

Women in Sport Leadership Research

A research report exploring the views and lived experiences of women and men operating in sport at a leadership level across Ireland.

Contents

Section 1: Introduction and Background

3

Section 2: Methodology

4

Section 3: Emerging Themes

6

Theme One: Allyship and Support Networks

6

Theme Two: Inclusive Culture

9

Theme Three: Work-life Balance

11

Theme Four: Confidence and Self-Belief

13

Section 4: Recommendations and Future Support for Leaders in Sport

15

Ongoing Monitoring

16

Mentorship and Support Networks

16

Tailored Training and Education

18

Work-life Balance Support

20

Summary

21

Section 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction

Over the past five years, there has been a substantial increase in the number of women on boards across sport in Ireland. To continue to develop a welcoming and inclusive environment for female and male leaders, Sport Ireland is monitoring and researching the views of women and men in leadership roles. By capturing some of their views and lived experiences, Sport Ireland can identify areas for improvement, better plan for future supports, and highlight and learn from areas of best practice. For the purpose of this research, a leader is defined as someone working at senior management level or holding voluntary board or senior committee positions in a National Governing Body (NGB), Local Sports Partnership (LSP) or other Sport Ireland funded bodies (e.g. the Olympic Federation of Ireland, the Federation of Irish Sport, etc.).

1.2 Context and Background

1.2.1 Policy Context: Women in Sport Policy

Sport Ireland's vision for women in sport is one where women have an equal opportunity to achieve their full potential, while enjoying lifelong participation and involvement in sport. The Sport Ireland Policy on Women in Sport (WIS Policy) was first launched in 2019 with a revised version launched in 2023. The policy identifies four key target areas, Leadership & Governance, Active Participation, Visibility, and Coaching & Officiating which present current gaps and future opportunities for women in sport.

In 2019, women accounted for approximately 24% of board members across National Governing Bodies in Ireland. Since 2020, the Sport Ireland Women in Sport Leadership Snapshot has provided updates on the percentage of women on boards across Irish sport. By November 2024, women made up 48% of board membership across the sector in Ireland. To continue the work in the Leadership and Governance target area in the WIS Policy, one of the key objectives is to ensure the culture within sporting organisations values women's contribution to leadership and governance and sees it as central to the growth and development of their sport. A key action included in the Policy is to "monitor the views of female leaders working/volunteering in sport".



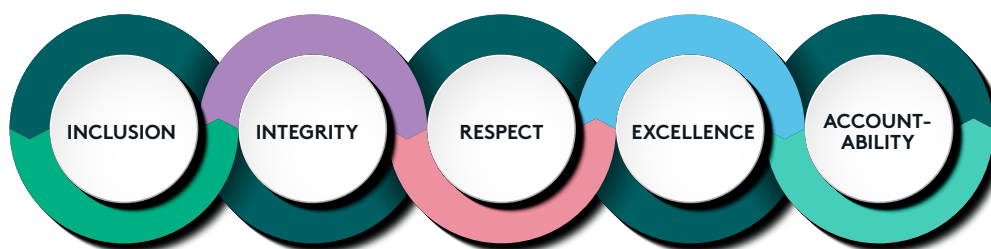
Leadership and Governance, Objective 3, Action 8

"Monitor the views of female leaders working/volunteering in sport"

Sport Ireland commissioned S3 Solutions to support the creation of a research report exploring the views and lived experiences of women and men working and volunteering in sport at a leadership level across Ireland. The report provides contextual background, outlines the purpose of the research and contrasts the female and male perspectives. A brief overview of the methodology can be seen, and, by the in-depth findings, key emerging themes are identified from both quantitative and qualitative results. Finally, the report highlights some key considerations and future recommendations for the sporting community.

1.2.2 Sport Ireland

Sport Ireland is the statutory authority tasked with leading, advocating and providing directed investment for the development of sport in Ireland. This includes, but is not limited to, participation in sport, high performance sport, anti-doping, coaching and the development of the Sport Ireland Campus. Sport Ireland's mission is to ensure that Ireland is an active nation where everyone is encouraged to participate, progress and achieve in sport. The values underpinning Sport Ireland's work in the development of sport in Ireland include:



Section 2: Methodology

2.1 Introduction

Between October and December 2024, a mixed method approach was used to capture the views of female and male leaders in Irish sport by integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a deeper understanding. The mixed methods allowed for the collection of numerical data to identify broad trends but also in-depth exploration of leaders' experiences and perspectives. Both methods were triangulated to form themes and practical recommendations.

2.2 Survey Consultation

A bespoke survey was created using ImpactReady software to gather the views of leaders in Irish sport. The survey was distributed online to NGBs, LSPs and other funded bodies. There was a total of 239 respondents to the survey, 54% (n=128) were female, and 46% (n=111) were male. Survey findings were analysed based on female and male responses to provide a comparison of their experiences. Participants selected their organisation type (See Figure 1) and current role (See Figure 2). 'Other' responses for organisation type included Sport Ireland and any funded organisation which is not an NGB/LSP.

