



FENCING
I R E L A N D

Women in Irish Fencing Survey Report

May 2021

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Introduction

This survey was run through Google Forms and was open for responses from 29 April to 14 May, 2021.

Our members were informed about the survey through:

- Email communication with our clubs
- Direct emails to our membership through the Go membership system
- Social media posts on Facebook, and Instagram

No question in the survey was set as 'required'.

The need for a survey on this topic was highlighted by a response in the 'Other Comments' section of the survey aimed at former university fencers. That survey was open to responses from December 2020 to January 2021. The comment in question was:

'I have ranted before about barriers to women in sport. Here's another one. If you made a list of college grads competing at satellites and world cups, you will notice once again that most of them are men. If you don't treat female fencers like serious athletes while you see them every week, you can't be surprised when they don't act like serious athletes after graduation. Regardless of the stage at which you wish to retain female athletes, the first step had to be to treat them as the competitive equals of their male teammates, with equal access to coaching, training camps, competitive resources (including everything from funding to electric pistes and refs from the poles on at Irish competitions), and above all, respect.'

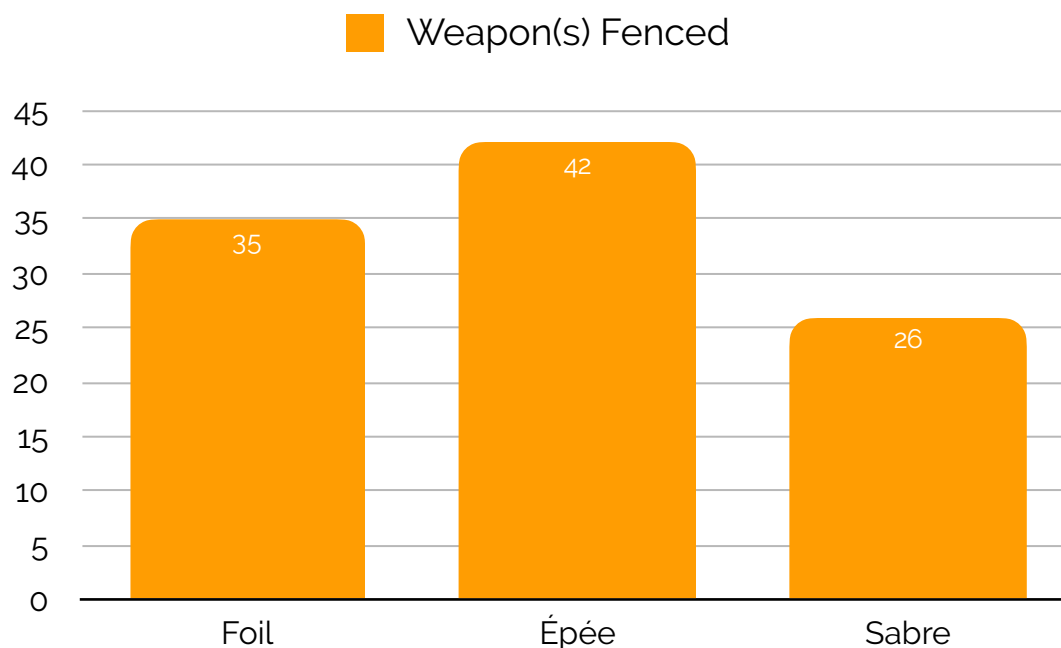
So this survey aimed, in part, to gather more information on the issues raised in that comment to gain a better understanding of how pervasive those issues are in Irish fencing.

In the course of designing this survey, it was noted that there was no clear information available to our members regarding how they could make a report or complaint to Fencing Ireland. This was rectified before the release of the survey and that information was highlighted and linked to in the survey at two points - in the course of the questions regarding 'Experienced sexist behaviour and attitudes' and at the end of the survey. The information regarding making a report or complaint to Fencing Ireland can be viewed on our website: www.fencingireland.net/make-a-report/

Survey written by Fencing Ireland Development Officer, Colm Flynn, and Fencing Ireland General Manager, Dearbhla Foley. Data analysis, conclusions, and recommendations written by Colm Flynn.

Respondents

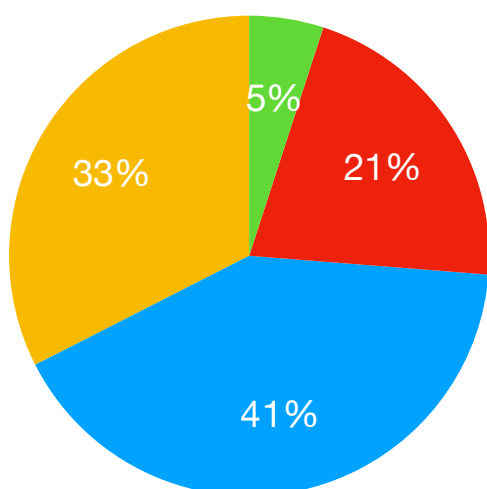
80 respondents



*Selecting multiple answers was possible when choosing weapon(s) fenced.

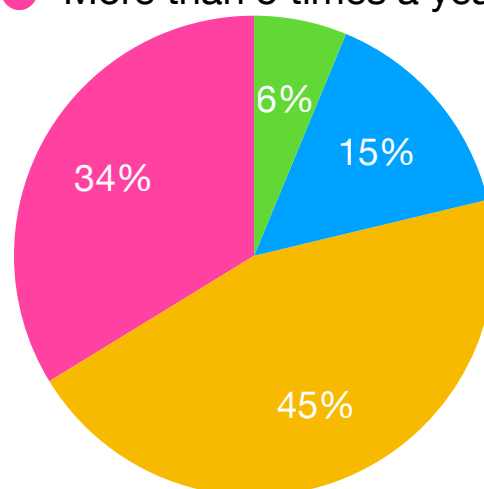
How often a week do/did you train?

- Less than once a week
- Once a week
- Twice a week
- Three or more times a week



How often do/did you compete in fencing events?

- I did not compete
- Less than once a year
- 1-2 times a year
- 3-5 times a year
- More than 5 times a year

