

# BRITISH FENCING GENDER POLICIES FOR LICENSED EVENTS

---

**Last Updated:** 6<sup>th</sup> September 2024

**Approved by board:** 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024

**Effective from:** 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025

## 1. DEFINITIONS

**Gender:** The UK government defines gender as:

- a social construction relating to behaviours and attributes based on labels of masculinity and femininity; gender identity is a personal, internal perception of oneself and so the gender category someone identifies with may not match the sex they were assigned at birth
- where an individual may see themselves as a man, a woman, as having no gender, or as having a Non-Binary gender – where people identify as somewhere on a spectrum between man and woman

**Cis Gender** - denoting or relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex (cis men, cis women)

**Non-Binary:** Non-binary (an umbrella term that includes genderfluid, genderqueer and other labels): not fitting neatly or exclusively into one of the binary gender categories. A non-binary person may have: a single fixed gender position other than male or female, no gender, a combination of male and female or other genders, or move between male, female and other genders – or they might not identify or agree with the concept of gender entirely.

**Sex:** The UK government defines sex as:

- referring to the biological aspects of an individual as determined by their anatomy, which is produced by their chromosomes, hormones, and their interactions
- generally male or female
- something that is assigned at birth

**Transgender:** A person whose gender identity is different from their physical sex at birth. Those people who, as defined by the Equality Act 2010, share the protected characteristic of gender reassignment, and are described as transsexual people under the legislation.

## BF Gender Policies for Licensed Events

**Gender Affected Activity:** The Equality Act 2010 defines a Gender Affected Activity as a sport, game, or other activity of a competitive nature in circumstances in which the physical strength, stamina, or physique of average persons of one sex would put them at a disadvantage compared to average persons of the other sex as competitors in events involving the activity.

**Home Nations Organisations:** (also known as Home Countries): England Fencing, Scottish Fencing, Welsh Fencing, NI Fencing and Channel Islands

**International Events:** Any fencing event run under the auspices of the International Olympic Committee, International Paralympic Committee, International Fencing Federation (FIE), European Fencing Confederation or other international competition for which BF has jurisdiction.

**Licensed Compete Event:** Any British Fencing (BF) Compete level licensed event run according to a traditional competition format under FIE/BF competition rules including all official ranking competitions, county, regional and national championships, and events providing a qualification pathway.

**Licensed Recreational Event:** Any British Fencing (BF) Licensed Recreational event run under the auspices of BF which meets the criteria of non-competitive as defined on the BF website. A non-exhaustive list of examples would be non-traditional format events, training camps, mixed team events, all plastic events, come and try sessions and so on.

**Unlicensed Recreational Activity:** Fencing activities that do not require a BF event licence. A non-exhaustive list of examples would include GB League, club activities, coached sessions, intra and inter club friendlies. These activities are not covered by these policies.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

British Fencing (BF) aims to create safe, inclusive and welcoming environments for everyone participating in fencing. We also recognise our responsibility to provide safe, fair and meaningful competition at all levels of development and performance from community to international level.

The 2010 Equality Act protects everyone in Great Britain against discrimination based on their protected characteristics. Under the Equality Act, there are nine protected characteristics: Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

BF's Equality Policy lays out clearly that the organisation is committed to treating everyone fairly, regardless of their protected characteristics.

BF's Gender Policies for Licensed Events recognises that we live in a diverse society and promotes open access to all those who wish to participate in BF's activities, regardless of gender. BF's Gender Policies for Licensed Events aims to protect the rights of any person, irrespective of sex or gender, to take part in, enjoy, and achieve their potential in fencing, while securing fair competition and safety.

## BF Gender Policies for Licensed Events

BF is determined that the transgender community can access fencing without fear of discrimination or prejudice. People who identify as transgender have the right to be treated with dignity and respect and BF operates a zero-tolerance policy on homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia.

The science illustrating the physiological, biological and subsequent sporting performance advantages that adults of the male sex have over adults of the female sex (as an example due to the effects of testosterone during male puberty) is unequivocal.