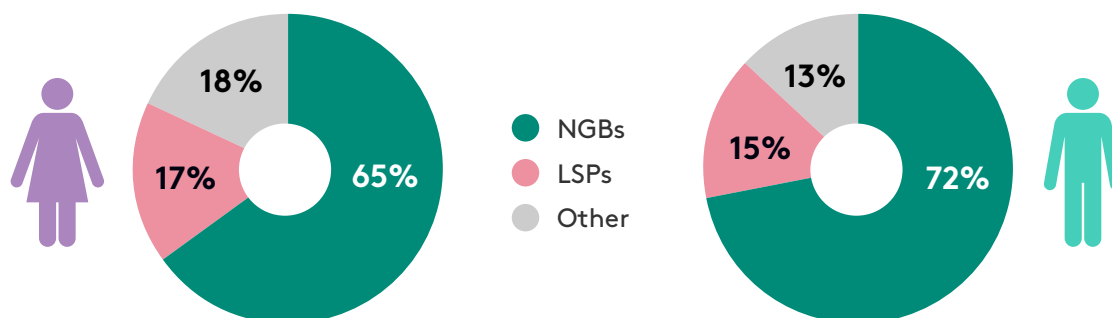


Figure 1. Organisation Type: Female and Male Survey Responses

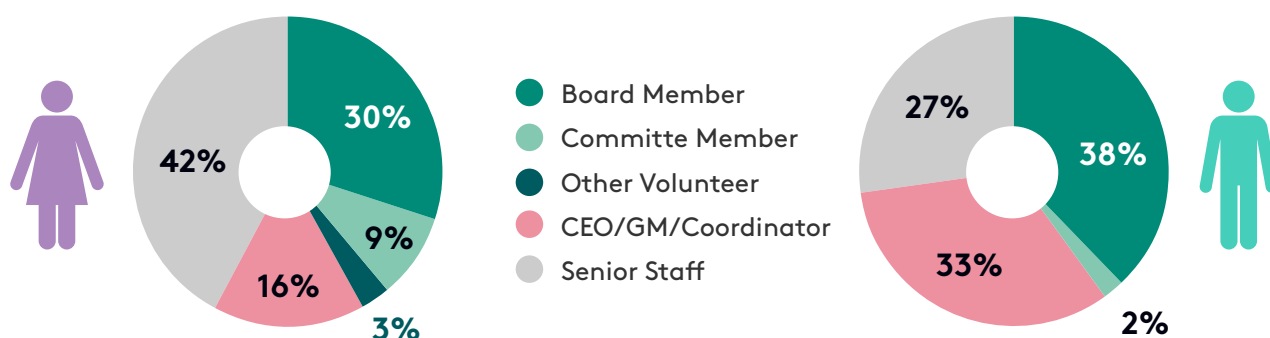


Figure 2. Current Role in your organisation: Female and Male Survey Responses

2.3 Focus Group Consultations

Qualitative online focus groups were run, independent of Sport Ireland. Interview scripts were designed with open ended semi-structured questions to allow participants to speak freely about their experience of being a leader in Irish sport. There were 6 focus groups with 30 total participants (7 male and 23 female). Each group consisted of employed senior staff members, and voluntary board/committee members (See Figure 3). All 7 male participants were from NGBs, 18 female participants were from NGBs, 2 of which were Volunteer led NGB members, and 5 females were from LSPs. Focus groups were transcribed verbatim and deductive thematic analysis took place using NVivo software to allow for key themes to emerge.

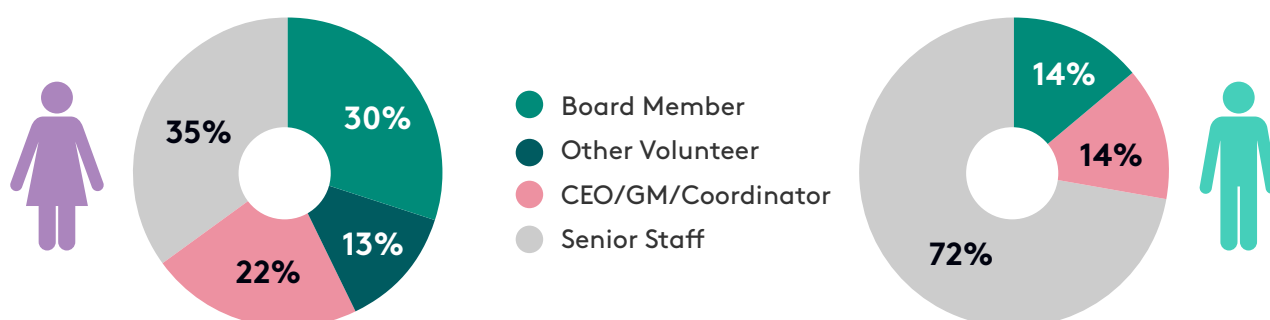


Figure 3. Current Role in your organisation: Female and Male Focus Group Responses

Section 3: Emerging Themes

Following an analysis of findings from survey responses and focus groups, the four themes below emerged. (See Figure 4). The following section provides an in-depth examination of each theme highlighting the female and male perspectives.



