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SYMPOSIUM: SAFEGUARDING THE CHILD IN SPORT – THE CONTRIBUTION OF INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH TO CHILD WELFARE AND PROTECTION SAFEGUARDING THE CHILD IN SPORT

Measuring the Implementation of an Ethics Initiative: Child Protection in Scottish Sport

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ABSTRACT: Methodologies for measuring the implementation of social inclusion and ethics in sport frequently draw on social marketing techniques or stage models of health behaviour change. This paper illustrates how a composite model of cultural change in sport can be used to monitor progress and trace resistance to ethics and social inclusion work in sport. The Scottish research was commissioned by sportscotland to assess how their child protection programme had impacted on a selection of Scottish governing bodies of sport. Fifteen sports were identified by the funder to take part in the research, of which 12 agreed to participate. Telephone and face-to-face interviews were held with key stakeholders at national and club level and supplementary focus groups were held with a small number of club level child protection officers. The results indicate a spread of responses in the different organisations with the following distribution: leaders (5), sceptics (2), followers (4) and resisters (1). These results are discussed in relation to the general cultural shift from 'permissive' to 'prescriptive' in the agencies responsible for overseeing Scottish child protection in sport.

Although child protection is a comparative newcomer to the sport policy agenda it has rapidly taken its place alongside race, gender and disability as one of the key ethical issues facing governing bodies of sport in the UK (Boocock 2002). Scottish involvement in child protection (CP) in sport dates back to the mid-1990s in the post-Dunblane period when public concern about the safety of voluntary sector recreation was highlighted. In Tayside, for example, a booklet entitled *All Our Children* and was produced by the Tayside Voluntary Organisations Child Protection Group (1996) which promoted the use of their *Code of Practice* (1995) and in 1997 the Scottish Sports Council (now **sportscotland**) produced an information leaflet for those working with young people called *Safe and Secure*. In 2000 Children 1st and **sportscotland** jointly organised a Consultation Seminar entitled 'Children: Safe and Secure in Sport' at which "participating organisations emphasised their need for advice and guidance on how to protect children taking part in ... physical activities" (**sportscotland** 2002a: 3). Since then, a three year action plan for child protection in Scottish sport has been delivered and a follow up plan has been launched. This paper describes a study of the impact of **sportscotland's** child protection programme on a selected number of Scottish National Governing Bodies (SGBs) between 2002 and 2004.

The need for child protection in sport in Scotland was brought into sharp focus by a number of events in England, notably:

- high profile arrests and convictions of former sports coaches (Brackenridge 2001) and
- the establishment in January 2001 of the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children and Sport

England. The CPSU's partner in Scotland is Children 1st (the working name of the Royal Scottish Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children).

In Scotland child protection in sport was addressed by a short-life working group (including **sportscotland**) responsible for devising an action plan. Closely following this, **sportscotland** employed an Ethics Manager with a priority to address child protection in sport as part of a comprehensive ethics programme. **sportscotland** was also a leading member of the Child Protection in Sport Steering Group (CPSSG), established to take forward a National Action Plan.¹ One of the key priorities **sportscotland** identified at the outset was the establishment of a policy and procedures template that governing bodies and other sport organisations could use. This template was intended to provide a detailed approach to child protection that eliminated the myths and scare factors that were being reported to **sportscotland** at the time.² **sportscotland** was also represented at a range of statutory forums including the Voluntary Sector Steering Group for the implementation of the Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003.³ **sportscotland**'s Ethics Manager sat on the Implementation Board for the Act, which oversaw how organisations involved in child protection worked together, the resources they had to implement child protection programmes and the practical difficulties faced by all organisations in complying with their legal obligations. As a result of the work of these two groups, a support package and range of initiatives was developed to be carried out with the implementation of the Act, with specific support for voluntary organisations, including sports organisations.

In 2004, Scotland's Child Protection in Sport Programme embraced an estimated 800,000 children (Children 1st 2004a) who took part regularly in organised sport as well as protecting the adults who worked with them. The establishment of the programme reflected a view that, whilst it possible to deliver child protection generically, it is most effective when delivered in an applied way through agencies that both understand the legal and social work implications of child protection and also have empathy for the cultural traditions and working practices of sport. The overall objectives of the Child Protection in Sport Programme were to:

- establish policies, procedures and programmes which promote the protection of children through good practice; and
- assist and support governing bodies of sport in Scotland in establishing policies, procedures and programmes which promote the protection of children through good practice.

