

WSLA

**High performance
environments that
enable female athletes
and coaches to thrive**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

For decades there has been an awareness and indeed evidence identifying the gender metrics within all levels of sport globally. However, it has been only in recent years that focused attention has been applied to start reducing gender inequality in sport.

This project has been driven by a new generation of trailblazers for women in sport – sport suffragists. The purpose of this project was to investigate the characteristics of a high performance environment that enable female athletes and coaches to thrive. We researched the current reality both from a statistical evidence based and experiential viewpoint and defined what “thriving” looked like.

In principle, High Performance Sport New Zealand strategic priorities apply to female athletes and coaches. However, our research indicates that change is needed to optimise the high performance culture and environment for women. Deficiencies in the high performance system have been highlighted and require a focused and resourced effort to ensure that equality exists for women.

Method

To understand the current perceptions of the high performance environment, qualitative research was used to gain information people’s experiences, attitudes and motivations. The respondents included both female and male retired and current athletes, coaches, managers, support staff, and educationalists. Data was gained using a range of methods including online surveys, interviews, case studies and research into international high performance systems. Questioning focused on examples of good practice, barriers, and how NSOs and HPSNZ could better support the needs of women.

Findings

Female athletes and coaches were the original focus of our research however as a more in-depth review into coaching has been undertaken by one of the other WSLA groups, we narrowed our focus on coaching to recognising it as a profession, the challenges of pathway programmes and lack of coaching opportunities and coach welfare.

The analysis of our findings suggests that the overarching factor needed to create an optimal high performance environment is an **Athlete centred approach, which focuses on**

the specific needs of elite female athletes to optimise performance. Specifically, the high performance environment must allow: flexible athlete support, the right people in the right positions, appropriate communication style and gender equality across leadership, coaching, management and support staff

Recommendations

One (part 1) - Strategic Advisor Women's Development

Our first recommendation is the development of a dedicated role to focus exclusively on the development of a national strategic approach for developing women's capability and ability to thrive in a high performance sport environment. The Strategic Advisor for Women's Development would lead the development and implementation of a High Performance Women in Sport Charter (HPWSC).

One (part 2) - Women's Advisory Sport Panel (WASP)

A major theme of our feedback was the desire for female athletes and coaches to have a voice and to know that their voice is heard throughout the performance pathways. The development of a Women Advisory Sport Panel would ensure that an inclusive high performance environment exists and that the needs of female athletes and coaches were represented. This panel, inclusive of the Strategic Advisor Women Development, would effectively be the HPSNZ "in house champions of change" driving outcomes such as:

1. Ensuring that women's voice is heard at the highest level (SNZ, HPSNZ Board)
2. Support the development of a national strategic approach to grow women's capability and ability to thrive in a high performance sport environment – HPWSC
3. Ensure that targeted resourcing is directed to developing female athletes and coaches.
4. To provide a platform for communication with key stakeholders.

The WASP would include both athlete and coach representatives and would support the current HPSNZ system approach of performance driven, athlete focused and coach led. The point of difference would be in ensuring that there is a gender specific lens prioritising the needs of elite athletes and coaches to maximise performance and experience.

Recommendation Two - Athlete Voice & Coach Voice

Athlete Voice

The current mandate for HPSNZ is “more New Zealanders winning on the world stage” and athletes are expected to be accountable for their performance. In many cases athletes do not have the opportunity to contribute to discussions around their high performance programme, environment and decisions which directly impact them.

In order to “thrive” athletes need to have the opportunity to express their views in an inclusive environment and know there is an effective mechanism for their views to be heard and acted upon. We believe there could be merit in HPSNZ providing a platform to facilitate Athlete Voice. This could either be by employing Athlete Voice Advocates specifically to act for sports or by drawing on existing resource via Athlete Life.

Coach Voice

The low number of female coaches operating at the elite level in New Zealand (20%) needs to be addressed with dedicated resources invested to understand better the constraints and potential interventions moving forward. The establishment of the Women Advisory Sport Panel would have female coach representation and therefore a platform and “voice” to identify and initiate change.

Conclusions

What’s clear from our research and feedback from the high performance community across the spectrum of sports is that **change is needed** in order to enable a high performance culture and environment for female athletes and coaches to thrive. We believe that the recommendations provided within this report offer a foundation for a solution to enable this shift. Should our recommendations be implemented in HPSNZ and the wider high performance system, what will success look like?

- The New Zealand high performance system would be world leading with regards to women's development and gender equity.
- All sports would be included in the Charter led by the proposed Strategic Advisor for Women’s Development and the Women’s Advisory Sport panel
- Sports would be supportive of this new way of engaging with athletes.
- A collaborative environment would exist between all key stakeholders to ensure that the recommendations deliver on the objectives specified within this report.
- Targeted resourcing and partnerships would be in place to ensure that best practice occurs.

Defining Thriving

In order to address the topic question, we first needed to define the key word “thriving” and what that means for female athletes and coaches in the high performance context or environment. The Oxford Dictionary definition of thriving is “prosperous and growing; flourishing.” We wanted to take that a step further and ensure we had a definition which fully encompassed what thriving means to female athletes and coaches.

Leading researchers define human thriving as the joint experience of development and success. Development and success occur in tandem through experiencing a high level of well-being and high level of performance¹.

So how do the experts within HPSNZ define thriving? According to Rod Corban HPSNZ Sport Psychologist, thriving environments celebrate the diversity of individuals and respect differences. Furthermore, in a thriving environment people feel safe to be themselves and are vulnerable in front of others. By no means does a thriving environment lack discomfort; in fact, it encourages discomfort in order to achieve something greater. When individuals are in challenging situations and experience physiological and emotional discomfort, they know those around them care more about them, as people, rather than their performance.² Corban describes key characteristics of thriving teams and individual environments as:

Team: People not robots, clarity, role model, belief and trust, challenge support balance, language.

Individual: Clear vision, robust identity, connection, composure, tenacity.

It is fair to say the current climate in high performance sport is challenging. Six sports have either been reviewed in the last 12 months or currently being reviewed regarding their high performance environment, (Cycling, football, rowing, netball, Rugby League and Hockey). And the media attention on the issues has thrown fuel on the fire. Regardless of the current media spotlight, there is a clear need for further focus on athlete welfare and wellbeing. We believe that the definitions described above convey what thriving should mean in an optimal high performance environment for female athletes and coaches.

¹ Brown, D.J, Arnold, R., Reid, T., & Robert, G. (2018). A qualitative exploration of thriving in elite sport. *Journal of Applied Sport and Psychology*, 30(2), 129-149.

²Rod Corban (Personal Communication, March, 2018)

Research

Over the years there have been numerous research projects published on the environment faced by women in High Performance Sport within New Zealand and across the World. The long list of issues faced are similar:

- male control of sport
- a lack of female role models
- funding inequity
- lack of recruiting and mentoring programs
- work-life balance.

More than often the survey results focus on the negative. For this research project it is vital that the characteristics of environment that are working well are highlighted. Likewise, the knowledge and expertise that is easily accessible in this country is reported and developed even further.

Data was gained using a range of methods including:

- Online surveys (with respondents having the option to remain anonymous)
- Interviews and case studies - one-on-one conversations in person and via the phone
- Expert opinions - high quality information from well-informed sources
- Newspaper and online articles
- Documents including; reports, meeting minutes, e-mails.