Figure 4. Four emerging themes identified from survey and focus group analysis

Theme One: Allyship and Support



Allyship in this context may be defined as male leaders supporting and advocating for gender equality, supporting and advocating for gender equality, the empowerment of women, and the inclusion of women in leadership roles within Irish sport. Survey and focus group participants highlighted the importance of collaborative working between male and female leaders. Furthermore, participants emphasised that support networks are an integral part of leadership, ensuring both female and male leaders feel supported in performing their current role and advancing their careers.

Allyship

Male survey participants were asked to agree or disagree whether they considered themselves to be an ally for promoting gender equality. 95% of male respondents agreed, with 74% strongly agreeing, and 21% somewhat agreeing. The remaining 5% consisted of 1 male participant who did not consider himself to be an ally but would like to be and 4 males who did not consider themselves an ally as they did not feel it was necessary.



**95%
AGREE**

Would you consider yourself an ally in promoting gender quality?

When provided with several examples of how people can show allyship, male survey participants selected the following suggested examples of how they showed allyship:

- by nominating females for leadership roles,
- calling out inappropriate behaviours,
- sponsorship of female leaders through promoting their work and allowing them to step into the limelight to present on their work success.

Similarly, focus group participants discussed the importance of allyship and support from the opposite gender. Within this context, male participants highlighted the added value of having a female ally and mentor with some suggesting they prefer working with female managers over males.

Interestingly, whilst female focus group participants discussed their appreciation for female allies, they felt that having a male ally considerably increased career progression and potential.



“I think those female allies and those connection points that networking and actually talking to somebody who’s gone through it can be underestimated.”

Female Participant No. 14

“Female support is really important, I’m going to be very honest, once you have a male sponsor, it’s stratospheric. The speed between a female supporting you and a male supporting you is not comparable.”

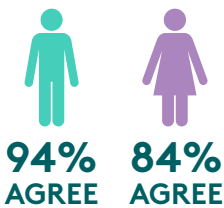
Male Participant No. 22



Ultimately, allyship between female and male leaders in sport helps foster an environment where all individuals, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to succeed and lead, benefiting the entire sports organisation. However, there remains the underlying belief that having a male ally considerably accelerates the rate at which females will progress.

Support

When discussing support, survey participants highlighted that they felt supported in their role by fellow peers, however, a gender gap is notable between female and male responses.

**84%**
AGREE

“I feel supported in my role by my fellow peers”

Survey participants were asked if they have ever had a mentor (official or unofficial) to help them grow as a leader. A majority had a mentor who helped a lot, however, 22% of females and 21% of males suggested that whilst they had a mentor, they would have liked more support. Additionally, 23% of females and 22% of males did not have a mentor but would have liked one (See Figure 5). Furthermore, the data reveals gender-based trends in mentorship, with women nearly evenly split between male and female mentors, while men were significantly more likely to have male mentors.

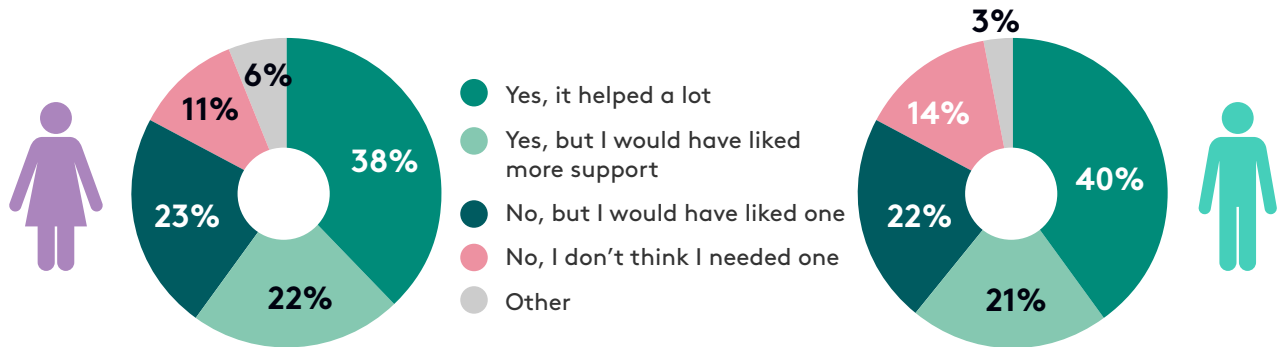


Figure 5. Having a mentor to help grow as a leader: Female and Male Survey Responses

Focus group participants echoed the survey findings by highlighting the importance of peer support and mentors not only within one's organisation, but also the strength in having those support networks from other organisations and mentors who have been through similar career pathways. Furthermore, both female and male participants acknowledged support from the opposite gender.



"It's more of a collaborative thing than someone saying I've done this role before or here's the job description. A lot of the time you lean on that support."