Measuring child protection impacts

Child protection is perhaps one of the poorest-researched policy areas within sport and one for which a strong evidence base is yet to develop. Such knowledge as there is has been derived from a handful of studies within sport in the UK (such as Brackenridge 1997 and 2001) and some prevalence data from sport overseas (such as Kirby and Greaves 1996; Leahy *et al.* 2001). The general social work and child abuse/protection literature is of use to sports policy makers in pointing towards methods and processes that can be adopted and adapted in the sport setting. As yet, no researchers from this 'mainstream' have focused on sport and only a small number have researched extra-familial or community-based abuse or protection schemes (see for example, Gallagher 2000). Interestingly, one of the recent trends in policy promotion for child protection is to situate it as a public health issue (Mercy 1999; Stop It Now! 2000) which sits well with the current health rationale for sport and other physical activity (Allison 1999; Physical Activity Task Force 2003; **sportscotland** 2003).

There is a reasonably large literature on policy impacts of child protection outside sport (Department of Health 1995; Parton 1996; Stanley and Goddard 2002) and several models of quality assurance and monitoring that could be applied to sports organisations (for example, Casson and Manning 1997). In the UK, the Child Protection in Sport Unit's guide *Sportscheck* (CPSU 2002) was the first such guide specifically tailored for sport. Monitoring and evaluation of CP in Scottish governing bodies of sport is likely to remain a distant goal until and unless policy is developed and permeated comprehensively.

In England, the use of *Sportscheck* and the implementation of a set of national *Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport* (CPSU 2003) helped governing bodies to define and clarify their CP roles and responsibilities. In 2004, the Child Protection in Sport Steering Group (CPSSG) decided *not* to adopt standards but to revisit this decision at a future date. It was of particular interest in this study, therefore, to find out from governing bodies how they might react to such standards in the future.

Methodologies for measuring the implementation of social inclusion and ethics in sport frequently draw on social marketing techniques or stage models of health behaviour change but have not, as yet, been applied to child protection. For most voluntary sport organisations, the introduction of child protection involves a process of cultural change (Brackenridge *et al.* 2005) in which the individual stakeholders concerned – such as officers, coaches, members and parents – exhibit a variety of 'activation states' towards CP (Fig 3):

- Inactive = no knowledge or commitment
- Reactive = reluctant commitment and engagement
- Active = satisfactory awareness and involvement
- Proactive = full commitment and advocacy
- Opposed = either overtly critical of, or covertly against, the CP initiative

These states are evidenced by analysing the following:

- Voices/discourses (What people **say** about CP in sport)
- Knowledge and experience (What people **know** about CP through experience – their awareness, interest or understanding)
- Feelings (What people **feel** – their attitudes and emotions regarding CP)
- Action (What people **do**/have done about CP – their achievements and behaviour)

The use of activation states allows simple visual depictions of each stakeholder's responses which differentiates where these are not internally consistent. For example, some people might express enthusiasm and commitment to the CP in sport programme at an emotional level (proactive feelings) but report having done very little about it (inactive action). Others might talk sceptically or express diffidence about the programme (overtly opposed voices) yet be comparatively well informed about the issue (active knowledge). Stakeholders interviewed for this study were expected to display the full range of activation states. It was of interest for this study to identify any who were opposed to the CP programme or to the way **sportscotland** had managed and disseminated it.

Experience in England has shown that governing bodies respond in a variety of ways to CP, ranging from those who are *willing* to embrace policies and procedures to those who are *unwilling* and resist them. Similarly, the approach of the state to CP in sport can range from *permissive* (such as giving advice and guidance only) to *prescriptive* (such as requiring compliance with standards as a criterion of funding). The combination of possible state approaches and governing body responses is illustrated in

the conceptual model at Figure 1. For the purposes of this study, the stakeholders' responses were aggregated to provide organisational activation profiles which determined where they sat in the conceptual model.