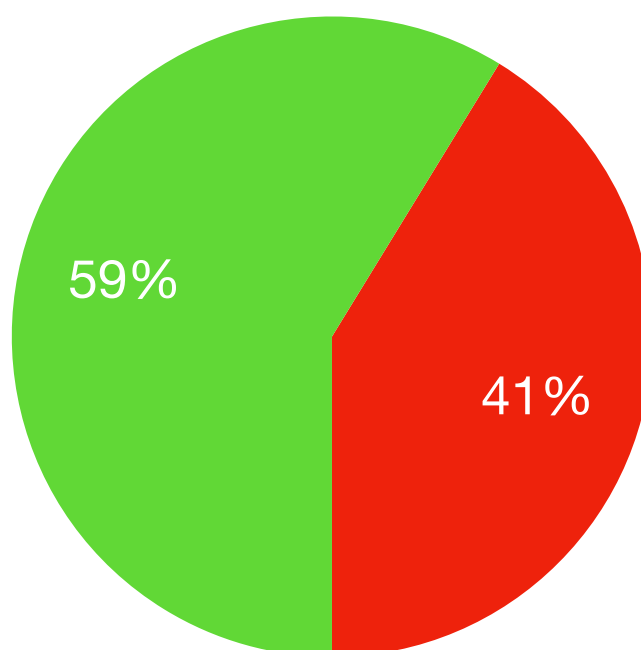


Former fencers

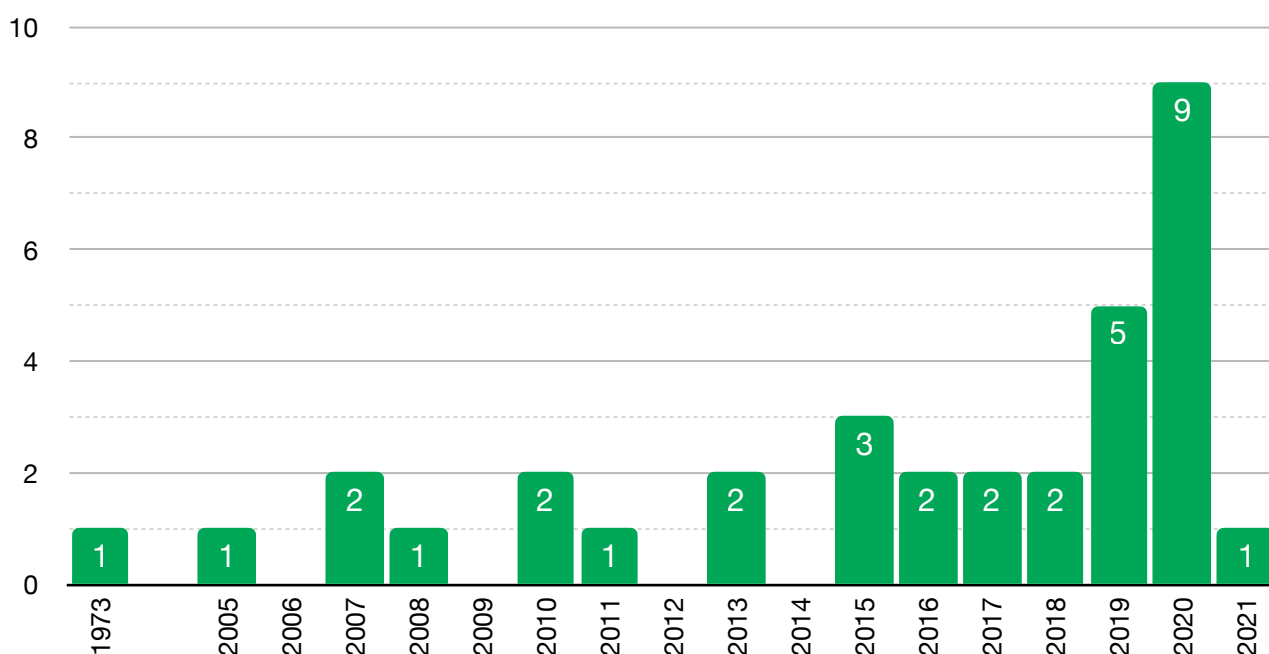
Are you currently involved in fencing in Ireland?

● Yes

● No

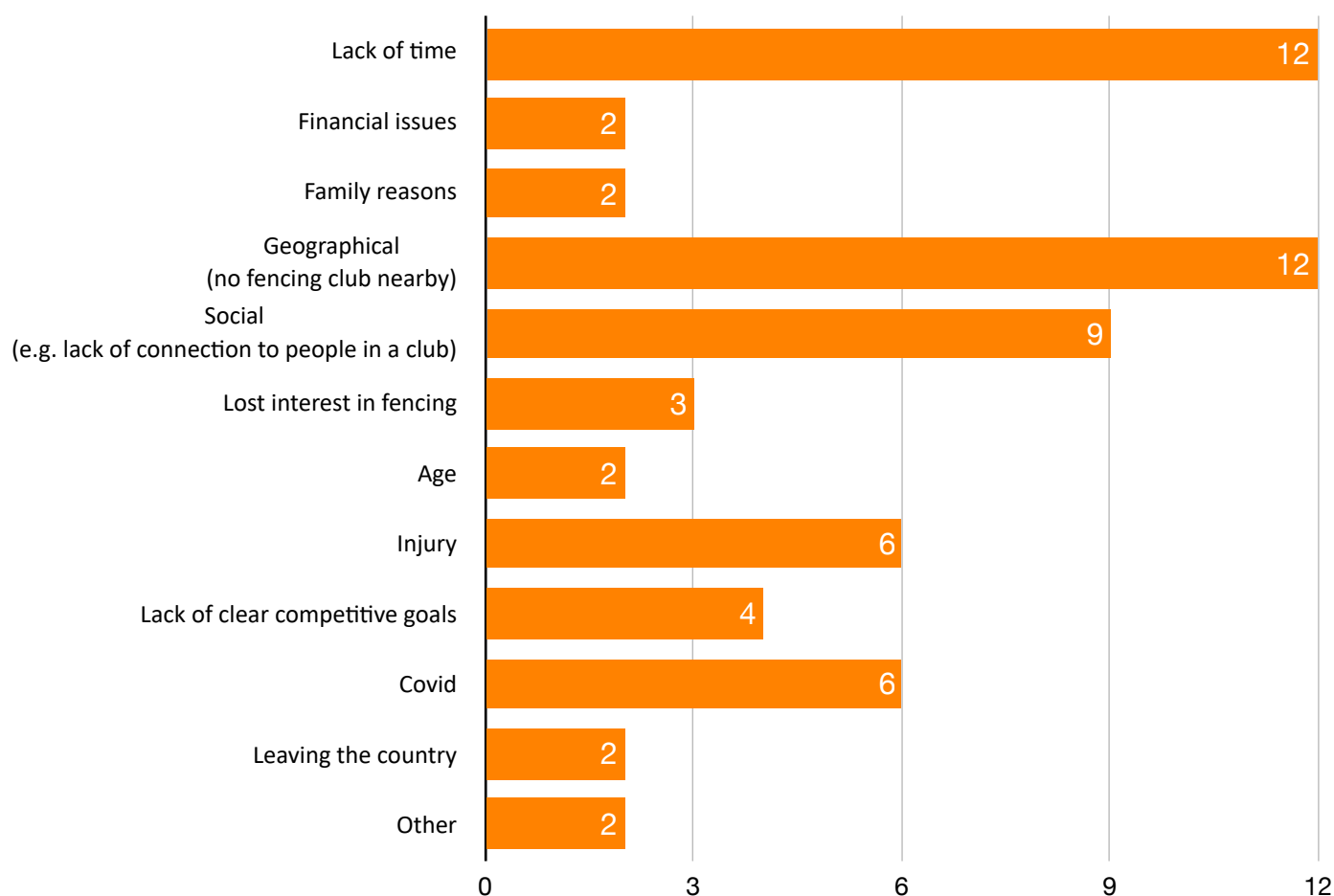


If you are not currently involved in fencing in Ireland, in approximately what year did your involvement cease?



Former fencers

If you are no longer fencing, why did you stop?



Selecting multiple options was possible in this question.

It was a fault in the survey to not set out a clear distinction for how those displaced from the sport by Covid should respond. Of course, almost all members of Irish fencing have experienced reduced involvement in fencing and, for extended periods, complete breaks from the practice of the sport.

'Other' includes two comments provided by respondents:

- "I found ageist attitudes prevailed and I felt embarrassed and discouraged"
- "Coach & some club members were in a clique that made me feel isolated in the club. I loved the sport, but the impact on my emotional well-being meant that I had no choice but to leave the club I was in. I have also been bullied by these same people when I initially joined, as a result of a rumour spread by another club member."