Male Participant No. 23

"I should acknowledge her support, it was mentoring, we probably didn't think of it as that, but there was certainly a lot of support and encouragement available."

Female Participant No. 14

"He's acted as a mentor for me and was my previous boss and someone I admire a lot. I think that's hugely important to have for support."

Female Participant No. 15

"There's a lot to be said for the NGBs in terms of how we network as well, I think most of the guys here on the call at some stage we've probably had a call with."

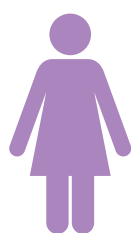
Male Participant No. 31

"I have a female mentor and she's kind of giving me advice in terms of my own career progression, where I want to get to and that type of stuff. So, she's got really good insight into steps I should be taking".

Male Participant No. 31

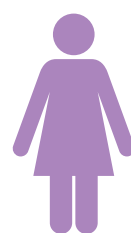


Finally, female survey participants were asked about their participation in a Women in Sport Network with only 34% of females reporting they were currently involved. Of those who were not part of a network, 79% indicated they would like access to one (a small percentage answered, 'don't know' and 'unsure' for the above questions). This highlights the need for increasing the number and widening access to Women in Sport Networks to promote greater inclusivity and ensuring that all women can benefit from the opportunities and resources these networks provide.



Are you part
of a Women in
Sport Network?

52% NO **34%** YES



Would you like to have
access to a Women in
Sport Network?

5% NO **79%** YES

Theme Two: Inclusive Culture



An inclusive culture in sport leadership promotes diversity and equity, while fostering an environment where all individuals feel valued, respected and empowered, enabling them to achieve their full potential. In the context of the current research, an inclusive culture may signify a shared belief that leadership roles are accessible to all, with systems in place to support both female and male leaders. Survey participants were asked to rate the gender balance in leadership roles within their current organisation. The majority of male (78%) and female (69%) respondents suggested a four- or five-star rating for gender balance in their organisation. However, females perceived the gender balance to be slightly lower than their male counterparts (See Figure 6).

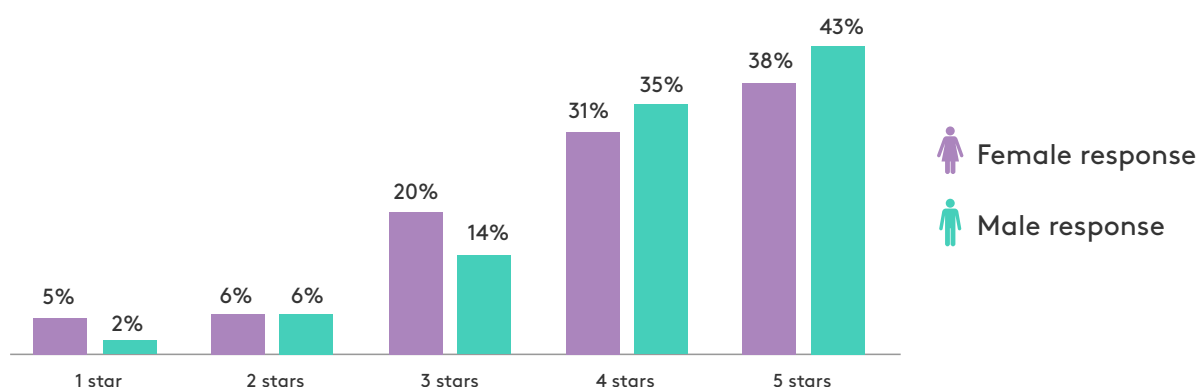


Figure 6. Rating gender balance in your organisation: Female and Male Survey Responses

Similarly, focus group participants echoed the quantitative findings highlighting the relatively positive gender balance in leadership positions. Whilst some females still perceived there to be slightly more male leaders, they highlighted no real bias.



"There's probably more male, but there is definitely no gender bias. I think there's no difference to anybody with age or gender.

Female Participant No. 16



Survey participants were asked to agree or disagree to a several statements in relation to their organisation and their experience within their current leadership role.



Both female and male respondents agree that their organisation fosters a supportive and inclusive environment, where they feel their voice is heard, their expertise and input is appreciated, and they are proud to be part of their organisation. However, when responding to “I feel men and women are heard and respected equally”, 92% of males and 78% of females agreed to the statement. Whilst this remains a reasonably high percentage for females, there is a noticeable difference between female and male perspectives.

Notably, a significantly higher number of women than men reported experiencing comments related to their gender or having to escalate a workplace grievance. Although participants were not asked to provide further details, the disparity highlights a clear gap between the experiences of women and men in the workplace.



Similar gender balance differences appeared around barriers accessing leadership roles. Women are almost twice as likely than men to report facing barriers to accessing leadership roles. Those who reported that they faced a barrier or were unsure, were asked a follow up question about the barriers they faced.