This model is not, of course, an accurate portrayal of the circumstances of all governing bodies but acts as a heuristic device for analysing the relationship between the governing body and its funder, in this case, the 15 nominated Scottish governing bodies and **sportscotland**. It could also be used to explain relations between a governing body and its constituent clubs. The location of a governing body within this model is a generalised one and does not show the competing interests or attitudes of the many individual stakeholder groups that comprise any given governing body. The framework by which individual stakeholder data were analysed, and from which this typology was abstracted, is taken from earlier work on the measurement of cultural change in sport (Brackenridge *et al.* 2002). This model assesses the degree to which different stakeholders are activated towards a particular issues – in this case child protection in sport, through their

- Knowledge
- Feelings
- Actions
- Voices

The knowledge, feelings, actions and voices of individual stakeholders in key decision-making positions need to be synchronised if children are to be safeguarded effectively. Data from one study are available (Brackenridge *et al.* 2002 and 2004) that illustrate how the responses of individual stakeholders within a governing body may be differentiated according to these behavioural areas and these data have already been used to inform policy adjustments.

Objectives

The overall aim of the study was to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the child protection programme with governing bodies of sport. The more detailed objectives were:

- to determine the impact to date in terms of outcomes achieved against targets for the programme;
- assess the effectiveness of the process of implementing and developing the programme;
- assess the perceptions of the target governing bodies about both the achievement of outcomes and effectiveness of the process; and
- identify areas of the programme or within specific sports where more input/support may be needed.

The study

Prior to 2004 no systematic appraisal had been undertaken of governing bodies' views on the effectiveness of **sportscotland** in developing and rolling out their child protection work. **sportscotland** was conscious that, without the full cooperation of the governing bodies, who are significant stakeholders in Scottish sport, the plans for safeguarding children and young people in sport might be seriously inhibited. In short, it was important for them to assess whether child protection in sport was perceived by the governing bodies as a burden or a benefit.

sportscotland nominated 15 SGBs to participate in the study, based on their assessment of risk of abuse to children in these sports. All fifteen were approached by

letter and follow up telephone call. One declined to participate and two did not reply. Individual and group interviews with SGB child protection officers or equivalent senior staff were supplemented with two focus groups at club level. All participants gave informed voluntary consent and signed consent forms. Interviews were transcribed and thematic content analysis conducted against the main themes of the Actions Plan.

Findings

Almost all of those interviewed were positive about the child protection work of **sportscotland** and complimentary about the helpfulness, communication and advice given by the workers who had implemented the programme. They varied, however, in their degree of activation towards the CP programme. Five were clearly 'leaders', comparatively well ahead in the development of CP, confident and committed to this work. Most of the SGB personnel interviewed said they would welcome a more prescriptive approach, especially with respect to policy development. Two interviewees were generally sceptical about the CP work, one of whom was especially vociferous in his views against the need to lay down rules, criteria or other markers.

sportscotland was seen by the SGBs as taking a relatively permissive approach to CP. Several interviewees commented that delivering child protection was 'not our job' and that they would welcome greater intervention from CP specialists. The danger of moving to such a prescriptive approach, however, is that sport personnel might fail to own the issue or to permeate it throughout their working practices and instead regard CP as simply a bolt-on to their day-to-day activity. These were the 'followers' who accept the need for CP but did not take the initiative. Given the heavy demands of running governing bodies and the pressures of modernisation and governance it would not be surprising if these sports sought short cuts in the future to fulfil their CP obligations.

Some of the governing bodies were 'sceptics' about CP because they felt it created a large workload and bureaucracy for little need. Indeed, several mentioned that they knew of no CP referrals at all within their sport in Scotland. The 'sceptics' also expressed reservations about the time and effort involved in background checking although many had registered with Disclosure Scotland and, from their perspective, the checking system appeared to be functioning relatively smoothly.

Another important bias was found in the discussion about CP from interviewees that focused almost exclusively on sexual abuse when this is probably far less common than emotional and physical abuse. Well-publicised fears of 'stranger danger' may have reinforced this myth. This finding pointed to a training need and also to the need for a better research and knowledge base about risks within sport. Indeed, risk assessment can only be informed by a sound evidence base and this was lacking in Scottish sport.

Many governing bodies said they would welcome more guidance on the distinction between abuse and poor practice and on their legal responsibilities, especially where cases were sent back from the legal system to be dealt with by them as internal disciplinary matters. Only one governing body mentioned vulnerable adults or disabled children, reflecting a gap in current awareness and provision.

In the main, the individual stakeholders from the governing bodies revealed active feelings towards CP but, with few exceptions, showed low levels of knowledge about the subject and had engaged in relatively little action (for example, few had personally attended training). Only one sport could be categorised as a 'resister' and, although this might well reflect the rather strong views of only one spokesperson, the influence of this individual – a chief executive – was considerable.