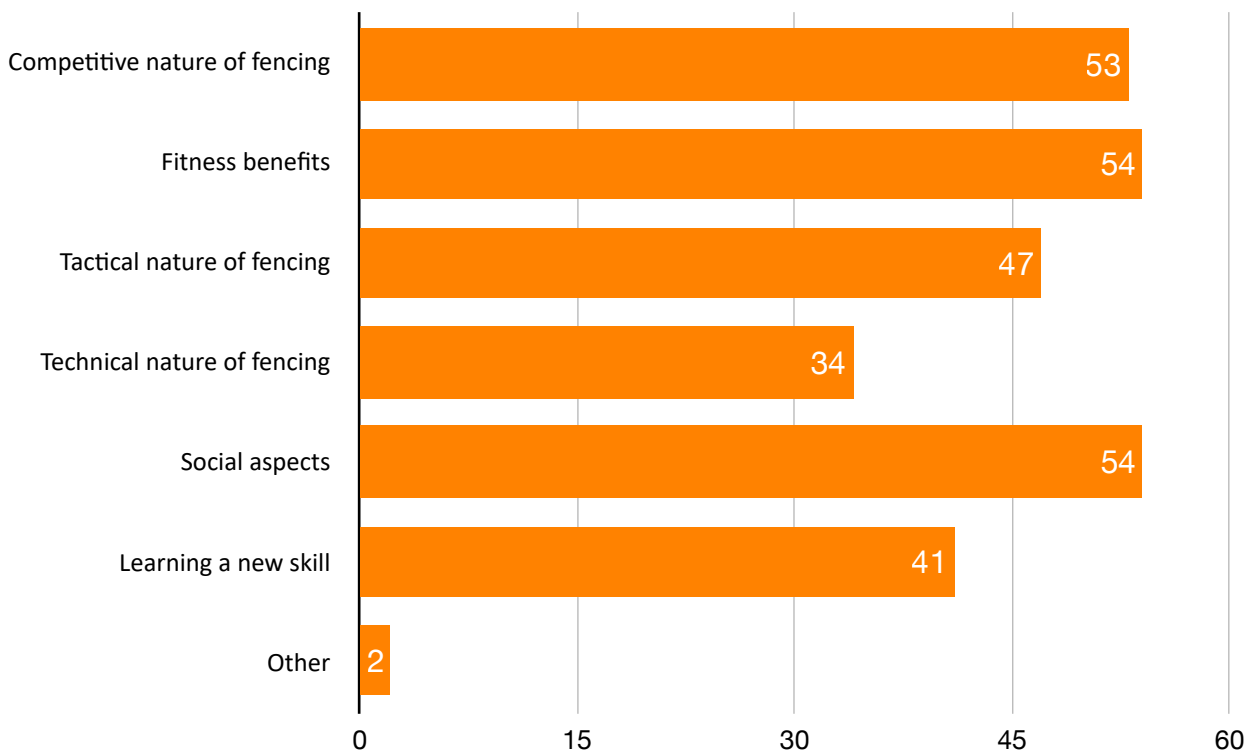
Conclusions

The 'Lack of Time' issue is a tough one to address as it is largely a factor in fencers' personal lives and one that is out of our control. Some potential ways in which this issue could be approached are set out in the 'Recommendations' section at the end of this report.

It is clear that the cohort of fencers who we have the best possibility of communication with are those still in the sport, naturally, and those who have left the sport in recent years. The numbers of fencers who completed the survey but who finished fencing more than 10 years ago is very small.

Benefits of and barriers to fencing

What elements of fencing do/did you enjoy most?



Selecting multiple options was possible in this question.

'Other' includes: "international opportunity" and "visiting relatives/family and holidays in Ireland, UK, Europe, New Zealand!"

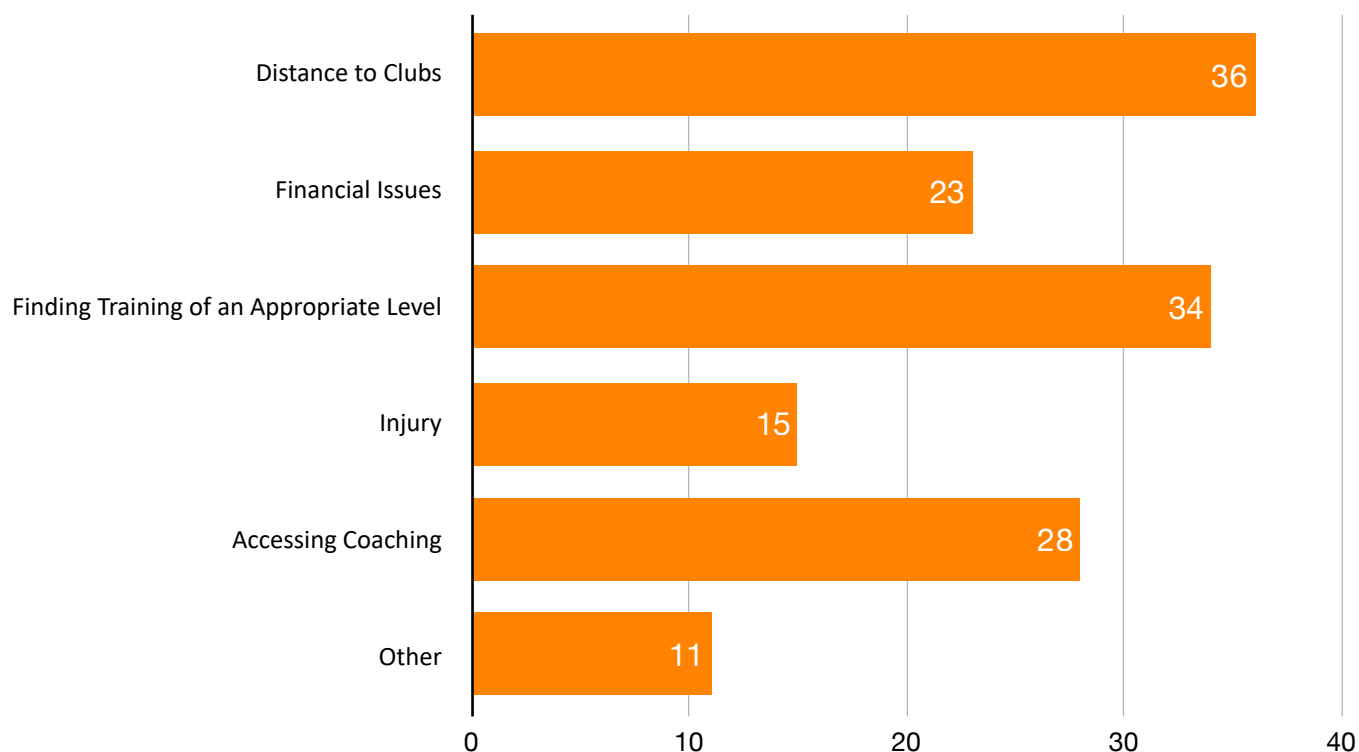
Why do women fence?

The specific question addressing what elements of fencing women like the most does not provide much insight except to say that there is no one factor that stands out as the sole reason for involvement in fencing. What we can see, however, is that the **social aspect** of the sport is joint top in those reasons and that the lack of social connections in a club also features prominently in the reasons that people have stopped fencing.

It is evident that any clubs that do not make efforts to specifically improve the social side of their activities are missing out on an important factor in keeping members.

Benefits of and barriers to fencing

What barriers, if any, have you experienced to taking part in fencing in Ireland?



Selecting multiple options was possible in this question.

Responses written in under 'Other' include:

- "Few saboteurs (sic)" - sabreurs?
- "Lack of connection to people at club-university club with low alumnus population"
- "Foil clubs are hard to find or I would go back. Also, private clubs tend to have very junior members only."
- "Transphobia in the fencing community"
- "Supplementary physical training. It would have been helpful to do physical workouts as conditioning/training separate from fencing."
- "Language"
- "No barriers where i was concerned"
- "a pandemic"
- "I fence in college but when I go home for the summer I have 4 Months of no training as there are no clubs in or near Waterford"
- "In the beginning, anti-female bias; latterly, ageism"

Conclusion

A key issue limiting participation in fencing is the geographical spread of clubs. Not only was it a top reason given as to why people stopped fencing the number 1 stated barrier to fencing is 'distance to clubs' (36 respondents). The second and third selected barriers to fencing may be also at least in part connected to geography: 'finding training of an appropriate level' (34 respondents) may refer for some to a club being available nearby but not a high enough level of club and similarly 'accessing coaching' (28 respondents) may well in part be due to the lack of coaching availability in certain parts of the country.

This is not new information, it was also evident for both women and men in the former university fencers survey carried out in December 2020 to January 2021.

It is clear that for the sport to grow, the number of clubs across the country must also grow.

Behaviour and attitudes in Irish Fencing

For each of the following questions, respondents were asked to rate a given statement based on how much they agreed or disagreed with that statement.