Survey Results

To delve deep into understanding the current perception and characteristics of a high performance environment qualitative research was used to gain information about people's thinking, attitudes and motivations. Using contacts made from many years in the high performance sport in New Zealand an online survey was circulated amongst all sectors and across a number of codes including; Swimming, Equestrian, Cycling, Netball, Athletics, Hockey, Triathlon, Rugby, Rugby 7's, Kayaking, Sailing and Rowing. respondents included retired and current athletes, coaches, managers, support staff, educationalists, both male and female. Appendix 1.

Structured interview questionnaires asked:

1. Thinking about the high-performance environment you are involved in or have been in previously, what are the elements of that environment that worked well for female athletes and coaches?
2. What are the challenges you see for female athletes and coaches in the high performance environment?
3. Are there any barriers to those changes that you see?
4. How could NSO's and the HPSNZ system better cater for and support the needs of female athletes?
5. What strategies do you see employed to create an optimal high performance environment?

The wide range of people that were approached shared openly and passionately in the hope that vital changes can be made but also those that are doing great things are recognized.



Figure 1 Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (n.d)

The terms equity and equality were referred to by many in their responses. The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women in Sport provide a useful definition to distinguish between the terms “Equality focuses on creating the same starting line for

everyone. Equity has the goal of providing everyone with the full range of opportunities and benefits – the same finish line.”³ Throughout the survey responses the both gender equity and equality have been referred to.

What is currently working well (or worked well in the case of those retired)?



Figure 2 Summary of language used in survey responses

Respondents were asked to think about the high performance environment they are currently involved in or have been involved in and describe the elements of that environment that **worked well** for female athletes and coaches. The responses have been categorised into four key areas; Coaching and Staff, Funding and Support, Communication, and Family as shown in Appendix 2.

According to respondents, people are the most significant element in an optimal high performance environment: “Having a coach that understands the female mindset,” and “coaches who understand how females operate physically and mentally” were referred to.

³ Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (n.d). What is gender equity? Retrieved from <http://www.caaws.ca>

Many respondents indicated that having “female managers”, “female staff” or “gender balanced leadership and management teams” added to a positive environment. In addition, the ability to communicate effectively through “honest clear communication with an emphasis on task” and “being part of the decision-making process” are examples of what is working. Both coaches and athletes commented that having access to a mentor or a “buddy system” enabled issues to be discussed and problem solved before they escalated into something greater.

What are the challenges and barriers to change?

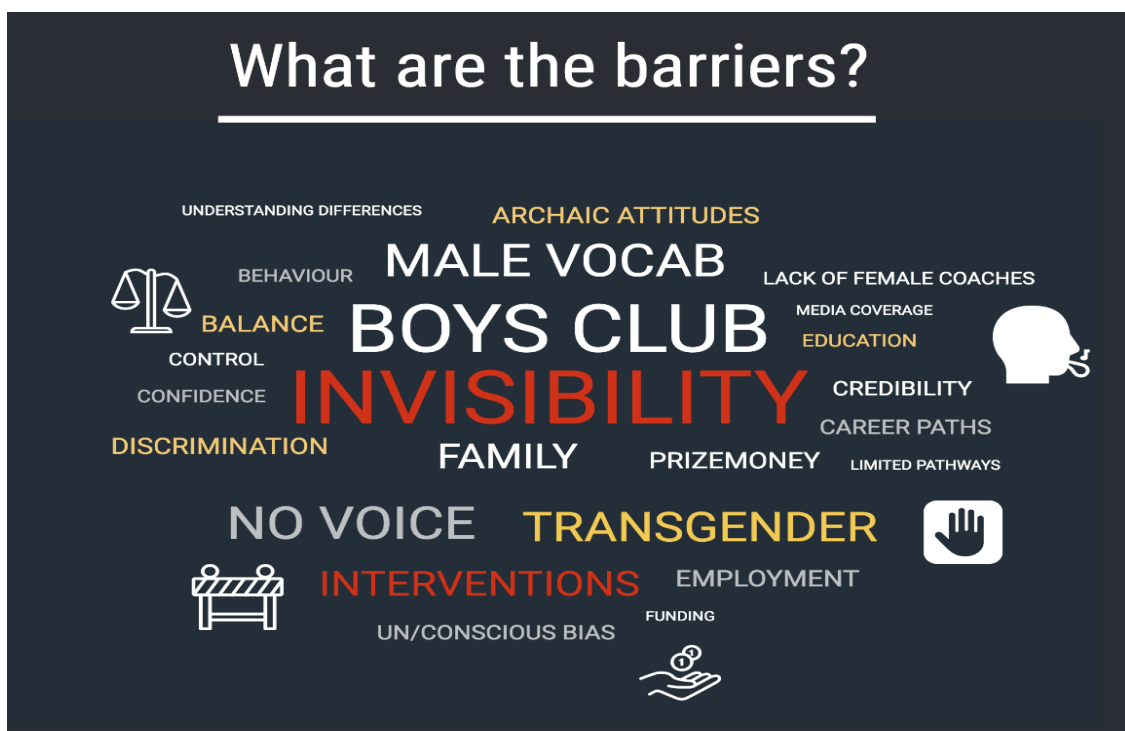


Figure 3 Summary of language used in survey responses

Respondents were asked to describe the challenges female athletes and coaches face in the high performance environment and the barriers to those changes in the current environment. The responses have been categorised into four key areas; Gender Equality, Communication, Education and Flexibility as shown in Appendix 2.

The gender imbalance across all sectors and roles in the high performance environment in New Zealand was highlighted in responses; “lack of female coaches and support staff” likewise, “there is a lack of female expertise aligned to female sport” and “more female Strength and Conditioning coaches”.

Women face hurdles at a national, organisation and community level. These findings are certainly not new and emphasise the lack of visibility and voice for female athletes and coaches. Respondents spoke of the cultural shift needed, aware that this is something that takes time “need to force the issue until there is better balance.” Many felt that quota systems for leadership roles and team selections had a negative impact. One commented that “leaders should be chosen on merit and ability,” while another felt there is “backlash against females being chosen just because they are females.”

That is not to say that Men cannot coach Women and lead sport or that Women cannot coach Men and lead sport. However, transparency around appointment processes, clarity around “who is looking” as well as the impression of “the ‘old boys’ network” make the pathway unclear for females in the high performance environment. What was made clear in responses is that coaches, athletes and management “want the best person for the job.”

What would you like to see change?

Respondents were asked to describe the changes they would like to see implemented to create an ideal high performance environment for female athletes and coaches?

What is clear is that sporting environment is constantly changing and evolving. As a sporting nation, to constantly perform on the world stage, change is required.

Add to the mix the fact that athletes are different, every sport is different and each of their needs are different.

What this research provides is probably more questions. Does the system allow for difference? HPSNZ provides a funding system but is the support on offer what the sport needs most? Does the system address actual needs of the individual athlete, coach or sport?

If changes were made would this mean that we would see more New Zealanders performing on the world stage? Do the barriers that have been identified fall on the shoulders of a management team, or should that sit elsewhere? And if so where?

Athletes and coaches are people first. High performance sport has the ability to develop great people and powerful role models. The knowledge, experience and passion of people in sport in this country is undeniable. They must be supported, retained, given confidence to be involved or become involved through a clear and transparent pathway. Catering for the needs of female athletes and coaches not only needs to be done during their career but also post career.



