021), Duty of Care Review (2017), Hartill (2009)).

The findings also identified an outdated understanding of harm prevention, risk management, roles, responsibilities and accountability that relate to the management of workforce-related risk and participant harm prevention, across a significant spread of the sector. There is evidence of good practice, but it exists in silos where learning and sharing is not common practice or encouraged, and the insight gained is commonly viewed in the context of a single workforce role, organisation, or type of harm.

The use of the Participant Safety Model highlights that the sector does not approach this area as the layered methodology depicts. There was limited evidence of either the layers in action, the level of success of the layers or an approach to evaluating them.

The evidence further demonstrated that there is no clear ownership of workforce-related harm prevention at sector level, despite a near constant stream of public cases of participant harm. Learning may well take place within the organisation concerned in each case, but it is evident that this does not cascade through the system (sector) as a whole or within interconnected areas.

4 Low reporting of high impact events is not good news

The relatively low levels of highly impactful and harmful incidents currently being reported in sport cannot be interpreted as an indicator that prevalence is low. Effective human error and harm prevention cultures found in other industries tend to experience an increased level of reporting of low impact incidents, combined with a falling level of reporting of high impact incidents.

In these cultures, it is probable that more high impact incidents are being prevented through appropriate action taken on low impact incidents. It is therefore important to note that any improvements made to the experience of reporting would likely see an increase in the volume of incidences being raised, at least in the short to medium term. This should be seen as a positive impact of interventions related to data collection and reporting.

5 Everyone has the right to be safe

Evidence demonstrates that there are particular groups within society that are more at risk and likely to be harmed. These groups are often referred to as 'vulnerable', however this terminology may create unintentional exclusions if participants do not regard themselves as being vulnerable.

Within many sport and physical activity settings, these power imbalances exist between the workforce and participants due to an inherent asymmetry of knowledge, influence and power. For example, recent research on racial inequality from UK Sport and the Home Nations (TRARIIS, 2021) identifies this power dynamic specifically between coaches and their participants.

The understanding of who might be at risk of harm should also be context-related, rather than simply looking at demographic grouping. For example, an adult elite sports person who is conscious about selection and de-selection decisions made by a coach may become reliant on that relationship and could be at risk of harm as a result.

It could be argued that all workforce and participant interactions should be considered as a risk, with appropriate harm prevention methods and risk management implemented to reduce the likelihood of harm occurring.

Recommendations

The findings from the current phase are a combination of feedback from the survey and focus groups, along with best practice identified in other industries within the UK, and from the overseas sport and physical activity sector.

The findings have led to a set of recommendations for further actions to be taken in pursuit of improving the safety of participants from workforce related harm.

These are presented in the form of the Participant Safety Model as a means of demonstrating where these actions could have an impact in filling the 'holes' in a sector-wide system.

The findings did not illuminate recommendations for each shield and a full exploration of the workforce governance system, modelled against

the participant safety shields, would be a key recommendation for future iterations of this area of work.

A final key recommendation noted from the review of other industries is that all actions and interventions need to be considered as being just one component of the system as a whole. There is no single 'panacea' recommendation that would, in isolation, successfully reduce the risk of harm occurring.

There is, however, the opportunity to implement a set of interconnected recommendations across the sector that could collectively contribute to a reduction in the prevalence and impact of harm, making sport and physical activity safer and more enjoyable for all participants.

