

Developments in safeguarding and welfare - an update for sport and exercise sciences

Dr Andy Miles FBASES, Dr Zoe Knowles FBASES, Clive Cook, Dr Emma Kavanagh and Katie Richards introduce and stimulate some discussion points in safeguarding and welfare.

Sport and exercise science will always have a key role to play in society's ambitions for enhanced levels of physical activity and success in sport. As such, BASES must remain in touch with the societal issues that affect sport and exercise. Of late the safety, well-being and welfare of those involved in sport and exercise has created negative headlines raising the question of whether such participants are being appropriately safeguarded. BASES has for some time had in place a Safeguarding and Welfare Advisory Group to advise on safeguarding and welfare issues, and provide support and content to BASES members.

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When we begin to talk about safeguarding issues and see the recent high-profile cases being reported, the immediate focus drifts towards child protection. The issues emerging from football have highlighted evidence of historical poor practice and an initial lack of safeguarding practices. A culture of complacency allegedly existed where those responsible for children's well-being were either not suitable to work with children or not equipped to deal with allegations of abuse. Whilst the experiences of former players are very concerning, the issues have also positively highlighted that the policies and practices implemented in the late 1990s, when football developed robust safeguarding procedures, have improved standards of practice and compliance across the game.

In addition, society is beginning to debate whether the cost of sporting success is worth the price that some athletes are having to pay. Sport and exercise scientists are likely to be at the forefront of some of these issues in the various support and research roles that they fulfil. As the media increasingly reports accusations of cultures of bullying and discrimination in some sports; suicide completions by former elite sportspeople unable to cope with the mental health issues arising from retirement; and demands for rule changes and increased injury prevention measures to protect players of all ages (e.g. cardiac screening and concussion), the need for safeguarding evidently stretches beyond just children and young people.

Indeed, as Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson suggests in the introduction to her recent *Duty of Care in Sport Independent Report to Government*, it is “timely for the sport sector to consider Duty of Care in its fullest sense...The sector is arguably under more scrutiny than ever before...the focus must...remain on those in the current system to ensure that they are protected and free from harm, bullying, harassment and discrimination. Although there are processes and safeguards in place, the right culture is still required to ensure they work.” (p.4).

The challenge for any association in eradicating poor practice is ensuring those responsible for overseeing safeguarding keep the well-being of participants at the forefront of their minds. Training and education programmes must ensure that those responsible

are clear on what safeguarding is, how they become aware of signs of abuse/issues and their role in reporting allegations. To this end, the recent *BASES Safeguarding and Welfare Policy* (see pp. 28-29 in this issue), the recently published BASES expert statement (Kavanagh et al., 2016) and the associated BASES Safeguarding and Welfare for Sport and Exercise Scientists workshop seeks to raise awareness of the issues and outline the actions and behaviours expected of members. A clear lesson from the current issues in football is that BASES must continually develop, support and reinforce a robust safeguarding and welfare policy to all those concerned.

Over the coming months the Safeguarding and Welfare Advisory Group will be looking to: increase the rollout of the new workshop to accredited members to increase their awareness of issues; lobby for increased student access to the workshop and the inclusion of safeguarding and welfare issues in the revised BUES criteria for undergraduate programmes; liaise with allied organisations (e.g. CPSU and NSPCC) to ensure appreciation of, and compliance with, research and policy developments in the area; offer updates and advisory notes on contemporary safeguarding issues; present case studies and access (via the BASES website) to resources, links and important research/media/publicly available documents and publish articles as a means of keeping the issue of safeguarding and welfare at the forefront of members' minds as they go about their sport and exercise science practice. ■



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References:

- Grey-Thompson, T. (2017).** *Duty of Care in Sport Independent Report to Government* (On-line). Available: www.gov.uk/government/publications/duty-of-care-in-sport-review
- Kavanagh, K. et al. (2016).** BASES Expert Statement on Safeguarding in the Sport and Exercise Sciences. *The Sport and Exercise Scientist*, 49, 20-21.

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