Figure 4 Summary of survey responses

Current State

High performance environment

High performance environment for female athletes and coaches from HPSNZ perspective

The HPSNZ philosophy is based on “Performance-driven”, “Athlete-focused”, “Coach-led”. In addition, ‘People’ and ‘Culture and Environment’ are stated as HPSNZ strategic drivers and must be noted given their relevance to this project.⁴

At the 2016 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Rio over 50% of athletes representing NZ were female and they contributed to 61% of NZ medal outcomes (11 of 18).⁵

There is no doubt women are producing results in terms of representation, performance and medal count which is of course how performance is measured and funding is allocated in high performance sport in New Zealand. But how much more could women achieve in an optimal environment and are our athletes and coaches actually “thriving”?

Sport NZ CEO Peter Miskimmin acknowledges the importance of athlete welfare and wellbeing. “What we are trying to do is create an environment that is about winning, but it is also about allowing athletes to be the best they can be and making sure their overall welfare is taken seriously.”⁶

Our project survey results indicated that lack of gender equality at the governance level in high performance sport, NSOs, coaching, management and support staff is a barrier to creating an optimal performance environment for female athletes and coaches to thrive. This is backed up by several studies addressing organisational performance, and diversity, including the McKinsey’s *Diversity Matters* study.⁷

We know intuitively that diversity matters. It’s also increasingly clear that it makes sense in purely business terms. Our latest research finds that companies in the top quartile for gender

4 High Performance Sport New Zealand. (2017)

5 High Performance Sport New Zealand. (2017)

6 Johannsen, D (2018, June 20). Sport NZ launches review into athlete welfare as cycling, football scandals emerge. Stuff. Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz>

7 Hunt, V., Layton, D. & Prince, S. (2015). Why diversity matters. McKinsey’s & Company. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com>

or racial and ethnic diversity are more likely to have financial returns above their national industry medians. Companies in the bottom quartile in these dimensions are statistically less likely to achieve above-average returns. And diversity is probably a competitive differentiator that shifts market share toward more diverse companies over time.

While correlation does not equal causation (greater gender and ethnic diversity in corporate leadership doesn't automatically translate into more profit), the correlation does indicate that when companies commit themselves to diverse leadership, they are more successful.⁸

In High Performance Sport the goal is medals and the less tangible value of inspiring the nation to feel proud to be New Zealanders and be physically active. Broadly if it can be stated that gender diversity means better business, then gender diversity also means better sport.

If we look at gender diversity and the high performance system it is clear there is a significant lack of female representation at all senior levels of sports administration and governance.

- Of the 120 HPSNZ staff, the gender balance ratio is (43% - 52) female and (57% - 68) Male (May 2018)
- There are no women in senior leadership positions at HPSNZ
- 32% (8 of 25) HPSNZ management positions have female incumbents
- 23 current and high-potential female leaders have been included in the HPSNZ Leadership Development Programme since 2013. Women represent 30% of the total participants, 70% were male
- Women represent 20% (15 of 75) of coaches selected for the HPSNZ Coach Accelerator Programme (CAP) across 10 cohorts since 2009
- 14% (3) women are currently NSO High Performance Directors/Managers across 21 HPSNZ invested sports, those sports are Equestrian, Swimming and Squash.
- 5 of the 12 NSO High Performance Athlete Development Leaders are women
- Since 2010, 32 (20%) of the 157 carded coaches have been women. Of these, 22 are from Netball.⁹

⁸ Hunt, V., Layton, D. & Prince, S. (2015).

⁹ HPSNZ (Personal Communication, 2018, Board Report)

While these statistics are clearly not where they need to be there are some encouraging initiatives taking place in the high performance system targeted at developing women and catering to the specific needs of elite female athletes.

HPSNZ WHISPA (Women's Health in Sport Project)

Head of HPSNZ Medical Dr. Bruce Hamilton is leading a group investigating the endocrinological factors that impact on the performance of females. This is a great initiative enlisting some of NZ's top sport medicine practitioners and endocrinological experts, however more resource could go into this area to accelerate progress so that new practices can be implemented to improve female physiological performance. In addition, world-class information like this needs to be openly shared with those who are leading and indeed living high performance on a daily basis (coaches and athletes). Once the project group has collated their initial findings we see it as crucial that high performance athletes and coaches are consulted and collaborated with to grow all parties' learnings.

HPSNZ Leadership Programme

HPSNZ's existing Leadership programme identifies and supports the development of female leaders. Although only 30% of the leaders on the programme so far have been female.

- HPSNZ's existing Leadership programme identifies and supports the development of female leaders. Although only 30% of the leaders on the programme so far have been female.
- HPSNZ have announced the establishment of a Gender Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Action Group with the purpose of leading and coordinating activity that will support HPSNZ in developing strategies and delivering outcomes in this area. The group members have now been announced and will be chaired by HPSNZ Board Member Alison Shanks and include HPSNZ staff representatives across the organization with support from Sport NZ and other appropriate agencies

There is a clear directive from Government and HPSNZ Board level that there needs to be more focus on achieving gender equality and developing women in sport. Therefore, the time is ripe for input such as this project and those of our WSLA cohort colleagues to influence in this space and build on and advance work that has started in this space.

Coaching

Coaching as a profession over the past 20 years has become a topic of conversation across international sport¹⁰. The landscape for high performance coaching in New Zealand is varied and challenging and while the assumption may be that high performance coaches operate in a professional environment the reality is that many are still highly effective volunteers.

Internationally federations have become more proactive in the development of systemic structures around the education and qualification of coaches. Where applicable, New Zealand sport organisations have aligned to the their international federations while others have developed independent national qualifications to drive coach development along the performance/high performance pathways. We assume that with formalised criteria and structures in place that there would be a level playing field available for all vying to develop their expertise however, and rightly so, qualifications alone are not predetermining factors to high performance coach appointments. Experience is an absolute determining factor to any coach looking to take on a high performance role. Coaches have most frequently been reported to learn to coach through informal apprenticeships of experience and observation of other coaches.¹¹

With only 20% of female coaches been carded or included in the HPSNZ Coach Accelerator Programme, numbers indicate that it is more challenging for women to enter the elite ranks of coaching. There are initiatives to improve this such as the recently launched FIFA-inspired Female Coach Scholarship Programme for Football NZ has been introduced “to grow the number of female coaches within the advanced coaching pathway – an area that is currently under-represented by females”, a NZF press release states.¹² At face value this looks like a great step in the right direction however former Football Fern and elite club coach Wendi Henderson can be forgiven for being a little skeptical about New Zealand Football’s latest equality-inspired coaching initiative. She’s not only seen and heard it all before. She’s lived it.

10 Duffy, Pat & Hartley, P & Bales, John & Crespo, Miguel & Dick, F & Vardham, D & Curado, J. (2011). Sport coaching as a 'profession': Challenges and future directions. *International Journal of Coaching Science*. 5. 93-123.

11 Christopher J. Cushion, Kathy M. Armour & Robyn L. Jones (2003) Coach Education and Continuing Professional Development: Experience and Learning to Coach, *Quest*, 55:3, 215-230

12 Deane, S (17 July 2018) The reality of NZ Football's glass ceiling. *Lockerroom*. Retrieved from <https://www.newsroom.co.nz>

"I've been around for a long time and I am sitting here saying 'I don't know what the pathway is'. I don't know how you break into it." ¹³

We know that internationally female coaches in elite level football have been exceptionally successful so why would Wendi's experience be so negative?