Strongly
disagree

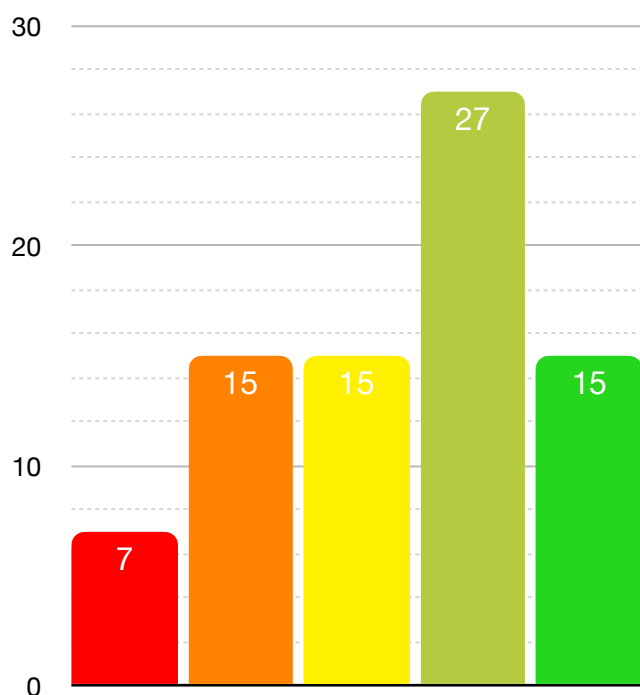
Disagree

Neither agree
nor disagree

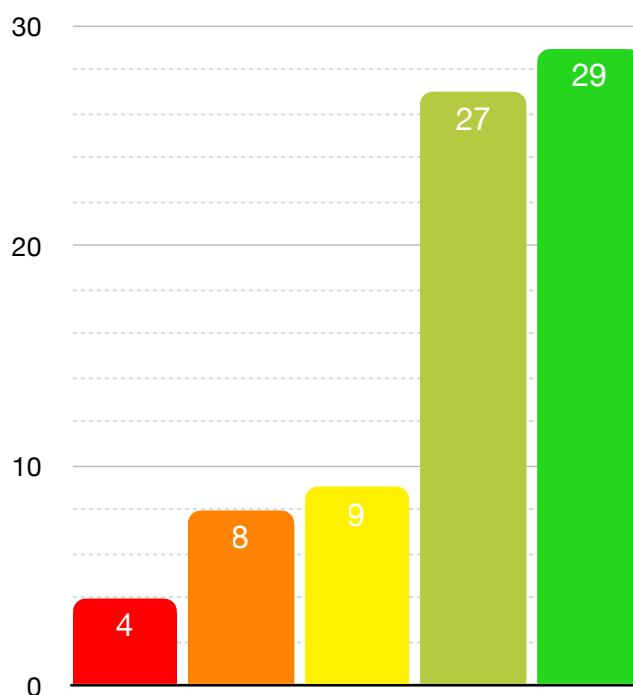
Agree

Strongly
agree

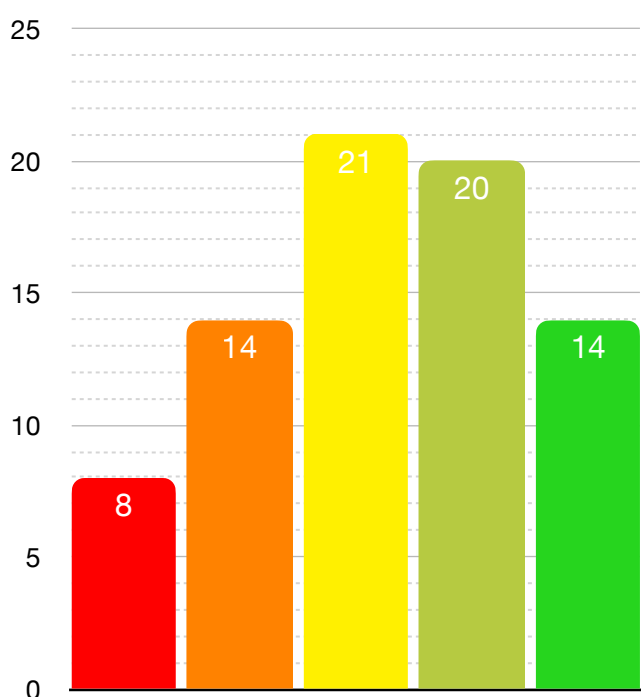
I feel Fencing Ireland values women and men equally.



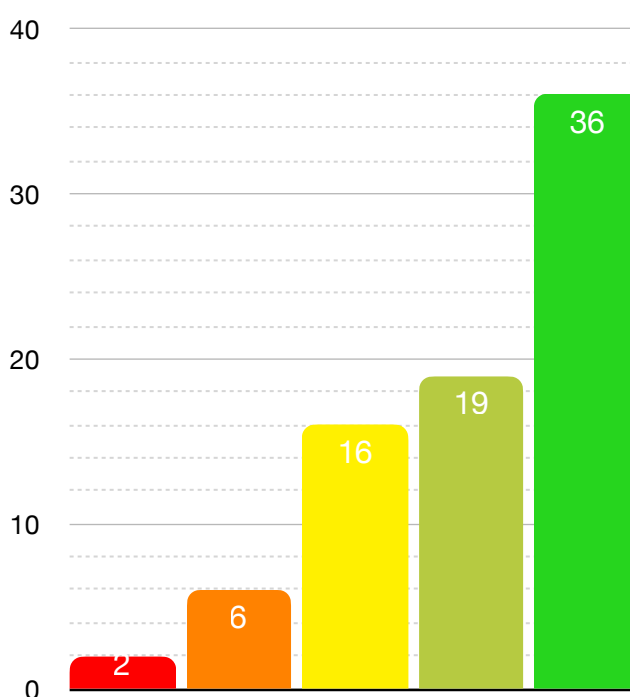
I feel my club values women and men equally.



I feel competition organisers value women and men equally.

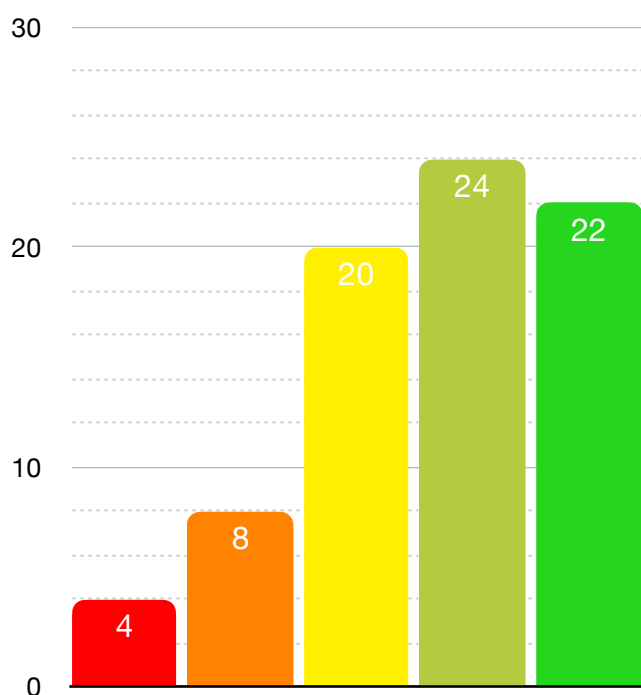


I feel my coach(es) value women and men equally.