In addition, the scientific community broadly agrees that the majority of the physiological/biological advantages brought about by male puberty are retained (either wholly or partially) by transwomen post transition (Hilton & Lundberg, 2020 [<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40279-020-01389-3>] and Harper et al., 2021 [<https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/55/15/865>]).

The scientific research examining whether those retained physiological/biological advantages translate into a retained sporting performance advantage for transgender women post transition (compared with pre-transition and/or cis women) is somewhat limited. However, the science that does currently exist strongly challenges the idea that testosterone suppression alone sufficiently removes the retained sporting performance advantage of transwomen (when compared with pre-transition and/or cis women).

In consideration of the available research as of June 2024, BF holds the position that fencing is a gender affected activity and that testosterone suppression has not been shown to negate performance advantage derived as a result of going through puberty as a male. Furthermore BF, in line with the IOC position, does not agree that athletes should be required to by BF to take testosterone suppression drugs to be recognised as a gender and therefore eligible for a competition.

These updated policies have been developed following extensive research and consultation with stakeholders, the fencing community, academics, and other relevant organisations.

### 3. SCOPE

These policies have been produced to clarify participation of people in fencing events in relation to their gender identities and to create a clear framework for taking part in Licensed Fencing Events that is as inclusive and fair as possible. They apply to any person that wishes to participate in a Licensed Event in the Gender Category that does not match their sex as assigned at birth.

These policies do not apply to:

- Unlicensed Fencing Events/Fencing activities that do not require a BF Event Licence.
- Training activities in clubs including inter club and intra club matches.

### 4. REVIEW

These policies comes into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025. They will be reviewed in 2026 following a pilot implementation period. Further changes may affect future eligibility of an individual to participate in certain events.

### 5. THE LAW

The Equality Act 2010 is the main legislation identifying that which is unlawful discrimination in the UK. It prohibits discrimination based on protected characteristics which include sex, gender reassignment and religion or similar philosophical belief (which includes gender critical belief). Harassment of a person on grounds of a protected characteristic and victimisation (which is treating someone less favourably because they make or support a complaint about discrimination) is against the law. Please refer to BF's Equality Policy for more information on our commitment to providing equal access to opportunity.

The Equality Act permits separate sex sport where the sport is a Gender Affected Activity. A sport is a Gender Affected Activity if the physical strength, stamina, or physique of average persons of one sex would put them at a disadvantage to average persons of the other sex, as competitors in events involving the sport. British Fencing considers all fencing bouts to be Gender Affected Activity.

The Equality Act also permits restrictions on participation by trans people in Gender-Affected Activity where necessary in order to secure fair competition or the safety of competitors.

BF will support organisations involved with the delivery of events and competitions to ensure fairness and will investigate fully any complaints relating to unfair exclusion from fencing.

5.1 The Gender Recognition Act 2004 allows trans people to change their legal gender if they wish to. BF is fully committed to providing support, advice and guidance to its staff, clubs, committees, coaches, volunteers, and participants to ensure trans people can continue their participation in fencing whilst and after transitioning.

5.2 We recognise that holding a Gender Recognition certificate allows trans people to be legally recognised in their affirmed gender and to be issued with a new birth certificate. However, the Gender Recognition Act permits a sporting body to restrict the participation of a person holding a Gender Recognition Certificate in a Gender Affected Activity where necessary in order to secure fair competition or the safety of competitors. Therefore holding a Gender Recognition Certificate does not always entitle a trans person to compete in their "acquired gender".

The law recognises a trans person's right to privacy and confidentiality over their trans status. Anyone who has transitioned and feels their history has not been treated confidentially or has experienced transphobia whilst involved in fencing (in any capacity), can contact BF for advice and support.