"Despite women being vastly under-represented in coaching, it's obviously not a merit issue, as female-coached teams have won 92 percent of FIFA Women's World Cups, Olympic golds and European championships since 2000." ¹⁴

Three high performance coaches from Athletics New Zealand have between them accumulated over 25 pinnacle event podium results. We know that success is possible, but we also know that it's a hard road to travel. Coaches learn by coaching; it's called action learning and is vital to adult learning and development. Gaining experiential knowledge is key to recruiting, retaining and engaging female coaches. Our recommendation of providing world leading mentoring and apprenticeship programmes for our female coaches is integral to growing our female coaching community and ensuring that those who put their names forward for elite coaching roles have what it takes to lead high performance.

Recently HPSNZ initiated the High Performance Coach Advisory Panel to look ensuring that the current system approach supports the elite coach both professionally and personally. Of the nine coaches on the panel, two are women. It is not surprising that the number is low with so few female high performance coaches representing so few sports (Netball/Athletics/Equestrian). A strong recommendation from this panel is a more focused and determined effort to address coach welfare. It has already been identified recently the concern of a "win at all costs" high performance attitude and the effect this has on our elite athletes, we would suggest that the toll is just as great on our coaches.

To date the lack of female coaches currently working in the high performance environment has not been addressed by the High Performance Coach Advisory Panel. It would be remiss of this panel and the female coaches engaged to not take the opportunity to highlight the challenges and seek advocacy from this elite group of coaches. It is a recommendation that a female representative from either this panel or from the Coach Accelerator Programme alumni be seconded onto the Women Advisory Sport Panel.

¹³ Henderson, cited in Deane, S. (17 July 2018).

¹⁴ Henderson, cited in Deane, S. (17 July 2018).

With a more in depth review and analysis been applied by one of the other WSLA groups, we have limited our focus on high performance coaching to that of recognising it as a profession, the challenges of pathway programmes, coach welfare and the need for more female coaches to have access to coaching opportunities. Action learning.

We believe that with the right people in the right positions the New Zealand high performance system can be world leading in the development of female coaches.

Examples of Good Practice

As part of our research we interviewed people from a number of different NSOs and from HPSNZ to identify examples of good practice in terms of creating a high performance culture and environment where females athletes and coaches can thrive. The sports we consulted with were Rowing, Equestrian, Hockey, Rugby, Athletics, Netball, Swimming, Canoe, Equestrian, Cycling, and Para Sport.

Supporting elite athletes through motherhood:

In October 2017 Dame Valerie Adams gave birth to her daughter Kimoana. She was able to continue an adapted training programme during pregnancy and qualify for the 2018 Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. With the support of her family, Athletics NZ and HPSNZ Adams won a silver medal just six months after giving birth.

When asked how it was possible to continue training during pregnancy and to compete at the Commonwealth Games she said, “you just have to make it work”. Her support system including her team, her family, Athletics NZ and HPSNZ “had to adapt”.

Adams was upfront about her pregnancy and intention to qualify for the Commonwealth Games and she says that she had the support she needed to continue training throughout the pregnancy and preparation for the Commonwealth Games.

From the family support perspective, Adams’ mother-in-law took time out from her job and took over the night shift for the 2 months prior to the Commonwealth Games. This meant Adams could get the rest and recovery she needed to train to the level required to prepare for a Commonwealth Games. Dame Valerie Adams’ story is an example of what is possible for female athletes. Having a baby does not mean you have to give up being an athlete. With the right support it is possible to return to physical and mental form and produce medal winning performances. In fact, Valerie feels she is “much stronger mentally” than she was before she became a mother.

In addition, Athletics NZ is also supporting Nikki Hamblin by continuing her carding during her pregnancy. Athletics NZ state that when Nikki's baby is born and she chooses to get back into training they will work with her to determine what support she requires and what targets she would need to hit in order to maintain her carding.

It is crucial that we have role models like Dame Valerie Adams who shows it is possible to have a family and still be a high performance athlete. As Kate Palmer, CEO Of the Australian Sports Commission said at the Sport NZ Connections Conference this year, "if you can't see it, you can't achieve it".

We have a gold standard role model in Dame Valerie Adams but when we look at our survey findings this is the exception not the rule. Adams is an outstanding athlete and NZ icon who has an incredible results record. Therefore, she has the leverage and influence to get the support she needs. In netball and hockey there have been a number of national team players who have had children and come back to compete at the top level with varying support plans.

Sadly, through our surveys we received feedback from Olympic level athletes who have lost their funding or had funding detrimentally reduced, treated insensitively, have been left out of case management meetings and made to feel that they are no longer "real athletes".

Football Ferns

The NZ Football Ferns hit the media earlier this year with positive advancement in the women's game. A Collective Bargaining Agreement was confirmed between NZ Football and NZ Professional Footballers' Association and NZ Football agreed to equity and parity for senior men's and women's national teams, including equal prize money, equal rights for image use, and parity across travel while representing NZ. The launch of the Kate Sheppard Cup and expansion of Women's National League to two rounds from the 2018 season was also announced. Unfortunately these steps in the right direction have been overshadowed by allegations that came out in June this year against NZ Football Ferns coach Andreas Heraf.

Andreas Heraf was placed on leave while an independent investigation was launched into the Football Ferns environment due to 13 Football Ferns players writing letters of complaint around the conduct and behaviour of Heraf. While it is unfortunate to have this situation arise in another NZ sport the good news is that these issues are coming to the surface and the athletes were able to voice their concerns and actions has been taken.

"We are very disappointed to be in a position where some of the players from within the Football Ferns have felt the need to formally lodge a complaint with NZ Football and would like to thank them for coming forward," said New Zealand Football President Deryck Shaw

"We hold player welfare as a matter of utmost importance and that is why we are conducting a thorough, independent review. We want to ensure we better understand these issues in an objective review. There is no place for inappropriate behaviour of any kind with New Zealand Football. "New Zealand Football has clear policies and procedures to protect the welfare of staff and players. We are focused on creating an environment which gives the Football Ferns, and all of our national teams, the best chance of winning on the world stage."¹⁵

We will watch this space for the outcomes of the review.

Cate Sexton - Women's Rugby

Cate Sexton was appointed the head of New Zealand Rugby Women's Development approximately 3 years ago. Her role along with five other regional roles show a positive example of an organisation's commitment to female players across all sectors of the sport. Through an enquiry leadership style and 'sisterhood' culture the organisation has seen a shift in the historical male dominated management. Furthermore, the first female board member, Dr Farah Palmer (ONZM) was appointed in 2016. In a short time at the helm Cate and her team have achieved outstanding performances both on and off the field citing 'people' as the defining factor. And it not only starts from the top down but also from the bottom up. "There's a real need for people to feel welcome and their contribution valued, have the confidence to ask questions and feel like they have been heard. Cate spoke of the need for clarity and trust in roles with greater investment; time and money, to insure the right people are appointed. "The right people need to be in the right positions" and that includes sports administrators, coaches and management

¹⁵ NZ Herald. (20 June, 2018). Football Ferns coach Andreas Heraf placed on leave as New Zealand Football investigation begins. NZ Herald. Retrieved from <https://www.nzherald.co.nz>

Hockey New Zealand

The NZ Women's Hockey team had the outstanding result of winning the Gold medal at this year's Commonwealth Games on the Gold Coast. We interviewed the Coaching team to find out how their high performance environment enabled the team to achieve this result.