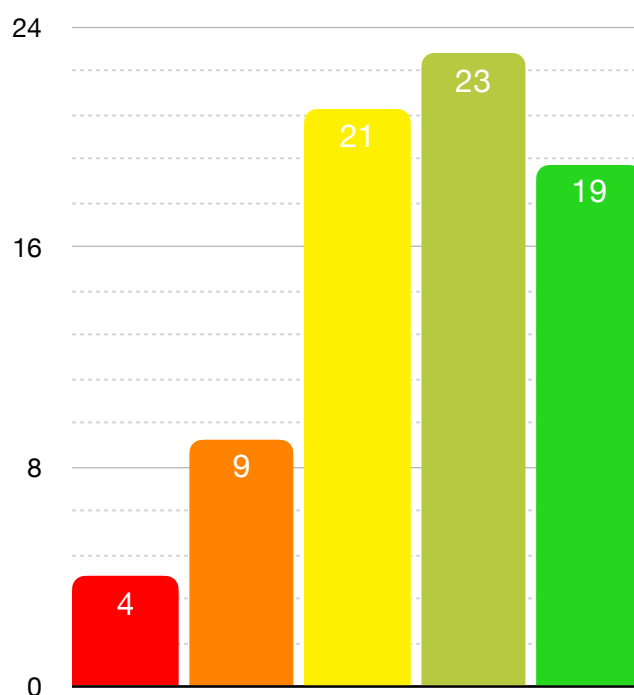


Behaviour and attitudes in Irish Fencing

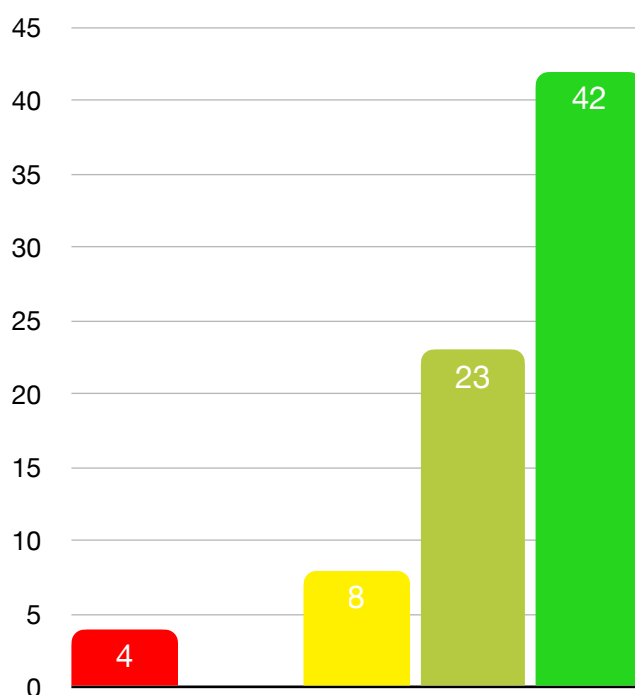
I feel respected as a woman in Irish fencing.



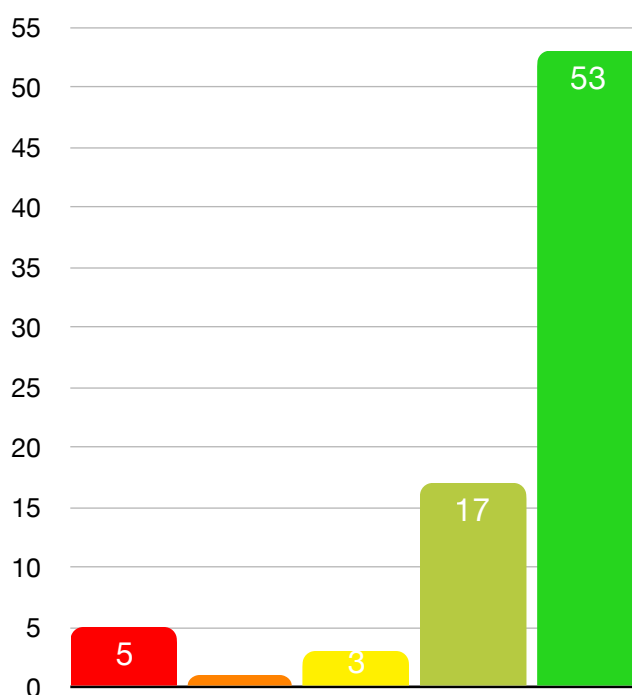
I feel respected as an athlete in Irish fencing.



I feel safe at Irish fencing events.



Getting involved with fencing has been a positive in my life.



Behaviour and attitudes in Irish Fencing

If we analyse this data by assigning a numerical value to each response (1 for 'strongly disagree', 2 for 'disagree', 3 for 'neither agree nor disagree', 4 for 'agree', and 5 for 'strongly agree') a score of 3 would indicate a neutral response to the statement from the average while a higher score would indicate a response that is, on average, positive and a score lower than 3 would indicate a set of responses that is, on average, negative. The scores for each statement would thus be as follows:

Statement	Average Score
I feel Fencing Ireland values women and men equally.	3.35
I feel my club values women and men equally.	3.90
I feel competition organisers value women and men equally.	3.23
I feel my coach(es) value women and men equally.	4.03
I feel respected as a woman in Irish fencing.	3.67
I feel respected as an athlete in Irish fencing.	3.58
I feel safe at Irish fencing events.	4.29
Getting involved with fencing has been a positive in my life.	4.42

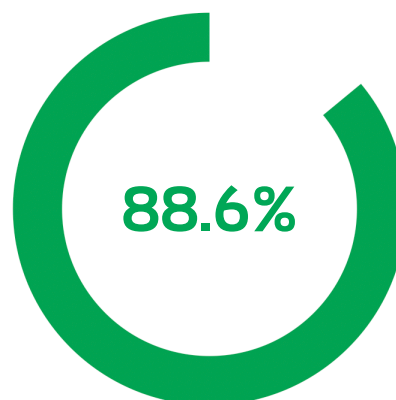
The positive news is that each statement received responses that averaged out in the 'agree' side of the spectrum. The level of positivity did vary, however, and some statements were better received than others.

- The outstanding positive responses are 'I feel safe at Irish fencing events' and 'Getting involved with fencing has been a positive in my life' with scores of 4.29 and 4.42 respectively. The responses to these statements will allow Fencing Ireland to make the following evidence based statements:

Women overwhelmingly report feeling safe at Irish fencing events.*

* = in a survey of women in Irish fencing, 54.5% strongly agreed with the statement 'I feel safe at Irish fencing events' and a further 29.9% agreed with it. Only 5.2% of respondents disagreed with the statement.

88.6% of women surveyed report that getting involved in fencing was a **positive in their life**.



Behaviour and attitudes in Irish Fencing

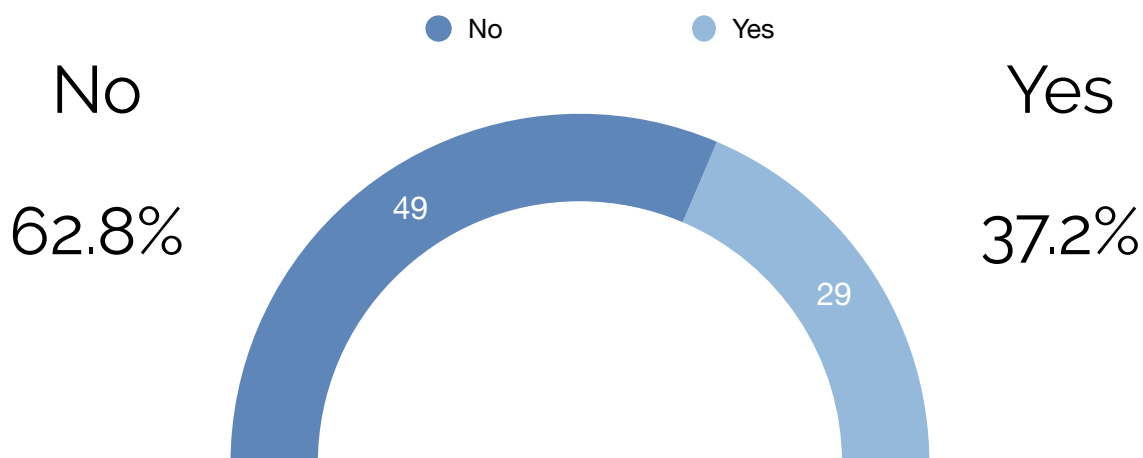
- Coaches and clubs also come out well from the responses to these statements with scores well into the agree side of the spectrum - 4.03 and 3.9 respectively.
- The lowest scoring statements were 'I feel Fencing Ireland values women and men equally' and 'I feel competition organisers value women and men equally'. While the average scores for these statements still lean to the positive side, with average scores of 3.35 and 3.23 respectively, there is cause for concern here and a need to address some issues. The details provided by respondents in later questions sheds further light on the issues at play here, particularly with competitions, and lead to some recommendations at the end of this report.
- The averages being largely positive do not mean that any of these areas are without issue, however. Every statement had at least a small portion of respondents strongly disagreeing - these range from a low of 2 respondents to the statement regarding coaches to a high of 8 regarding competition organisers. Care must be taken to understand and, where possible, address the opinions and experiences of fencers even in cases where they are outliers and not representative of the overall experiences of fencers in Ireland.
- In a year or two, when the process of addressing the issues raised in this survey should be having an impact, it may be instructive to repeat this ranking of statements in a new survey to see if any improvement can be discerned.