## BF Gender Policies for Licensed Events

5.3 At the time of these Policies being approved, the International Fencing Federation (the FIE) position is under review in response to the International Olympic Committee draft framework published in 2021. In summary, this IOC framework suggests transgender women should no longer be required to reduce their testosterone levels to compete in a women's sport category and says there should be no presumption that trans women have an automatic advantage over cis gender women. This framework replaces the 2015 guidance which many IFs align with and will place responsibility on IFs to develop evidence-based policies. In devising this policy, BF has had regard to the IOC framework and has considered carefully the current scientific evidence surrounding the physiological differences between males and females and how those affect sporting performance in fencing.

5.4 In developing these Policies, BF have considered the Equality Act 2010 (as amended), the Gender Recognition Act 2004, and Sport Council Equality Group (SCEG) guidance. It recognises the right of an individual who has transitioned to participate in sport in their affirmed gender whilst ensuring that such participation does not unfairly affect competition and does not affect the safety of fellow competitors.

## 6. POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION

Currently the FIE does not have a published policy in place but for practical purposes follow the pre 2021 IOC guidelines (see Appendix A) which applied to all international level sport. BF's previous Competition Gender Policy was created following the IOC Policy and guidance from the IOC as set out in the Statement of the Consensus Meeting on Sex Reassignment and Hyperandrogenism (Nov 2015).

The FIE is currently reviewing its policies based on the 2021 IOC Framework on Fairness, Inclusion and Non-Discrimination on the basis of Gender Identity and Sex Variations. Any changes to the current FIE policy will result in a review of these policies. This may result in changes to eligibility criteria to participate in certain events.

Should there be a need to verify any information with the FIE this will be done confidentially through BF's Chief Medical Officer.

Where competitions held in the UK are directly licenced by the FIE, for those entries not made by BF, BF will permit people to compete in accordance with the relevant FIE policy. Where BF is required to select and enter athletes, 9.2 applies.

## 7. MEMBERSHIP

BF's policy on membership is that a member may chose the gender stated on their membership.

If an existing BF member wishes to change their gender on their membership, they are able to do this within the 'My Profile' section of their membership account. Where a prospective member

## BF Gender Policies for Licensed Events

would like to obtain membership in a gender other than their sex at birth, they will be able to choose their identified gender freely when obtaining their membership.

The BF Membership gender setting does not define eligibility to participate in events and therefore not does not override the provisions of these Policies.

## 8. GENDER POLICY FOR RECREATIONAL EVENTS/ACTIVITY

### 8.1 Licensed Recreational Events

Licensed Recreational Events are covered by this Policy. These are non-traditional fencing events offered out to the wider fencing community. The types of events that fall under the category of licensed recreational events include come and try events, regional training days, mixed team events, formats that don't align to classic competitive structures. All plastic fencing events fall under the recreational event category.

[Information on Licensing Recreational Events.](#)

Licensed Recreational Events allow clubs, counties and regions to embrace opportunities to provide fencing experiences aimed at people who wish to engage in fencing in different and less traditional ways.

BF's Policy on Licensed Recreational Events is:

- Recreational Event organisers are permitted to restrict participation in these events based on protected characteristics to meet local community needs, however this must be clearly stated on the joining instructions.
- Where no guidance is provided by the organisers and gender categories exist for the event, Transgender and Non-Binary participants may take part in Licensed Recreational Events in the gender category they wish to.

### 8.2 Un-licensed Recreational Activity

These are Fencing activities that do not require a BF event licence and are not covered by these Policies. Decisions as to any limitations on participation are for local organisers to determine taking into account local community needs and the law.

The below is offered for information purposes. A non-exhaustive list of examples would include GB League, club activities, coached sessions, intra and inter club friendlies.

#### Club Recreational Activities

If clubs are offering gender categorised recreational activities, BF encourages Transgender and Non-Binary participants to take part in club recreational activities in the gender category they wish to.

### GB League

GB League events are club hosted recreational league events open to all members with Recreational or Compete level memberships, irrespective of any protected characteristic including age, sex, gender, disability. These Policies do not change this.