It was clear that the tensions arising from different approaches to child protection in sport by the two major agencies involved, with **sportscotland** being more permissive and Children 1st more prescriptive, require resolution in order to clarify the requirements

on governing bodies and to optimise the safety of children. Interestingly, one individual described the prospect of national standards for CP being introduced as follows:

Absolute pants! Rubbish! This is all the ethics and everything and forcing sports down that line. I don't agree with it at all. [Why?] Because it's prescriptive and telling sports how to run themselves and in the end you can write a policy and it can sit on a shelf gathering dust – the key thing is to understand what you're doing, work through it yourself which is much longer term, much harder but more rewarding and sustainable... In the end you can write things down but it doesn't change behaviour... It's about changing the culture and that's more done with understanding than with big sticks.

Other sample quotations that illustrate the voices heard about CP are shown in Figure 3.

Previous research (Malkin *et al.* 2000; Summers 2000; Brackenridge 2002) exposed a CP policy vacuum between governing body and club level that was also apparent here. Whilst this was unlikely to apply only to work on CP, it nevertheless presents a particular challenge to governing bodies and, indeed, to Children 1st and **sportscotland**. After all, it is clubs that engage directly and regularly with young people so, in an important sense, the CP chain is only as strong as its weakest (i.e. club) link.

Conclusions

An important test of the Scottish CP programme will be its comprehensiveness since leaks in one area will have repercussions for others: for example, supervision and monitoring of coaches is undermined if proper background checks are not undertaken prior to appointment. It might thus be worth evaluating the effectiveness of CP progress by the pace of the slowest as well as the quality of the best governing body.

Overall, one-third of those who responded to the invitation to engage with this study saw CP responsibilities as a burden but even the sceptics expressed some positive views about the work. For the majority it had most certainly been a benefit and one in which **sportscotland** had played an important and welcome role.

It's actually a pain in the neck but when you're in development you meet people who are a pain in the neck but their clubs run well and they get things done and they're successful. And child protection is a pain in the neck but if you do it well it makes the whole thing much stronger.

... the work currently being carried out is invaluable and has gone a long way to promote an understanding of child protection issues and to kick start the long slow education process that is so long overdue in so many sports.

This study exposed a number of gaps in service provision that **sportscotland** and its partners were subsequently encouraged to address, notably:

- 1 consultation with children and young people
- 2 monitoring and evaluation systems
- 3 systems for recording or progress chasing abuse referrals and cases
- 4 the compilation of case data that can be used to conduct risk analyses
- 5 case recording and management systems
- 6 disabled children and vulnerable adult protection
- 7 CP provision in 'adult' clubs that have young people as members
- 8 whistle-blowing systems and support
- 9 training for parents

Because different governing bodies move at different paces through the CP policy cycle (policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation and review) a differentiated set of demands might suit them better than a single monolithic set of requirements. Keeping the current 'leaders' proactive will be vital if the wider group of governing bodies is to become motivated by the issue of child protection. The last thing that **sportscotland** needs is a backlash against child protection, yet there are already signs from some directions that this may have started (Watson 2004).

It will also be important for the progress of this leading group of governing bodies to be properly evaluated so that good practice can be disseminated among the rest. The 'resisters' clearly need to be engaged in more dialogue with **sportscotland**, probably at Chief Executive Officer/Director level, and may require a combination of education, persuasion and prescription to become active in regard to CP.

Notes

1. The CPSSG was made up of representatives from key sport and/or child protection organisations, including the Scottish Sports Association, local authorities, Children 1st and **sportscotland**. **sportscotland** reported progress achieved against the Action Plan targets and provided updates on additional activities and areas of need. The CPSSG was a voluntary group that did not report to but informed the Scottish Executive of progress made.
2. In order to further develop the programme by supporting governing bodies in the implementation of the template, **sportscotland**, engaged with Children 1st to form a formal partnership through which it was agreed that a new post, supported by both agencies to develop the **sportscotland** programme objectives, should be put in place. As a result, in May 2002 a Child Protection in Sport Development Worker was employed to achieve specific implementation objectives of the **sportscotland** programme. Children 1st then developed its own project to support its investment in the post, which formally recognised the **sportscotland** programme and addressed other, broader issues fitting with the wider objectives of Children 1st. In order to maintain this coordinated working, **sportscotland** met with Children 1st on an annual basis to agree the progress made and to agree the **sportscotland** programme objectives and targets, which Children 1st then uses to help formulate their annual project objectives.
3. This body has a major responsibility to ensure the protection of children is carried out in an appropriate way by organisations with volunteers and that they are not overly burdened by statutory obligations.