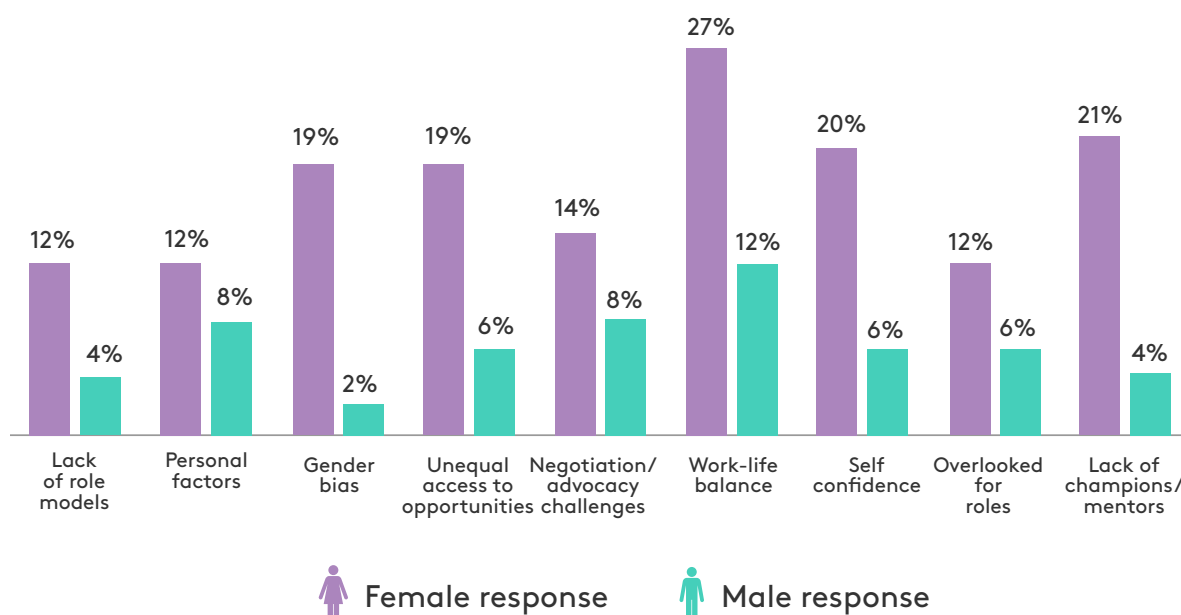


Figure 7. Barriers experienced accessing leadership roles: Female and Male Survey Responses

Female and male participants experienced a range of similar barriers to leadership. Work-life balance is the most prominent barrier for both genders. However, significant differences are apparent for every barrier. For example, 21% of females felt a lack of champions/mentors was a barrier in comparison to only 4% of males. 19% of females selected gender bias while only 2% of males felt this was a barrier. This reiterates the sizable differences in female and male experiences.

Overall, while their organisation may be supportive and inclusive at a general level, the experiences of female leaders suggest that inclusivity does not always translate into equality in leadership opportunities. Women continue to face barriers and challenges that their male counterparts do not, or at least, not to the same degree, indicating that systemic gender inequalities persist even in otherwise positive organisational cultures. This highlights the need for organisations to not only promote inclusivity but also actively address these barriers to ensure true equality in leadership roles.

Theme Three: Work-life Balance



Work-life balance is a critical yet complex issue for leaders in Irish sport, where the demands of working/volunteering in sport often clash with personal and family commitments. Being a leader in sport brings its own unique challenges due to the irregular working/volunteering hours, frequent travel, and the pressure to deliver results.

Both women and men (27% female, 12% male) selected work-life balance as the most common barrier to accessing leadership roles (See Figure 7). However, female and male focus group participants had different perspectives on the type of issues they associated with work-life balance.

Additionally, survey participants were asked if they had children under the age of 18 and how having children has impacted on their career progression and leadership. A considerable difference is evident between female and male responses, with 53% of women suggesting it had a negative impact compared to only 24% of males. Furthermore, 34% of males felt parenthood had a positive impact on their career progression, whilst only 12% of females agreed (See Figure 8).



Figure 8. Impact of Parenthood on Career Progression

Female focus group participants also raised the challenge of familial responsibilities. Women discussed the difficulty in trying to balance their work and family responsibilities particularly when they could not see other female leaders or mentors as an example.



"In terms of childcare or travelling to meetings at 7pm in the evenings when you're cooking dinner for the kids or putting them to bed"

Female Participant No. 1

"Most people that were in senior management didn't have kids, so I thought that wasn't possible if I wanted to get that dream of becoming a CEO"

Female Participant No. 14



Interestingly, whilst male survey participants selected work-life balance as the most common barrier, focus group participants tended to focus more on the challenge of working later and longer hours in an industry that has a lower pay scale. Male participants did also acknowledge the challenge for females historically being the primary caregiver.



"The reward is not money but the impact we have on the ground to our sport, to our volunteers, to our athletes, sometimes it's more rewarding than the money itself. So, life balance is an issue."

Male Participant No. 27

"I don't think it has shifted from the traditional family norms in terms of a lot of the time, it is still left to the female to be the primary caregiver."