BF and the Home Nation Governing Bodies will provide guidance, education and support to all organisers of Recreational Events and Activities.

## 9. GENDER POLICY FOR COMPETITIVE ACTIVITY

### 9.1 Domestic Licensed Competition

Where an event organiser offers a Licensed Compete Event, they must provide at least one of the following categories of competition:

- Female category
- Mixed<sup>1</sup> category

Application to compete in a Female category: Only people who are female sex at birth and have not started female to male hormone treatment will be eligible to compete in the Female category.

Application to compete in the Mixed category: Transgender (and all other individuals *including* those eligible to compete in the Female category) will be eligible to compete in the Mixed category.

It is recommended, but not mandated, that these categories are held on different days.

BF and UKAD Anti-Doping Regulations will continue to apply.

BF U17/U20/U23 and Senior National Rankings will reflect the categories identified above. No mixed (or international male category event) will count towards the Female category ranking and no Female category event will count towards the Mixed category ranking.

### 9.2 International Competition (FIE/EFC/IWAS)

To be selected for Great Britain in International Events in female/women's category events, only people who are female sex at birth and have not started female to male hormone treatment will be eligible.

---

<sup>1</sup> In other sports this category is commonly termed 'Open'. In fencing the word 'Open' is already widely used in the naming of senior ranking events which are 'Open' to all age 13 and above. Therefore the category will be termed 'Mixed' or 'Mixed/Men's' to indicate this is a replacement for the Men's category.

## BF Gender Policies for Licensed Events

To be issued with an EFC, FIE or IWAS License to compete in the female/women's category events for Great Britain, only competitors who are female sex at birth and have not started female to male hormone treatment, will be eligible notwithstanding all other requirements.

In accordance with the EFC, FIE and IWAS Licensing procedures, competitors with an EFC/FIE/IWAS female/women's category license cannot be entered into a EFC/FIE/IWAS men's category event.

To be selected for Great Britain in International Events in the male category, only people with the associated male EFC/FIE/IWAS men's category license will be eligible.

## 10. VOLUNTEERING AND EMPLOYMENT

These Policies do not affect transgender people in any aspect of volunteering or employment and BF will strive to ensure that the culture of the sport and workplace is supportive and welcoming throughout any transitioning process or as a transgender person.

In accordance with our Equality & Diversity Policy, and other key policies such as the Anti-Bullying & Harassment Policy, any discriminatory behaviour or treatment will be taken seriously, and action taken in accordance with the Disciplinary Procedures.

BF will work to meet the individual needs of each person to ensure that they have a positive experience of their volunteering and/or employment.

## 11. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All Participants are bound by the BF Code of Conduct, and this should be upheld at all times. These lay out what is expected of all BF and Home Nation employees, members, volunteers, affiliate clubs and participants.

## 12. DATA PROTECTION

BF, as a data controller, must ensure that any personal data processed in relation to these Policies are in compliance with data protection laws and its own internal Data Protection Policy. For more information please refer to BF's Privacy Policy.

In accordance with the BF Privacy Policy, clubs and competition organisers will have access to a member's gender and eligibility status for competitions in cases where the member has provided that information.

BF encourages its members to use the name, title and gender with which they identify on their membership record. Any changes of gender, name and title will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Policy and BF will seek to accommodate such requests promptly.



### 13. CONTACT DETAILS AND REPORTING

BF welcomes questions on the implementation of these Policies which can be [submitted using this form](#).

BF urges any person involved with fencing who has experienced harassment and abuse in the sport to report it immediately using the [welfare reporting form here](#).

Concerns regarding non-compliance with these (and any other) Policies can also be reported [using this form](#) or sent to [welfare@britishfencing.com](mailto:welfare@britishfencing.com). Breaches of these Policies will be handled under the BF Disciplinary Policy.

*British Fencing, 1 Baron's Gate, 33 Rothschild Road, London W4 5HT  
A company limited by guarantee no 1917099.  
Registered in England & Wales. VAT registration 226658348*