

Women's Sport Taskforce
20 January 2026
DCMS - 100 Parliament Street

Women's Sport Taskforce - Online Abuse Roundtable - Attendees

Government

- Stephanie Peacock MP, Minister for Sport, Tourism, Civil Society and Youth

Attendees

- Orla McRae (DSIT, Director Security and Online Harms)
- Melanie Dawes (CEO, Ofcom)
- Chris Boardman (Sport England, Chair)
- Alex Rolfe (UK Sport, External Affairs and Media Lead)
- Jessica Walker (Crown Prosecution Service, Deputy Chief Crown Prosecutor)
- Jonathan Hirshler (Signify Group, CEO and Co-Founder)
- Sanjay Bhandari (Kick it Out, Chair)
- James MacDougall (The FA, Head of Corporate Affairs)
- Alex Teasdale (RFU, Executive Director Women's Game)
- Hen Cowen (ECB, Senior Communications Manager)
- Fran Connolly (England Netball, CEO)
- Genevieve Gordon Thomson (Professional Players Federation/Commercial and Legal Director, Netball Players Association)
- Michael Bourne (LTA, Performance Director)
- Nikki Doucet (Women's Super League Football, CEO)
- Sam Baker (UK Football Policing Unit, Hate Crime Lead)

Actions:

1. **ACTION: DCMS to launch a Women's Sport Online Abuse Forum, which the sector will subsequently own, in order to share ways of tackling emerging challenges.**
2. **ACTIONS: CPS to:**
 - a. **Assist with liaising with and educating industry/the sport sector in relation to offences, evidence gathering, ancillary orders, victim/community impact statements, court/trial process and general information sharing and exchange (case studies etc).**
 - b. **Work with industry/the sport sector and policing to produce CPS guidance either as a standalone or encompassed within our existing guidance, specific to online criminality against female athletes.**
 - c. **Work with industry/the sport sector and policing working on major women's sporting events to produce guidance/a playbook to assist with recognising and triaging online abuse incidents effectively.**
 - d. **Work with industry/the sport sector and policing to produce guidance to community/grassroots sport to recognise and report online abuse incidents effectively.**
3. **ACTION: UKFPU to summarise for the Minister resources allocated to responding to online abuse a) in women's football and b) in wider women's sport.**

4. **ACTION : Signify to offer training and education to industry and athletes regarding how to:**
 1. **Understand unique challenges facing female athletes; and**
 2. **Triage incidents of online abuse**

Meeting Minutes

AGENDA ITEM 1: Welcome & Opening Remarks

- The Minister for Sport welcomed members to the meeting and thanked them for their attendance and commitment to women's sport. The Minister noted that the Secretary of State is also keenly interested in this area.
- The Minister noted abuse can have a profound impact on athlete confidence. She noted that female athletes face a vulnerability when being placed into a national or international spotlight and that athletes whose income can be dependent on social media, should not be expected to remove themselves from the online environment.
- The Minister highlighted her support for the work of the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office as part of their strategy for tackling Violence against Women and Girls.
- The Minister noted the need for the Women's Sport Taskforce and industry to place a focus on practical actions in order to drive change.

AGENDA ITEM 2: The Online Safety Act & Ofcom Guidance: A Safer life online for Women & Girls

- DSIT summarised obligations under the Online Safety Act, recognising the role of Ofcom as the regulator in enforcing the Act.
- Ofcom noted that it was unable to refer to specific ongoing investigations but that it was focused on the accountability of social media entities.
- Ofcom referred to intimate image abuse and cyberflashing as current areas of focus.
- Ofcom referred to the recent publication of guidance: **A Safer life online for Women & Girls** noting there will be a report in the first half of 2027 that will identify platforms which are not seriously implementing their safety guidance for women and girls.
- The Minister confirmed an intention to continue to convene the sector in the run up to major domestically hosted UK women's sport events such as the 2026 Women's T20 Cricket World Cup.
- **ACTION: DCMS to launch a Women's Sport Online Abuse Forum, which the sector will subsequently own, in order to share ways of tackling emerging challenges.**

AGENDA ITEM 3: Women's Football Case Study

- WSLF noted that certain nuances exist in the way that female elite athletes often experience online abuse.
- WSLF summarised a recent case of an elite female athlete receiving online abuse and noted the abuse players face (including abuse relating to body image) impacts performance and participation.

- In the UK, WSLF are actively collaborating with other football partners to find the right tools and right actions to tackle this type of abuse.
- From an international perspective WSLF are liaising with the WNBA and sharing best practice.

AGENDA ITEM 4: Criminal online abuse

- The Crown Prosecution Service outlined the role of the CPS and flagged a number of relevant offences, also referring to case studies that were specific to sport.
- The CPS noted the existence of hate crime case uplifts, special measures, ancillary orders, restraining orders, stalking protection orders and community impact statements as tools that could be utilised as part of the criminal court process.
- **ACTIONS: CPS to:**
 - **Assist with liaising with and educating industry/the sport sector in relation to offences, evidence gathering, ancillary orders, victim/community impact statements, court/trial process and general information sharing and exchange (case studies etc).**
 - **Work with industry/the sport sector and policing to produce CPS guidance either as a standalone or encompassed within our existing guidance, specific to online criminality against female athletes.**
 - **Work with industry/the sport sector and policing working on major women's sporting events to produce guidance/a playbook to assist with recognising and triaging online abuse incidents effectively.**
 - **Work with industry/the sport sector and policing to produce guidance to community/grassroots sport to recognise and report online abuse incidents effectively.**
- **ACTION: UKFPU to summarise for the Minister the resources allocated to responding to online abuse a) in women's football and b) in wider women's sport.**

AGENDA ITEM 5: Online Abuse that does not cross the criminal threshold

- Ethical data company Signify presented to the group - focusing on liaison with social media platforms, police and clubs/leagues and the importance of trust in reporting.
- Signify summarised unique challenges faced by female athletes - and provided examples of how these are managed during e.g. a weekend of WSL matches. summarising the route to referral of matters that did not meet the criminal threshold.
- Signify noted education work provided by Kick it Out and internal industry routes to dealing with inappropriate conduct e.g banning orders.
- **ACTION : Signify to offer training and education to industry and athletes regarding how to:**
 - 1. Understand unique challenges facing female athletes; and**
 - 2. Triage incidents of online abuse**

AGENDA ITEM 7: CLOSING REMARKS

- The Minister reflected on the positive actions coming from the meeting and instructed DCMS officials to follow up on all actions.

- The Minister reflected on discussions around the need for tailored education and how the Women's Sport Online Abuse Forum could provide a practical platform to enhance sector knowledge and cross collaboration in this space.