Male Participant No. 28



While both female and male respondents face challenges in balancing personal and professional responsibilities, women in leadership roles experience additional societal or organisational pressures related to expectations about caregiving or family responsibilities, which can create barriers to sustained leadership. As a result, women are twice as likely to feel parenthood has a negative impact on their career with men three times more likely to feel it has a positive impact. Furthermore, with fewer female role models visible in top leadership positions in sport successfully balancing work and family responsibilities, this can lead to a sense of isolation for aspiring female leaders.

Theme Four: Confidence and Self-Belief

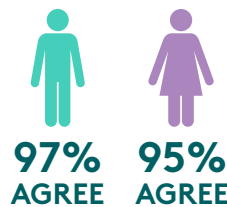


Confidence and self-belief are fundamental qualities for leaders in sport, enabling them to navigate challenges, and make decisive choices in high-pressure environments. For female leaders, cultivating these traits is particularly significant, as they often operate in historically male-dominated spaces. Confidence allows leaders to assert their vision and influence, while self-belief provides the inner assurance to overcome setbacks and persist through adversity. Survey participants were asked to rate to which extent they agree or disagree with five statements in relation to their own skills, experience and efforts.

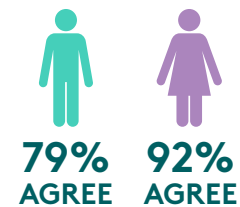
**"I have the skills
needed to be in my
leadership role"**



**"I have the experience
needed to be in my
leadership role"**



**"I achieve in my
leadership role as a result
of my own efforts"**



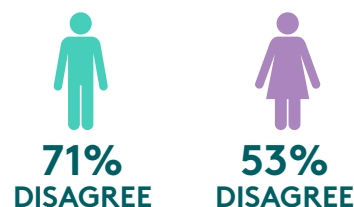
The overwhelming majority of female and male survey participants agreed that they have the skills and experience to be in their leadership role. Interestingly, when asked about achieving in their role as a result of their own efforts, 92% of females agreed, higher than 79% of males. There may be many potential reasons for this difference which could warrant further exploration in future studies.

Survey participants were also asked to agree or disagree with statements relating to how they feel when they're with other leaders in Irish sport.

**"When I'm with other leaders in Irish
sport, I sometimes feel like I don't
belong there "**



**"When I'm with other leaders in Irish
sport, I sometimes feel like I don't have
the experience to be there "**



Notably a higher proportion of males disagreed with the statements than females. Even though both genders previously rated their experience and skill level highly, women were more likely to report reduced confidence (feeling like they don't belong or don't have the experience) when in the company of other leaders.

Focus group participants had contrasting views at the surface level when discussing their own confidence and self-belief. Similar to the survey findings highlighting a potential lack of confidence based on the environment and company, focus group participants discussed their experiences of being one of the few female leaders and how this impacted on them.



"I had the opportunity to go to world leaders' conference. You're the only female sitting in a room and I think I went to one conference and didn't talk to anyone for over 24 hours because I just felt I wasn't confident to do so."

Female Participant No. 6



In addition, female focus group participants also highlighted their initial lack of confidence and self-belief when considering any career progressions. This insight suggests that there may be a temporal difference associated with confidence and self-belief, where women feel less confident in applying for roles, but develop confidence once appointed to leadership positions.



"I think on at least 4 occasions I had declined the opportunity to apply for the role because I felt the organisation deserved somebody who was better"

Female Participant No. 8

"Putting myself forward for this role was a big step for me coming out of my comfort zone. Even putting in the application for the for the interview I was doubting myself, and it was my coordinator telling me you're well able for this job, but I still had that doubt in myself."

Female Participant No. 5



Interestingly confidence and self-belief were not openly discussed by male focus group participants, rather their perspective focussed on a positive slant highlighting the increased responsibility they received when progressing in their career.



"When you're a development officer you're implementing projects handed down to you, you're just doing as you're told. When you get to senior management, you have more responsibility of setting the agenda and setting the strategic plan and setting the division of the sport."

Male Participant No. 28



Women highlighted the need for mentors and support networks to assist them in the first instance before they would consider themselves for promotions or career progressions. Whilst it may seem that on a general level, this supports previous research that females possess a lack of confidence in applying for a role, the survey findings highlight that once operating in the role, females do so confidently and trust they have the knowledge and skills required to excel.

Section 4: Recommendations and Future Support for Leaders in Sport

As the landscape of sport continues to evolve, providing robust support for leaders has become increasingly critical to ensure the growth, inclusivity, and sustainability of organisations. Survey and focus group participants provided several strategies and suggestions where future support for leaders in Irish sport could be enhanced. The following suggestions were categorised into three main areas for support (See Figure 9).