As simple as it sounds, **communication** was identified as the key theme that proved to be a critical aspect to ensuring the management team got things right for the hockey team. By providing their athletes with a clear, open and honest communication channel, this allowed them to create an environment where the athletes felt safe and able to discuss performance issues and allowed their athletes to give input around their program and training. This process provided a platform where all athlete voices could be heard. As a result they have been able to build a shared vision. Clearly having this shared vision has meant they have been able to excel at a pinnacle event.

Of course, there are always barriers for athletes, coaches and management teams to reach their optimal high performance environment. What was revealed in this example of the women's hockey team was there was a need for sufficient support structures to be put in place for players to provide work and family life balance. In addition and probably highlighted the most was the inequality around reward structure for women and networking opportunities for players to be able to earn or gain sponsorships whilst they were playing.

Tyla Nathan-Wong - Rugby

Tyla Nathan-Wong was a key member of the team that lifted the Sevens World Cup in 2017 and is a senior member of the Black Ferns, captaining the team in 2017.

When asked what it is that makes the Black Ferns thrive in a high performance environment, Tyla replied, "At the end of the day it is team first, no single person is greater than the team." Tyla also highlighted the need for communication that is open and honest as an important factor to build the trust between everyone within the programme.

"If you aren't getting selected for a team you want to know why and you want to know the truth and hopefully that can be communicated effectively or if you are given training to do by yourself you are trusting that your teammates are doing the same and putting in the hard work like yourself and your management are putting their trust in you to do the same."

In addition, the team has a leadership group of six players who are able to discuss any needs or issues with team management. This healthy relationship involves two way communication “feedback can be given from the management to players and from players to management. Here we are the player’s voice.”

Tyla recognizes that many things in the sporting environment are uncontrollable but feels there are a number of areas that NSO’s and HPSNZ could develop in order to cater better for female athletes including;

Increasing knowledge and information based around strength and conditioning programs for females.

“We are physically different to males and need to work on and strengthen different areas”

“Other sports should follow NZ Rugby’s lead and include maternity policies. Just because a female athlete gets pregnant it doesn’t mean their career should be over.”

“Look to see if education is required for coaches (male or female) that are looking to coach a female team. For a coach to come in that has never coached a female athlete or team before, the experience and process could be completely different.”

Marty Croy - Paralympics NZ Shooting and Cycling HPD

The Para Cycling programme has successfully led the transition of Laura Thompson from Olympic medalist (Tandem Pilot) to Para Cycling National Development Coach. Paralympics NZ support Laura as a single mother and coach through not only a performance focused but also a family focused team environment. “If you have the right people, you do what you can to hold onto them”, said Marty Croy. In creating an inclusive approach the programme asked? “What is best for the athlete and performance?” “What is best for being a Mum?” They concluded that it’s not just about the sport for the team to thrive, the wellbeing Laura and the support networks around her take priority. There are times when the reality of resources and logistics make travelling with a toddler impracticable. However, the decision is jointly made through the process of balancing each performance piece.

“I am very fortunate to work for such a supportive organisation and this has helped me balance both my career and being a mother to my one-year-old son Patrick. In the first year of Patrick’s life he has been on 43 flights and attended his first Para Cycling Track World Championships in Rio in March.” ¹⁶

Other High Performance Examples

As part of our research we interviewed high performance staff working with Women’s Canoe Racing and Rugby 7s. The key elements which were identified as having an impact on allowing women to thrive in their high performance culture were a coaching staff with an “enquiry style” communication approach and the fact that the coach and athletes co-created their team values, vision and expectations. Having this degree of collaboration and agency allows the athletes to feel like they are driving their own performance rather than being dictated to without their thoughts and input being considered.

Another best practice environment element which we identified throughout our research was sports recognising the need to allocate dedicated resource to women’s development. For example, NZ Rugby have a Women’s Development Manager, as do Football, and Yachting NZ are currently recruiting for a Women’s Sailing Manager role as they have identified that they need to grow and retain the number of women in the sport and cater better for their specific needs in sailing.

¹⁶ Official website of the Paralympic Movement. (n.d). Maniago 2018: Perfect transition for Laura Thompson. Retrieved from <https://www.paralympic.org>

Summary of Findings

Characteristics of a high performance environment that enable an optimal culture for female athletes and coaches to thrive

As a result of our research and discussions, our suggestion is that the overarching factor needed in creating an optimal environment is an *Athlete centred approach which focuses on the specific needs of elite female athletes to optimise performance.* Specifically, the high performance environment must allow flexible athlete support, appropriate communication style and gender equity and in turn equality across leadership, coaching, management and high performance support practitioners.