Conclusion

Overall, the opinions of the women surveyed with regard to these statements are positive. Respondents, on average, report feeling that the mentioned bodies/groups do treat women and men equally. There is a significant minority who do not perceive this to be the case, however, and certainly more can be done to address their concerns and to be seen to be seeking out and listening to the opinions of women in Irish fencing. Some ideas on how this can be done are set out later in this report in the 'Recommendations' section.

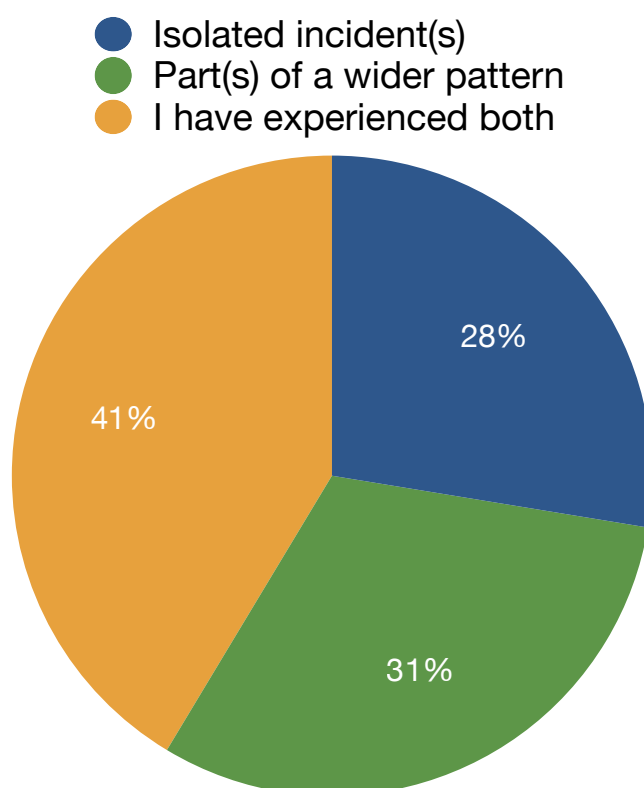
Experienced sexist behaviour and attitudes

Have you ever experienced sexist behaviour or attitudes in Irish fencing?



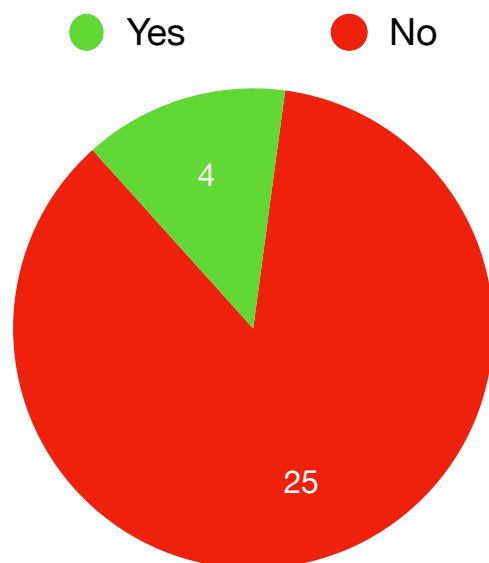
The rest of the questions in this section of the report were only shown to respondents who answered 'yes' to the question above.

Do you feel the sexist behaviour or attitudes you experienced was an isolated incident or part of a wider pattern?

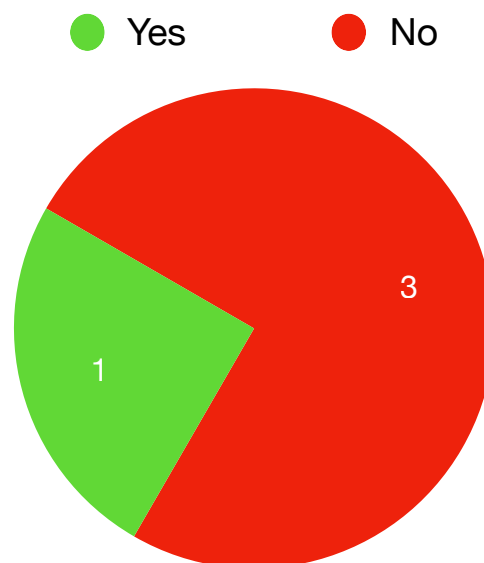


Experienced sexist behaviour and attitudes

Did you report the behaviour to any relevant authority?



If you have reported sexist behaviour or attitudes, were you satisfied with the response and actions taken by person/group to whom you reported it?



Conclusions

A hit rate of 1/4 for satisfaction from reported behaviour is not good but is it difficult to read much into this with the small sample size and with the lack of information on where the behaviour was reported. What is more noteworthy is the very low rate of sexist behaviour and attitudes being reported - 4 of 29 who answered the question, only 13.8%.

Prior to this survey, Fencing Ireland had recently published a new webpage to provide information and set out clear guidelines as to how a report could be made about these and other issues. It can be hoped that having this information readily available may improve the low rate of reporting evident here but it should not be viewed as the only step required to do so.

The Make a Report webpage can be found here: www.fencingireland.net/make-a-report.

Can you provide some general information on the nature of the sexist behaviour/attitudes you experienced?

This was phrased as an open question with space to write as much as the respondent wished.

The question was posed with the following note included:

"NOTE: please only provide general, anonymous information here, if you wish to make a specific complaint/report, please use Fencing Ireland's official reporting structure, which can be found here: www.fencingireland.net/make-a-report"

The information provided here is a summary of comments provided by respondents to this question, the complete responses can be found in Appendix 1, below.

Competitions

- Equal 'prominence' not given to men's and women's events
 - Women's events being relegated to lesser/substandard quality halls or pistes
 - Women's finals not taking place on the 'podium piste'
 - Clean up happening when women's finals are on
- Trophies not being presented for women's events such as the Irish Nationals all weapons event when they are for men
- Scheduling problems
 - A number of comments referred to women's events (particularly foil) always being on a Sunday and wanting a more equitable scheduling split
 - Some comments want both gender events of the one weapon on the same day if logistically possible
 - Women's events being delayed due to delays in men's events
- Women's events being described as less important than men's events

Refereeing

- Lack of respect for female referees, calls questioned, 'intimidating and derogatory tones and words' used when speaking to or about women referees
- Sexist comments to or about women referees
- Under qualified men being sent to referee women's events

Training

- Correct gear not provided for women
- Refusal to train with women due to perception of them not being good enough

General attitudes/behaviour

- Several respondents reported sexist comments and attitudes, often dismissing the fencing quality of women or women's events
- Men giving unsolicited advice to women, even women they have no connection to
- Women's opinions not being listened to

Experienced sexist behaviour and attitudes

Inappropriate behaviour

- Small number of comments referring to inappropriate behaviour - one a sexual assault but regarded by the respondent as "an isolated incident and not related to the club or competition, but entirely down to the individual." Another reported lewd behaviour by a coach in a post-training sauna session, again, noted as an isolated incident.
- Bullying

Other

- Injury being dismissed as unimportant when a man injured in a similar way would have, in their opinion, been treated differently
- One comment saying their "sympathies lie with men" as women are often aggressive and impolite. Coaches encourage "women (to) get in tough with their 'male side'".

One respondent, after providing comments on competition organisation and attitudes towards referees, also noted: "Most of this is a general attitude to women's sport in society and not particular to fencing but perhaps is more visual given men and women train and compete alongside each other."

Conclusions

Sexism and sexist behaviour is a society-wide problem and, as fencing does not exist in a vacuum, societal changes will have to play a role in its reduction.

That is not to say, however, that there is nothing Fencing Ireland can do to address the specific situation regarding sexism in Irish fencing.