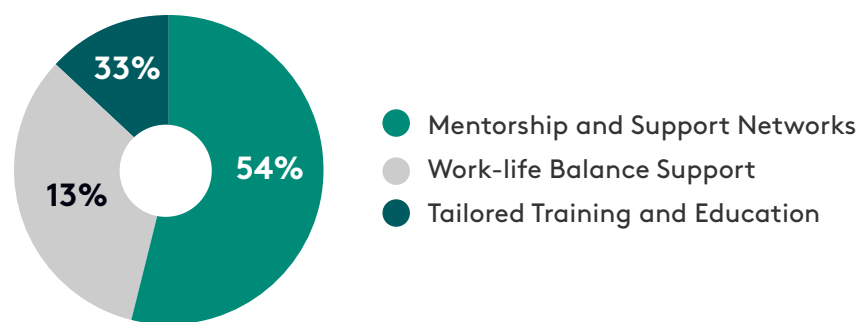


Figure 9. Suggested strategies for future support: Survey responses

The consultations carried out with various leaders in Irish sport have highlighted many of the strengths and progress made in making sport leadership more gender equitable. However, several areas of work have also been identified which could lead to an even more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable environment.

The following recommendations are informed by feedback from the survey and focus group consultations and are designed to address areas for development, while building a more supportive and adaptable sporting environment. Four key areas for future recommendations have been provided (See Figure 10).

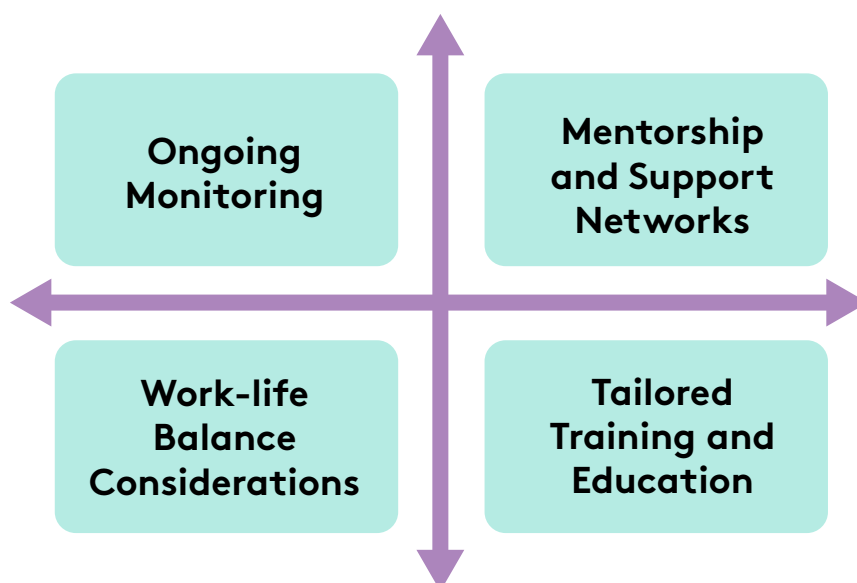


Figure 10. Future recommendations for consideration

Ongoing Monitoring

The current report has delivered the first step in relation to Action 8 of the WIS policy by providing a baseline for monitoring and researching *“the views of female leaders working/volunteering in sport”*. However, continued monitoring of the experiences and views of female and male leaders in Irish sport will be necessary to deliver on the policy objectives.

Consideration should be given to increasing the range of sport leaders included in surveys from grassroots to elite levels and adopt strategies to include more information on the experience of those from minority groups.

Future monitoring should provide particular focus on the culture within sporting organisations, as well as the challenges, barriers and supports required for sustained work-life balance and maternity considerations.

Finally, monitoring and support around areas such as gender proofing job descriptions, advice on job descriptions and board recruitment applications, etc., may help ensure women are more likely to apply for roles.

Mentorship and Support Networks

54% of participants highlighted mentorship and support networks as the most important future support. Structured mentorship programmes should focus on connecting experienced leaders with emerging talent and positioning mentorship as a cornerstone of leadership growth. However, there appears to be a gap in mentoring and support networks at an executive level for more senior leaders. More executive style coaching would also be welcomed by this cohort.

Successful female leaders should be showcased as role models through public campaigns, networking events, and case studies to inspire and empower others. Providing continued training and education for mentors will ensure they can provide meaningful guidance and support. Additionally, continued growth and expansion of Women in Sport Networks, will foster collaboration, visibility, and opportunities for aspiring female leaders.

The availability of funding to NGBs, LSPs and other funded bodies is integral to supporting the sector in providing mentorship, support networks and other training and education that creates inclusive environments.

54% of survey respondents (54% of females and 57% of males) suggested the need for continued mentorship and support networks to assist both female and male leaders excel in their career.



“Ensuring we provide the right environment and support network for any leader and recognise that every situation has its own nuances, but ensure we provide an environment and opportunity for all to flourish.”

Male Survey Response

“Understand more of how to change the system to improve gender equity, not just the women. Mentorship programs targeting at executive levels of functioning and not just confidence-building the person.”

Female Survey Response

“Targeted campaigns at the right candidates. Sometimes just a bit of encouragement to build confidence is all it takes. We need to be proactive.”

Male Survey Response

“I think just create more of those opportunities of coming together, sharing experiences, sharing knowledge meetups.”