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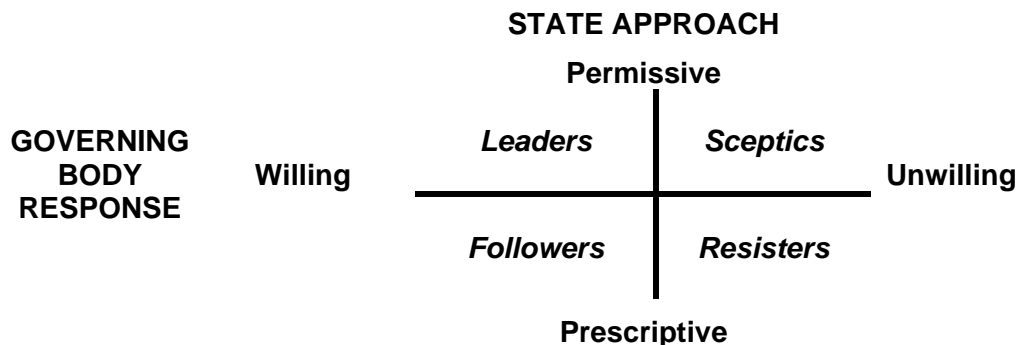
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Figure 1: Conceptual Model of State Approaches and Governing Body Responses to Child Protection in Sport



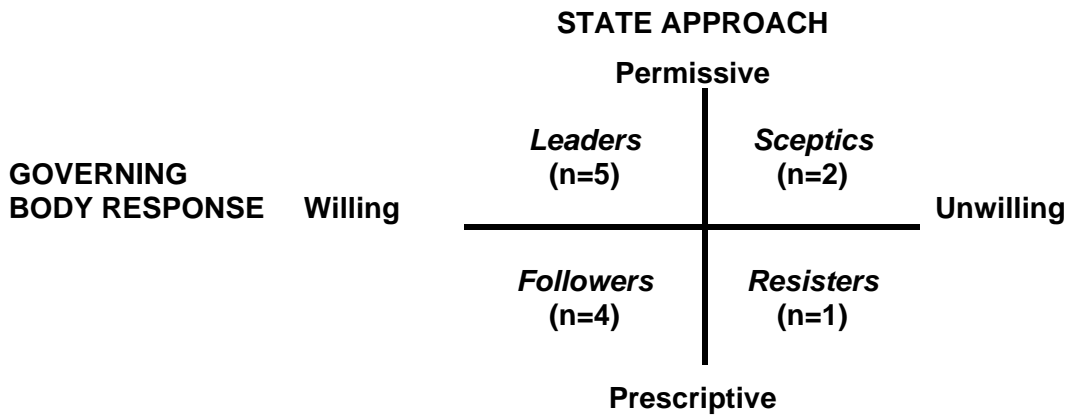
Leaders. These governing bodies are willing to cooperate and are proactive in developing CP on their own (often because they or others in their sport have faced a challenging case involving adverse publicity). They may have drawn from social work, teaching, probation or police skills within their own ranks and have used CP materials from outside sport to develop their policy infrastructure. They offer models of practice (not necessarily evaluated yet as best practice) to other governing bodies.

Sceptics. These governing bodies are hesitant or unwilling to cooperate, for a variety of reasons, and therefore delay or obfuscate CP work. They usually come round eventually but require a lot of policy support and advice along the way.

Followers. These governing bodies happily conform to the state's specified criteria or standards when asked to do so.

Resisters. These governing bodies object, complain or actively refuse to cooperate with state CP requirements. They may have their own internally-developed policies and procedures but are often reluctant to discuss these with outside agencies, funders or scrutineers.

Figure 2: Governing Body Responses to Child Protection in Sport



Sample: 12 governing bodies out of 15 approached.
See Fig 1 for an explanation of Leaders/Sceptics/Followers/Resisters.