The rate of 37.2% - over a third - of respondents reporting experiencing sexist behaviour or attitudes is clearly too high. 70% of those who reported experiencing sexist behaviour/attitudes regard some or all of that behaviour as part of a wider pattern. This high rate of respondents regarding the behaviour they experienced as part of a wider pattern indicates that these are not issues that can be left unaddressed.

The positive news on this front is that the most common issues raised in the question asking for details from respondents have the potential to be relatively easily fixed with some adjustments to the organisation and running of competitions. Some proposals are set out in the final section of this report: 'Recommendations'.

What could Fencing Ireland do to improve the experience of women in Irish fencing?

This was phrased as an open question with space to write as much as the respondent wished. A significant portion of respondents took the time to fill out this section. An overview of the responses (with some edits to ensure anonymity) follows.

The information provided here is a summary of comments provided by respondents to this question, the complete responses can be found in Appendix 2, below.

Competitions

- Equal 'prominence' should be given to men's and women's events
 - Take steps to ensure women's finals are given the same importance as men's finals - not cleaning up during finals, access to 'podium piste', etc.
 - Women's events to get access to same standard of equipment as men's events
- Investigate scheduling issues
 - A number of comments referred to women's events (particularly foil) always being on a Sunday and wanting a more equitable scheduling split
 - Some comments want both gender events of the one weapon on the same day if logistically possible
 - Delays in start of women's events due to men's events running over
- Encourage more women to compete

Training

- More access to training
- Equal attention should be given to men and women by coaches
- Specific women focussed sessions (or even competitions)

Attitudes

- Women should be respected as athletes
- Work should be done to improve perception of women as athletes by men
- Men should listen to women if the women refuse help/advice
- Rules for polite behaviour

Refereeing

- Clamp down on abuse of referees
- More female referees
- Better allocation of referees at competitions - women not to get the lower quality referees

Positive comments

- Fencing Ireland does well
- Awareness is important and this survey helps

Transgender issues

- One comment saying we need to be more accepting of trans people
- One comment stating that they 'dislike' fencing trans women internationally

The future

Complaints procedures and appropriate behaviour

- Listen to women

Other comments

- Terminology - 'ladies' vs 'women'. Commenter reckons it used be an issue but is now sorted.
- Encourage women in various roles, especially in senior roles and as coaches
- Advertise more to girls in school, advertise more in general. Advertise fitness element more.
- Separate men and women, especially old men and young women
- More sessions outside Dublin

Conclusion

There are many good ideas in here, some of which can be implemented/ achieved in a manner which relatively clear and simple to plan. Other issues will take more consideration and potentially long term gradual improvement with continuous effort to improve - this is particularly relevant to changing and improving attitudes.

The future

Volunteering to help

At the end of the survey we asked respondents to let us know whether they would be interested in taking part in future projects to address the needs of women in Irish fencing. Respondents had the option of either leaving their name and email address in the survey or, if they wished for their survey responses to remain anonymous, they could send an email registering their interest in taking part.

We got a strong response to this appeal for volunteers to help in future projects. **23 respondents** provided enough details that they can be contacted to take part in any such future projects.

Further comments

This section was provided as a final chance for respondents to provide information/opinions that they might have felt valuable but which was not directly addressed in previous questions/sections.

"I was battling breast cancer when I started fencing and it helped me a lot go through that period. I know that in France and Italy fencing is used as a therapy post cancer treatment and it would be nice if something similar was brought along here"

"It would be good to offer refresh training to bring older fencers back into the sport"

"Access to clubs and coaches is the biggest issue I think. That affects both men and women, but of course given that the numbers for women are already so low, I think we're more likely to drop out. Worth considering that when women who are just learning are fencing mostly men, it's hard to keep confidence when their height makes it much harder to beat them!"

"Promotions and advertising are generally aimed at junior members too. Much as I'd love to pick it up again, I'd run a mile if I kept getting beaten by a bunch of 12 year olds!"

"the attitude of one coach was quite awful when I went back to Ireland and started again in my previous club - As women, we should be considered and respected as adults not treated and addressed to as little girls. This person was the reason why I ended practicing fencing after 15 years. I do miss fencing a lot."

"The non- gender specific training is what attracted me to fencing as a sport, and I really enjoy the fact that men and women train and compete together."

"Women's fencers coaches etc should be highlighted more on the circuit"

"Fencing is a great sport, but nobody knows about it. It needs to be promoted in schools throughout the country."

The future

"Not really specific to women but good communication, courses, well-run competitions - all of these raise the profile of fencing and help to make all fencers feel part of a community. I have had so much fun and am so grateful for all the work that is being done by a fairly small group of volunteers. Keep it up!"

"Many women take up fencing and are enthusiastic but leave within a year. A once-a-month women's only coaching session may help women to feel they are progressing. Clubs are not well enough supported to nurture new blood, so that the fall-off curve is not as steep."

Recommendations

Competition

The most common area of complaint brought up by this survey is the issue of equality in the running of competitions. **Competitions are the key area to address.** Competition organisers and Fencing Ireland came out worst from the rating of statements - this makes sense in the manner that these bodies organise events that are important to fencers but at the same time fencers may not feel affection or loyalty to those bodies in the same way a fencer might to their own club or their coach(es). This also makes sense in that the complaints made about competition organisation are reasonable.

Many of the specific complaints made in the survey responses can be addressed relatively simply with suitable planning and organisation from those running competitions. These include ensuring that all events in a competition are given equal prominence in terms of:

- Equal access to the highest standard equipment - if there are some pistes with visible time and score and some without, care should be taken to ensure that women's events are not left missing out while men's events benefit. The pistes should be assigned on a logical basis not based on gender, e.g. a competition organiser may decide that épée tends to have more need for the visible bout time and assign pistes on that basis - this would be reasonable but it must be ensured that the policy is applied similarly and equitably for men and women.
- Holding their finals and semi finals on prominent pistes - if there is a specific 'podium piste' all events must be given equal access to that piste for finals.
- Announcements regarding the start of finals or other prominent matches are done systematically and with a similar prominence for all weapons, regardless of gender.
- Checking that prizes awarded, particularly at competitions with perpetual trophies, are comparable across genders and weapons.

Furthermore, Fencing Ireland should undertake to investigate the issue of equality regarding the scheduling of men's and women's events. If inequalities are confirmed, it may be necessary for Fencing Ireland to coordinate some cooperation between completion organisers to ensure an equitable split of days of events across the events calendar.

Finally, if the situation arises in the future whereby a fencer or group of fencers experiences similar issues to those raised in this report, there needs to be a clear procedure for the reporting of concerns to competition organisers and a willingness from competition organisers to listen to concerns and address them both on the day and in planning for future events.

Refereeing

Issues regarding the poor treatment of women involved in refereeing come up both in the details question of the 'Experienced Sexist Behaviour and Attitudes' section as well as in the 'What could Fencing Ireland do to improve the experience of women in Irish fencing?' question.

Independent of this survey and report, Fencing Ireland are already working on ways to improve the treatment of referees. The policies being written include plans which aim to both better educate the fencing community regarding appropriate and inappropriate behaviour towards referees and to ensure referees feel supported when dealing with and/or reporting abusive behaviour.

Fencing Ireland is already engaged in improving the qualification processes for Irish fencing referees. These developments should address the issues raised in this survey regarding problems with the allocation of referees by increasing the number and standard of referees active in Ireland.

Changing Culture and Attitudes

The changing of attitudes to increase the respect shown women as fencers and athletes is an issue which may take longer to than some other changes. We must begin by ensuring that Fencing Ireland's policies and actions always pay attention to gender equality. Running a 'Women in Irish Fencing Forum' (see next section) potentially as an annual event could play a role in ensuring that women's issues progress over the years.

We must celebrate our top female athletes as athletes. We must use our communication channels, including social media, to promote the achievement of women in Irish fencing, not just as female fencers but as fencers and athletes independent of their gender. We should do more to celebrate all our champions of Irish events, male and female, and should give equal prominence to all who have the same achievements.

Women in Irish Fencing Forum

As a result of this survey we now have a number of new tools available to advance the position of women in Irish fencing.