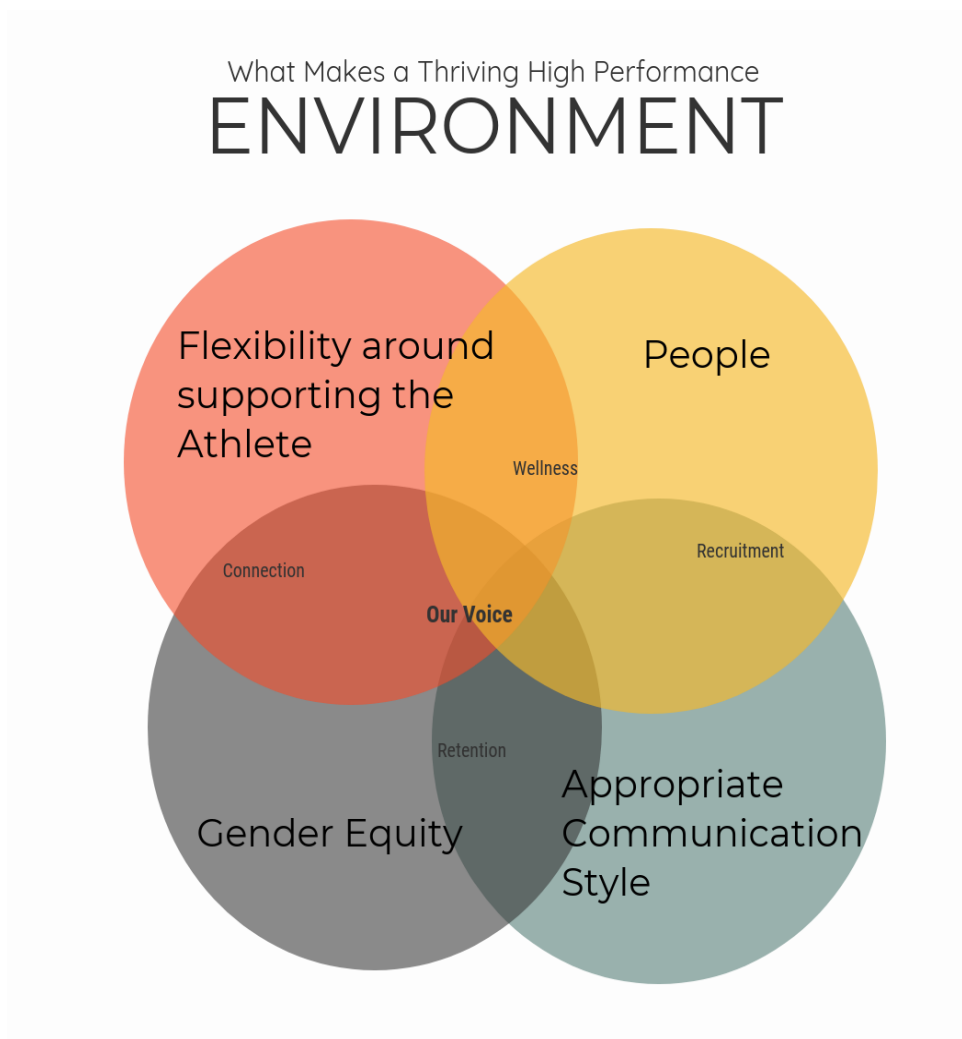


Figure 5 Key Characteristics of a Thriving Environment

1. Flexible Support for Athletes

- Programming based on the need of the individual
- Holistic approach to female wellness and performance (mental health, endocrinology)
- Adaptable to needs of athlete's families
- Clear, consistent maternity/paternity policy, including provision for continuation of PEGs during pregnancy if an athlete wishes to continue with their career
- Post retirement/non selection support (NGS)

2. Appropriate Communication Style

- Open and honest communication
- Unconscious bias training in order to eradicate sexism and biased perceptions of male and female communication styles
- Clear expectations of coach and management staff
- Clear expectations of athletes
- Athlete being part of decision making process for high performance programme (as appropriate for each sport)

3. Gender Equity

- Throughout all sports governance and leadership
- Coaching, support staff
- Media attention and recognition

4. People

- The right people in the right places
- Role clarity
- Transparent appointment process

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation One (part 1)

Strategic Advisor Women's Development

While New Zealand sits within the top ten countries globally with regards to bridging the gender gap¹⁷, women continue to face challenges and systemic barriers. Our research indicates that the high performance environment in Aotearoa while inclusive from an athlete participant perspective, has not yet allocated dedicated resources to address inequity, cultural and unconscious bias directly.

Through our research we looked at what approaches other sectors are taking to develop women and address gender inequity. It is a strategic priority of the NZ Police to improve gender equity and the working environment for women. In order to find out more we interviewed a Detective Sergeant Seema Kotecha, a member of the NZ Police Women's Advisory Network (WAN). The WAN is led by a full time National Strategic Advisor (Anne-Marie Fitchett) who sits between the district and Governance levels of the WAN and has a mandate to initiate change in the key national priorities of Recruitment, Retention and Development.

Looking also at the corporate sector in New Zealand, many organisations have recognised the need to appoint specific roles and Advisory Boards with the mandate of developing gender equity and diversity for example BNZ Bank who have Head of Diversity and Inclusion role (Cath Loax) and Air NZ have an award winning Women's Advisory and Leadership Programme.¹⁸

Internationally the movement for improving gender equality and participation in sport started from government level at least 5 years ago.

In September 2013 the UK Department for Culture Media and Sport established the Women in Sport Advisory Board, tasked with improving participation, improving media profile,

17 Haines, G. (7 November 2017). Mapped: The best (and worst) countries for gender equality. The Telegraph. Retrieved from <https://www.telegraph.co.uk>

18 Diversity and Inclusion. (n.d). Air New Zealand – Women soaring high. Diversity Works. Retrieved from <https://diversityworks.nz>

increasing commercial investment, improving women's representation in leadership and workforce and encouraging greater recognition for women's sporting achievement.¹⁹

In May 2017, The Australian Minister for Sport, John Enren announced the establishment of Victoria's first Office for Women in Sport and Recreation.

According to the Victoria State website "The office will implement the nine *Game Plan Inquiry* recommendations from the recent *Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation* and deliver further *Change Our Game* initiatives to increase participation and enhance leadership opportunities in sport for females."²⁰

The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWs) partnered with government organisations to publish "Women in Sport – Fuelling a Lifetime of Participation" in March 2016. They concluded that "Female coaches are essential to a vibrant and effective sport system" but only 25% of coaches in Canada were female. "The gap is even greater in many high performance settings, including in university sports and national team coaching."²¹

Therefore, based on our research our first recommendation is the development of a dedicated role to focus exclusively on the development of a national strategic approach for developing women's capability and ability for to thrive in a high performance sport environment. The Strategic Advisor for Women's Development would lead the development and implementation of a High Performance Women in Sport Charter (HPWSC).

The mandate for this charter would cover the following strategic priorities:

1. Representation

- Open and transparent dialogue without fear of repercussions.
- Women Advisory Sport Panel (WASP) - advocate for the athlete/coach voice at governance level.

¹⁹ Department for Media Culture and Sport. (2015). Final Report of the Government's Women and Sport Advisory Board. *GOV.UK*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk>

²⁰ Victoria State Government. (26 May 2017). New office to boost gender equality in sport. *Victoria State Government*. Retrieved from <http://sport.vic.gov.au/>

²¹ Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (n.d). *Women in coaching*. Retrieved from <http://www.caaws.ca>

- Know your bias - unconscious bias training

2. Retention

- Flexible high performance system/environment that has a focus on the specific needs of female athletes and coaches.
- Pay equality - salary audit
- Prepare women for leadership roles and address barriers - conscious/unconscious bias training
- World leading mentoring/apprentice programmes for HP women (Action learning)
- Maternity/Paternity – open and transparent policy that supports the ability for women to bring their “whole selves” to their roles as athletes or coaches.
- Childcare and flexible hours

3. Recruitment

- Focus on gender metrics and talent identification
- Targeted recruitment initiatives
- Pay equality
- Women’s Leadership Programmes
- To inspire and prepare women through educational workshops/conferences
- World leading mentoring/apprentice programmes for HP women (Action learning opportunities)

4. Wellness

- Increased focus and resourcing of physiological barriers to elite performance for female athletes
- Athlete Life - collaborating providers within HPSNZ to create development opportunities for women
- Coach welfare – mental skill, nutrition, life/work balance - (NGS)

5. Connection

- Alignment to Sport NZ, HPSNZ, NSO's, RST's, and Women in sport networks.
- Links to regional network initiatives
- Initiate a Champion for change network
- Lead the development of programmes, initiatives and events designed to address the current challenges facing female athletes and coaches.

Recommendation One (part 2)

Women's Advisory Sport Panel (WASP)

A major theme of our feedback was the inability to “lead up”. The desire for female athletes and coaches to have a voice and to know that, their voice is heard throughout the performance pathways. The development of a Women Advisory Sport Panel would ensure that an inclusive high performance environment exists and represents the needs of female athletes and coaches. This panel, inclusive of the Strategic Advisor Women Development, would effectively be the HPSNZ “in house champions of change” driving outcomes such as but not exclusive to:

1. Ensuring that women's voice is heard at the highest level (SNZ, HPSNZ Board)
2. Support the development of a national strategic approach to grow the capability and ability for women to thrive in a high performance sport environment - HP Women in Sport Charter.
3. Ensure that targeted resourcing is directed to developing female athletes and coaches. For example, targeted funding through PM Scholarship Programme
4. Drive the content and intent of the HPWSC.
5. To provide a platform of feed forward/feedback to key stakeholders.