Female Participant No. 1



In addition, both female and male participants discussed the need to support and mentor the opposite gender. Suggested strategies for continued mentorship and support networks involved providing support for upcoming female and male leaders. Participants would also welcome facilitated learning from other sport organisations in terms of leadership.



“Having more male allies and including men in the discussion to advocate for women would really help current and future leaders.”

Female Survey Response



Tailored Training and Education

33% of survey respondents (36% of females and 29% of males) highlighted tailored training and education that is accessible for all. This included providing training and education for employed staff during working hours and offering evening and weekend training and education for voluntary board/committee members to fit around their day jobs.



"Having trainings available after 6pm during the week and weekends would make them more accessible for people who are volunteering in leadership roles outside of their normal work."

Female Survey Response

"The delivery of more programmes outside Dublin is needed, with more of a focus on regional and local delivery."

Male Survey Response



Hybrid or online formats (recorded or live) may assist with time constraints along with providing in-person sessions at a local and regional level. The provision of a qualification/certificate or accredited training/education would be welcomed by most, as well as a means of supporting senior leaders to progress at international level.

Organisations should explore the potential to partner or collaborate with corporate and academic institutions to enable the delivery of high-quality training and mentorship for both aspiring female leaders and those already operating at the highest leadership/governance level in their organisation. Ensuring the continued provision of funding supports to NGBs and LSPs will enable them to provide leadership and professional development opportunities to their staff/members/community thus further empowering individuals to grow and succeed in their roles.



"Having trainings available after 6pm during the week and weekends would make them more accessible for people who are volunteering in leadership roles outside of their normal work."

Female Survey Response

"The delivery of more programmes outside Dublin is needed, with more of a focus on regional and local delivery."

Male Survey Response



Furthermore, participants discussed how awareness training on gender balance would assist in the development of increasing female leaders. Both female and male respondents acknowledged the need for awareness around gender balance and its benefits. This highlights the possible need to create training and education around the topic of allyship, inclusive culture and unconscious bias.



“Training on the fundamental difference in gender traits would be helpful in assisting the need for, and benefit of, gender balance.”

Female Survey Response

“More focus on education and the benefits of better decision making/outcomes as a result of gender balance.”

Male Survey Response



Finally, participants acknowledged that future support for leaders needs to be tailored to suit not only the individual and the role, but also to each organisation.



“The right course at the right time is important. Even getting advice on that. If you’re moving into a governance role that you’re doing a course alongside it, that’s actually relevant.”

Male Participant No. 23

“Strategies for training and education need to be dependent on where the organisation is and cannot be evaluated in isolation.”

Female Survey Response



Work-life Balance Support

To support work-life balance and familial responsibilities for leaders, Sport Ireland, NGBs, LSPs and other funded bodies should revise or consider developing family-friendly policies such as flexible work/schedules, remote working and job-sharing.

The sport sector should seek out and make use of targeted resources and training such as time management workshops, mental health support, and wellness programmes to support both female and male leaders in managing work-life integration. Additionally, updating policies on maternity leave and implementing reintegration programmes will support women returning to leadership roles after family leave.



"I feel that every sport needs to have a focus on wellbeing and include in that family-friendly policies, flexibility, education, and awareness around menopause."

Female Survey Response

"More family-friendly work environments would be all encompassing of progress for both mothers and fathers."

Male Survey Response



Furthermore, female participants highlighted the need for maternity considerations to assist with increasing female leaders by making policies more attractive rather than maternity being seen as a potential hinderance to career progression.



"Cultural audits in organisations. Exploring if a gender pay gap exists. Financial support to NGBs/LSPs to put maternity cover/support in place."

Female Survey Response

"Work towards a situation where maternity cover is funded for staff going on maternity leave. This may start with part-funding with the intention to fully fund over time."

Female Survey Response



Overall, female and male participants collectively provided a myriad of suggested future support for leaders in Irish sport. These strategies and suggestions will not only help attract and retain women in sport, but provide support for all leaders, regardless of gender or position.

Summary

This report has provided a detailed exploration of the views and lived experiences of both female and male leaders in Irish sport. The research highlighted that whilst a gender balanced and inclusive culture in Irish sport is growing, female leaders still experience more barriers and challenges in gaining and sustaining leadership positions than their male colleagues. A sense of a growing inclusive culture comes with the caveat that females noted experiences of inequalities and rated the gender balance in leadership roles within their current organisation to be slightly lower than their male counterparts.

Participants suggested areas for future support that would assist with both current and future leaders. As a result, four key areas have been provided for consideration by the sport sector:

**1.
Ongoing
Monitoring**

**2.
Mentorship
and Support
Networks**

**3.
Work-Life
Balance
Considerations**

**4.
Tailored
Training and
Education**

By considering and adopting some of the suggested recommendations, the inclusive culture in Irish sport can grow.

This will not only benefit female leaders, but also strengthen the overall quality, innovation, and impact of leadership within the sporting community.