Figure 3: 'Activation States' with Regard to Child Protection in Sport

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State→ ↓Focus	INACTIVE	REACTIVE	ACTIVE	PROACTIVE	OPPOSED
Voices/ discourses (What people say about CP in sport)	Don't know what you're talking about. Nothing to do with me. Never heard of it. What do you mean?	Well, OK if I have to. I'd rather not get involved. I suppose it has to be done. I'm not sure if I know enough. What if I do something wrong?	This is important. We all share this responsibility. It's something that must be done.	We won't get it right first time. There is always more to learn. We need to keep this under review. We need to learn from others.	Overt/manifest/obvious: This is a complete waste of time/money. You'll never stop those paedophiles. Abuse just doesn't happen here. Covert/latent/hidden: Yes, of course it matters...
Knowledge and experience (What people know through experience – their awareness, interest or understanding)	No knowledge No awareness No experience No interest No motivation	Some limited knowledge Some awareness Some experience Some interest	Aware of roles and responsibilities Knowledge appropriate for role Knowledge of where to seek advice and help	Knowledge beyond the minimum Experience of handling referrals/cases Knowledge of CP systems outside sport	Overt/manifest/obvious: Reports known CP failures Covert/latent/hidden: Appears knowledgeable but is actually ignorant of CP
Feelings (What people feel – their attitudes and emotions)	Indifferent Ignorant Unwilling In denial	Fearful, scared Frightened Timid Nervous Anxious Sceptical Reluctant	Accepting Tolerant Compliant Accommodating Willing	Confident, sure, certain Convinced Committed Positive Relaxed Reflective Evaluative	Overt/manifest/obvious: Resistance Hostile Covert/latent/hidden: Dishonest Contradictory
Action (What people do /have done – their achievements and behaviour)	None Resistant Bystander behaviour	Responds only after several 'pushes' Professes ignorance Asks to be anonymous	Applies knowledge Fulfils responsibilities Seeks learning and experiences Attends courses/workshops Reads literature Acts appropriately Engages actively	Keeps up to date Seeks feedback Talks about how to improve Adapts and responds Seeks wider info sources Participates in or volunteers for CP role	Overt/manifest/obvious: Actively opposes CP work Covert/latent/hidden: Own behaviour belies/contradicts apparent commitment to CP

Figure 4: Quotations Illustrating Governing Body ‘Voices’ about Child Protection

INACTIVE	REACTIVE	ACTIVE	PROACTIVE	OPPOSED
<p>'I've not heard of that [club mark schemes] before' 'I wouldn't say we've taken any advice' 'It's not our cup of tea' '[We have] no action plan for child protection' 'We haven't started checking volunteers' 'I didn't have the time or the knowledge to do it'</p>	<p>'It's quite a daunting thing for us' 'It's a daunting thing, no question about it' 'Let's face it, it's fairly new but it's just a case of whether we think we need to have more of it' 'If you need your plumbing fixed you call a plumber' 'I don't believe in reinventing the wheel' 'None of us in the governing bodies is looking for more work' 'The enormity of it didn't hit until I started looking at everything that was involved' 'A lot of people were very frightened about it, quite honestly' 'I'm reluctant to ask our volunteers to do more but...' 'We have not monitored it the way we should' 'It appears as though this is something the governing body should have had in place years ago' 'We've been aware of it for a while [but] there's no legal requirement for it yet' 'Typical of any sport we were in trepidation going through this'</p>	<p>'[It's] the way sport has to go' 'We're not quite there yet' 'OK it was extra work but the fact that it was being addressed was really important' 'It's difficult... but we're going to have to do it' 'They knew that it would be an awful lot of work but it was a case of – right, this is what we're going to do' 'It's not a legal requirement but it is best practice'</p>	<p>'This is a big priority' 'Sometimes I feel we're not doing it justice' 'The real task for me is how to take it forward' 'We're severely lacking in that area [monitoring]' 'The only animosity that comes from clubs is where there's not enough activity' '... it has become all of our issue' 'The main thing we're trying to create is an open environment – which is a training issue – and good resources to back up that training'</p>	<p>Overtly: '[CP] was unnecessary actually' 'Nothing's every come of it' 'It's almost closing the stable door after the horse has bolted' 'You think, Oh no not another thing... you can waste all your time round there [at sportscotland courses]' 'A lot of it is ignorance' 'Even if you gave them the info you couldn't guarantee they'd read it' 'A lot of time is wasted' 'It's plate spinning all the time so the last thing you want is to be having to write a policy, especially something as sensitive as that' 'Is this all damned necessary?' 'It's almost a hindrance to everything that we used to do' 'There was a feeling from the older instructors that, Oh well, I can't instruct any more, this is beyond me' 'If we've got to think of all that we won't bother'</p> <p>Covertly: 'Most clubs are trying to ignore it at the moment'</p>