The WASP would comprise representatives from both the athlete and coaching communities and would look to support the current HPSNZ system approach of a performance driven, athlete focused, and coach led. The point of difference however will be in ensuring that there is a gender specific lens prioritising the needs of our elite athletes and coaches to maximise performance and experience.

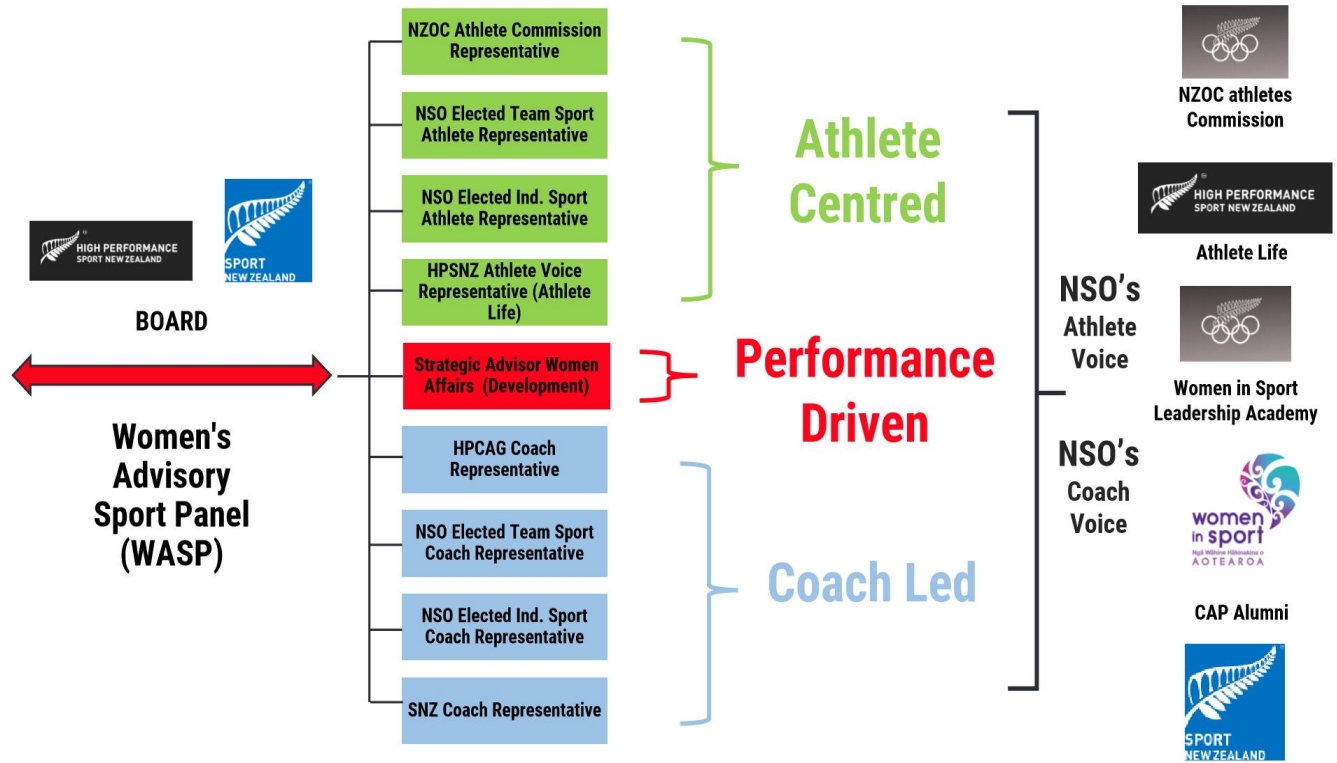


Figure 6 Example of proposed makeup of the Women Advisory Sport Panel

Recommendation Two: Athlete Voice & Coach Voice

Athlete Voice

The current mandate for HPSNZ is “more New Zealanders winning on the world stage” and athletes are expected to be accountable for their performance. In yet, in many cases athletes do not have the opportunity contribute to discussions around their high performance programme, environment and decisions which directly impact them.

If we want athletes to “thrive” as per our definition in this report, they need to have the opportunity to express their views in an inclusive environment and know there is an effective structure or mechanism for their views to be heard and acted upon if they are not being addressed via the existing communication channels.

Since we embarked on this project there has been significant discussion in the world of high performance sport around Athlete Voice or Athlete Representation. The NZOC Athletes’ Commission presented on the topic in June this year and Sport NZ has commissioned sports lawyer Stephen Cottrell to conduct an assessment of the systems and processes that NSOs have in place to safeguard athlete welfare, including looking at whether sports have the right mechanisms in place for athletes to have a “Voice”.

While the need for Athlete Representation/Voice is non-gender specific, in light of our research and own experiences as high performance athletes, we see it as crucial in enabling an optimal culture for high performance female athletes and coaches to thrive.

At the NZOC General Assembly in June this year, Alison Shanks presented on behalf of the Athletes’ Commission and defined Athlete Representation as:

“Formal communication channels within an organisation that ensure an athletes’ view is included to improve decision making and organisational performance”²²

Olympic Bronze Medalist George Bridgewater echoes the need for Athlete Representation/Voice, *“By not listening....or not using some of that expertise or experience, I think there's a lot of value left on the sidelines.”²³*

²² Athletes Commission. (2018). Personal communication.

²³ Bridgewater cited in, Alderson, A (21 June, 2018). New Zealand high performance sport model 'not fit for purpose'. NZ Herald. Retrieved from <https://www.nzherald.co.nz>

In addition, the Chief Executive of Sport NZ, Peter Miskimmin recognises that times are changing. *"For a long time in sport we've had a command and control culture, that's not fit for purpose today. What athletes are saying is that we ought to be involved and want to have confidence to raise issues, and we want to be at the table when decisions are made around us and about us."*²⁴

There are a number of NSOs which have their own Athlete Representative Group in place including Rowing, Snow Sport and Equestrian who we consulted with. There may be more but time has not allowed us to be thorough in talking to all of them and now the Cotterill Review will collect and make available a more comprehensive picture.

It is encouraging to see a number of sports addressing this need already, but we suggest that NSOs need support to put these systems and processes in place. Without some kind of objective system outside of the NSO, the impact of Athlete Representation Groups/Athlete Voice could potentially be limited. There is always going to be a point at which management and coaching team will push back on ideas and concerns raised by athletes and of course coaches and high performance management need to retain this right to a certain extent, but without independent oversight of the process athletes may feel that Athlete Voice/Representation is merely being paid lip service.

We believe there could be merit in HPSNZ providing a platform to facilitate Athlete Voice to ensure that there is a consistency in how Athlete Voice issues are communicated and acted upon. This could either be by employing Athlete Voice Advocates specifically to act for sports or by drawing on existing resource in the form of Athlete Life Advisors.