Level: Sector Influence

Shield	Recommended Action
Standards And Referrals	• Introduce a contemporary definition of participant harm, to include discrimination, abuse and physical harm. • Ensure the participant voice is used in the development of standards relating to workforce governance. • Create minimum standards for organisations recording workforce harm prevention in tools such as risk registers. • Create minimum standards for managing complaints, safeguarding, licensing, audits and quality assurance systems.
Regulation And Accountability	• Implement, maintain and continually develop a sector-wide and standardised workforce governance quality assurance system. • Update the Sport England and UK Sport Code for Sports Governance, to include prevention of harm to participants and good workforce governance as essential requirements for all funded organisations. • Implement a sector-wide and interconnected workforce management system, to improve reporting and analysis of concerns. • Mandate a sector-wide adoption of professional standards. • Develop an interconnected registration system for members of the front-line workforce, which highlights suspended or terminated individuals. • Identify and appoint a sector-level, independent and accountable organisation for workforce governance and workforce-related harm. • Introduce and standardise a sector-wide and inclusive process for managing mandatory reporting.
Roles And Responsibilities	• Create a mentor/peer supervisor professional standard. • Create a sector workforce governance system that considers areas such as: policies, processes, systems, risk assessments, risk registers, coordinated learning and sharing of practice, professional standards, quality assurance, research and innovation, coordination of and response to emerging areas of workforce-related harm. • Create workforce governance professional standards for members of the workforce who engage in sector, organisational and individual levels of operating in this area. • Mandate the sector's adoption of professional status within the workforce, and the role, environment, population and technical expertise a member of the workforce holds, along with how and when they can be deployed. • Introduce levels of independence for workforce governance and those who govern the workforce system.
Coordinated Learning Cycle	• Implement education and awareness raising of workforce governance. • Ensure the participant voice is used in the development of education and training. • Include managing workforce-related harm prevention within all relevant professional standards and education across the sector. • Create a system where learning from individual cases or sports can be easily shared across the sector. • Develop an interconnected mentorship programme. • Develop interconnected communities of practice. • Provide resources that meet minimum standards in all workforce governance-related areas, to the less well-resourced parts of the sector. • Provide education on the 'duty to report' principle.

Level: Organisational Influence

Shield	Recommended Action
Culture	• Agree and embed conduct, risk management and acceptable behaviour in relation to participant safety, welfare and harm prevention across all organisations. • Engage with the interconnected communities of practice. • Embed the 'duty to report' culture amongst the workforce and 'duty to act or refer' culture amongst organisations.
Process	• Implement, maintain and continually develop a sector-wide and standardised workforce governance quality assurance system. • Provide, record and analyse exit interviews for members of the workforce. • Provide, record and analyse exit interviews for participants (particularly in disciplines such as clubs or elite performance). • Conduct analysis of exit interviews to consider participant harm and share learnings through communities of practice. • Utilise risk register templates/minimum standards/best practice on workforce-related harm prevention. • Deploy the workforce in accordance with their professional status.
Resource Management	• Provide resource to meet the minimum standards of workforce governance. • Adopt professional standards across the organisation.

Level: Supervisory Fail

Shield	Recommended Action
Inadequate Supervision	• Engage in a mentor / peer supervision programme. • Check and uphold the workforce's adherence to the relevant professional standard. • Check and uphold the workforce's adherence to the agreed conduct, risk management and mitigations.
Failure To Manage Violations	• Check and uphold the workforce's adherence to the duty to report principle

Summary

This project has logged the sector's journey of self-discovery into the area of workforce governance. It has uncovered a lack of understanding of key areas of workforce governance, harm prevention and workforce-related risk management.

It has further highlighted the value in connecting communities and networks within the sector; sharing learning and best practice and operating as a sector that values transparency.

This work also reflects the evolution in thinking around workforce governance: from a position where certain individual interventions had been seen as the panacea to workforce-related harm, to a recognition that system-wide analysis and an interconnected approach could have a significantly greater impact on participant safety.

There are still many unknowns and gaps in the system, such as accountability for the recommendations highlighted within the 'Sector Influence' shield. The next phase of this project would include volunteer organisations undertaking a self-assessment against the Participant Safety Model. This would be followed by a systems test, using a case study to review the organisation's workforce governance system to highlight best practice and areas for improvement. This would also demonstrate if this approach can aid the sector's understanding of, accountability for, and interconnection, on matters relating to workforce governance.

The sector's workforce is an enabler of vast amounts of enjoyment of sport and physical activity for all members of society; adding significantly to the physical, mental, social and economic health of the nation and contributing a gross value added of £12.6 billion (CIMSPA, 2022).

However, harm does happen and will continue to happen without a significant and coordinated approach to mitigating the risk of workforce-related harm. It is intended that this report contributes to the sector's ongoing dialogue in this area and outlines positive next steps and actions to be considered in the advancement of good workforce governance.

CIMSPA