Case for Athlete Voice Structure Option - HPSNZ Athlete Life Advisor as Athlete Advocate for Athlete Voice

- Existing relationship with athletes for each HPSNZ funded sport
- Deep understanding of the high performance environment
- Professional, confidential and strong communication, facilitation and conflict resolution skills

²⁴ Miskimmin cited in, Alderson, A (21 June, 2018). New Zealand high performance sport model 'not fit for purpose'. NZ Herald. Retrieved from <https://www.nzherald.co.nz>

- Part of role is already “advocate” for athletes individually, Athlete Voice facilitation would be an extension of this to advocate for athletes as a group
- With 14 team members around the country Athlete Life is well placed to be in close contact with athletes and be available to meet for Athlete Rep Group meetings and also offers a cost effective option as they are existing staff at HPSNZ
- A key element of Athlete Life is supporting athletes in developing personal leadership. Facilitating Athlete Voice is a logical extension of this.
- Athletes once selected will need ongoing training and mentoring to have the right skill set and maximise their impact, Athlete Life are currently in this role.
- Athlete Life must remain impartial to the process. An agreed Terms of Reference or Code of Conduct would be necessary to ensure Athlete Life was not seen to be influencing decisions, show bias, make assumptions etc

Proposed Process for Athlete Life/Athlete Advocate

- Each NSO has an election process to name 2-5 athlete to form an Athlete Rep Group
- Athlete Rep Group (ARG) has the responsibility of canvassing their fellow athletes to ascertain their issues, thoughts and concerns
- Athlete Life Sport Lead to meet with ARG monthly/bi-monthly to discuss the issues that ARG want to raise and facilitate further discussion and testing of ideas
- Athlete Life Sport Lead for each sport to capture agreed issues to bring forward to Athlete Voice Advisory Group. This content to be approved by all ARG members.
- Athlete Voice Advisory Group to meet quarterly with Athlete Advocate and member of ARG (rotate athletes attending meetings to ensure reasonable time commitment for athletes)
- CEO to bring the issues presented by ARG rep to the NSO Board
- Athlete Advocate to follow up with CEO after NSO Board meetings to assess progress and report back to ARG.
- In some cases the Athlete Rep may attend the Board meeting if deemed necessary but this would not be a requirement for Athlete Reps. Each sport will need to develop the exact process & structure that works for their environment/context.

If a structure such as Athlete Voice as described is in place, we believe the need for external interventions may be reduced.

Coach Voice

The low number of female coaches operating at the elite level in New Zealand (20%) needs to be addressed with dedicated resources invested to better understand the constraints and potential interventions moving forward. The establishment of the Women Advisory Sport Panel would have female coach representation and therefore a platform and “voice” to identify and initiate change.

What could the Future look like?

What's clear from our research and feedback from the high performance community across the spectrum of sports is that **change is needed** in order to enable a high performance culture and environment for female athletes and coaches to thrive. We believe that the recommendations provided within this report offer a solid basis for a solution to enable this shift.

Should our recommendations be implemented in HPSNZ and the wider high performance system, what will success look like?

- The New Zealand high performance system would be world leading with regards to women's development and gender equity.
- All sports would be included in the Charter led by the proposed Strategic Advisor for Women's Development and the Women's Sport Advisory Board
- Sports would be supportive of this new way of engaging with athletes.
- A collaborative environment would exist between all key stakeholders to ensure that the recommendations deliver on the objectives specified within this report.
- Targeted resourcing and partnerships would be in place to ensure that best practice occurs

Within this report we have provided examples of sporting bodies adapting similar approaches, however there were no measures so far on the impact of their implementation. Being able to provide key data around the impact of these recommendations will be critical. Our recommendation is that such data is based on statistical and experiential feedback. In addition, we believe that developing more "cultural intelligence" across our high performance sport environments is also critical to understanding the needs of our participants. We recommend that additional research is focused on the social and cultural experiences of elite female athletes and coaches to address barriers such as gender ideologies and stereotypes in sport.

To take this project a step further, we believe that there is an opportunity for the NZOC to share the success of the WSLA programme and the project recommendations that have come as a result of it with the IOC, and in turn share our findings with a global audience.

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Abbreviations

WSLA - Women in Sport Leadership Academy

WASP - Women Advisory Sport Panel

HPSNZ - High Performance Sport New Zealand

NGS - non gender-specific

NSO - National Sporting Organisation

RST - Regional Sports Trust

SNZ - Sport New Zealand

NZOC - New Zealand Olympic Committee

HPWSC - High Performance Women in Sport Charter

PEGs – Performance Enhancement Grants

APPENDIX 1: Online survey population

SURVEY RESULTS

WE INTERVIEWED



ALL ROLES



WE ASKED



Do you think there are enough female leaders in key decision-making roles in your high performance sport environment?

"At 2 recent forums (NSO) there were less than 10% of females."

WHAT IF?

What might the impact be of more female leaders in key decision-making roles?

“Strong role-models for female youth.”

“Broader perspective, robust conversation, shared experience.”

“Natural understanding of female perspective.”

APPENDIX 2: What is currently working well?

The following table summarises what is currently working well for athletes, for historically worked for those who have retired.

<p>Funding support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scholarships & programmes that support education, career and provide funding • ACE/Athlete Life Advisors • Support developing life skills and transition out of sport • HPSNZ coach accelerator programme • PEGS • Sharing of support • Quality facilities that are accessible
<p>Coaching and staffing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Objective mentor to consult • Buddy System • Female manager on teams • Gender balanced leadership and management teams • Having a coach who understands the female mindset • Coaches that are genuinely interested in their athletes lives • Providing a supportive yet challenging environment. • Female coaches • Coaches who understand how females operate physically and mentally • People’s ability to value difference • Commitment to the mixed gender team environment, at times separate training sessions and meetings. • Commitment to depart from the status quo • Access to consistent quality coaching • Strong development and performance environment • Being able to remain feminine in " a non feminine sport"

<p>Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership group within the team • Be part of the decision-making process • Surrounded by other engaged and determined females • People’s ability to listen • Honest clear communication with an emphasis on task • Where sexist language jokes and innuendo are not present
<p>Family</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family are accepted on teams • Being able to take children to events • Empathetic and understanding about the unplanned events and challenges that pop up with athlete Mums • Advanced knowledge of training and competitive calendar that remained consistent

APPENDIX 3: Challenges for females in the high performance environment

What are the challenges you see for female athletes and coaches in the high performance environment?

Are there any barriers to those changes that you see?

<p>Gender Inequality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backlash against females being chosen just because they are females. • Leaders should be chosen on merit and ability • We want the best person for the job' - but who is looking? • Old boys' networks • Lack of confidence for some women • Lack of female coaches and support staff • Lack of funding for development opportunities • At HPSNZ level there is a lack of female expertise aligned to female sport • More female Strength and Conditioning Coaches • Lack of funding for development opportunities • At HPSNZ level there is a lack of female expertise aligned to female sport • Transgender athletes
<p>Communication</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sexist labelling of “female” and “male” emotions • Masculine vocabulary • Many coaches live through a win at all cost basis and rely on athlete performance to ensure their own re-selection. • How female athletes are perceived - especially in relation to communication styles, expression of emotion and trust. • In some sports most coaches are male - male vocabulary and point of view.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying what the coach's agenda is and that of the governing body. • Many coaches live through a win at all cost basis and rely on athlete performance to ensure their own re-selection.
<p>Education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The willingness to show vulnerability is seen as a weakness. • Currently males are seen as superior in sport leadership and females expected to adopt male characteristics to survive. • The perception of what a female athlete should look like physically in yet still they have the expectation to perform. The expectation to be "feminine." • Better understanding of females and what makes them tick. Having male coaches understand that females can't do the same as their male counterparts and a better understanding of the developmental stages of a female and the effect that puberty can have on a female.