- A set of data to better set out the issues
- A group of volunteers who have declared that they are interested in "taking part in future projects to address the needs of women in Irish fencing".

One project we could launch in the near future is to use this group of volunteers and invite them to a Women in Irish Fencing Forum. This (likely online) meeting would consist of a number of elements:

- A presentation on this survey and the information gathered from it
- Discussions on various areas which this survey has highlighted as needing addressing - these discussions can happen through a combination of smaller breakout group discussions as well as wider discussions amongst the whole group.

Recommendations

Such a forum may prove a useful process through which more concrete proposals can be formulated to address issues that need addressing. If a meeting in summer 2021 is successful, this could become an ongoing event - perhaps taking place annually to try to ensure that improvements made are maintained and that newly arising issues are addressed as needed in the future.

Transgender issues

The position of transgender people in fencing came up in a small number of survey responses - one commenting that fencing in Ireland has issues with transphobia, and another commenting that they did not enjoy fencing transgender opponents at international events. Even with the very small set of comments on the topic of transgender people in fencing, just two respondents, elements of the complexity and varied nature of the debate on this issue are captured here. This is a topic of debate across the sporting world and not one with an evident, easy solution that satisfies all parties. An easy answer is, therefore, unlikely to present itself for fencing in Ireland.

It is worth noting, however, that the word 'transgender' does not appear on our website. There may be cause to write a policy with regard to Fencing Ireland's stance on the position of transgender people in the sport here.

'Lack of Time'

A large factor given for people giving up fencing is a 'lack of time'. This is a tricky area to deal with as it presumably comes from a fencer's personal or professional life and is not directly related to fencing. There are, however, a few things that could be addressed to improve this situation:

- If fencing is enjoyable and rewarding enough some may prioritise it higher for their limited available time.
- We can potentially keep some people involved in the sport though ensuring that there are ways of staying involved with lower levels of time commitment, these could involve:
 - Volunteer roles such as refereeing that do not necessitate attending training sessions multiple times per week
 - Fencing sessions in clubs which are welcoming and fun and which purposefully facilitate those who engage in the sport for occasional participation, fun, and fitness but who cannot make a large time commitment at the moment.
- We may also consider methods of ensuring that lines of communication remain open so that former fencers experience as few barriers as possible to returning to the sport if/when they have more time available to them in the future.
- As noted above, the social aspects of fencing seem to play a large role in fencers' enjoyment of the sport - improving this aspect further may also play a role in aiding the suggestions here as to how this issue can be lessened.

Recommendations

Reporting Procedures

The rate of reporting of experienced sexist behaviour is too low. And among those who did report sexist behaviour, the rate of satisfaction is too low. Crucial parts of this issue are summed up well in this comment provided in the question asking what Fencing Ireland could do to improve the experience of women in Irish fencing: "Take complaints more seriously, & hold people accountable for their words & actions. Provide documentation on appropriate behaviour & how to address sexism & bullying behaviour to clubs."

Fencing Ireland has recently added a new page to its website to better inform members of how they might make a report about sexist behaviour or other issues, including issues surrounding safeguarding of children or vulnerable adults. The availability of this information on our website has been promoted in the course of this women in fencing survey but should also be periodically mentioned on our social media channels or email newsletter to ensure members are aware of this important information. Fencing Ireland cannot make people report these issues but we must at least make the reporting process clear, simple, and non-judgemental.

Fencing Ireland is not the only body to which reports of such behaviour might be made, however; complaints might also be made to clubs, schools, university sports departments, etc.. Fencing Ireland should investigate providing guidance to relevant bodies on how to handle any such reports or, if such guidance exists already, Fencing Ireland should re-publicise that information.

Coaches

Coaches, in general, are depicted well in the responses to this survey. There are a few answers to questions which indicate that occasional incidents do occur where the behaviour of coaches is not of a high enough standard. Fencing Ireland should undertake a review of our Code of Conduct for Coaches and Club Officials to check that it is sufficiently robust and covers issues raised in this survey. Any updates or changes to the Code of Conduct should be clearly communicated to our coaching community.

The current Code of Conduct for Coaches and Club Officials is available here: <https://www.fencingireland.net/wp-content/uploads/Code-of-Conduct-for-Coaches-and-Club-Officials.pdf>

Appendix 1 - Full responses to question asking for detail on experienced sexist behaviour

Can you provide some general information on the nature of the sexist behaviour/attitudes you experienced?

This was phrased as an open question with space to write as much as the respondent wished.

The question was posed with the following note included:

"NOTE: please only provide general, anonymous information here, if you wish to make a specific complaint/report, please use Fencing Ireland's official reporting structure, which can be found here: www.fencingireland.net/make-a-report"

Competition organisation:

"Women's weapons tend to be an after-thought in the way competitions are scheduled and organised and do not get as much visibility (e.g. final not held on the podium piste while men's weapons' finals are; women's events are delayed to allow for men's events to proceed correctly; qualified referees are most often allocated to men's matches)."

"I can't comment on the situation now as I am no longer involved in fencing in Ireland, but in the past I have complained to organisers about women's events being undervalued, e.g. relegated to substandard pistes or scheduled at the end of a day when no one else is there and the hall is being cleaned while the women are still competing."

"Some general attitude about the importance of women's events by male competitors."

"At one of the first tournaments I attended, the women were sent to a substandard salle, with temporary pistes, while the men were fencing in the better equipped salle. This almost stopped me attending further events, and possibly, if I was younger, I may have stopped then."

"In general I feel that women's events are not treated with the same respect as the men's equivalent. Examples of this include not holding Women's finals on the finals piste at large competitions, leading to limited support for the fencers and low morale. I have fenced the WS final at the Irish open in the small hall with no announcement that it was taking place and therefore no significant spectators while the finals piste was being used for a Men's Last 8 match. A number of years ago I won the women's all weapons at the Irish Nationals, for which, unlike the men's equivalent, there was no trophy. When a prominent coach (not mine) asked what the women received, a member of the then IFF responded with "A Hug" and hugged me without my permission. It was all laughed off at the time but i feel that this was indicative of the wider attitude to women's fencing in Ireland."

Appendix 1

Competition organisation (continued):

"The experience of many female matches being put on substandard pistes during competitions. Either with faulty boxes or poorly taped pistes etc while the male matches get preference for high quality equipment and central situation of the pistes in the hall."

Hearing comments like "sure it's only the women's event, I'll change those times". Not getting as much piste time as males. Females getting worse pistes/boxes at events by default."

"There is a general attitude of the women's events being "lesser" with those events often being relegated to lesser pistes or having start times delayed for men's events. While some of this is due to the numbers participating, particularly large sign up numbers are usually clear in advance and if this is going to cause a knock-on delay for womens (or any other) start time, this should be communicated clearly. I have rushed to get to venues early on a Sunday only to find there aren't enough pistes and my event isn't going to start for an hour or more. Then you are given very little notice to get on piste, often disrupting a warm up routine."

"General regarding of women's brackets as less worthy of respect - Schull Novice Men's Trophies are much larger and nicer."

Refereeing issues:

"Consistent lack of respect for female refs from male spectators and fencers, aggression when disagreeing, constant questioning of calls by male coaches and intimidating and derogatory tones and words used when speaking to females refs or when speaking to others on the sidelines about the ref. [...] Male fencers being sent to ref female poules in competitions without consulting the fencers, thus assuming their unwillingness or unsuitability to ref themselves. More insultingly these fencers may not even primarily fence the weapon they are refing or may never be called upon to ref the male matches because of their well known inexperience."

"With regards other areas, male fencers have often made sexist comments or attempted to undermine women who help with refereeing of men's events. This doesn't help with referees attempting to gain confidence or with the availability of referees. Similarly, I have witnessed a reluctance to referee womens events."

Training issues:

"When getting started, range of gear sizes for women were limited with chest plates and womens jackets."

"a couple of old men in my club seemed to delight themselves in targeting my breast area during a match."

"There have been many, many times where a male athlete has refused to fence me in practice/warm-up because "I'm a girl" and "would slow them down"."

Appendix 1

General attitudes/behaviour (mostly specifically from/by men):

"I have occasionally witnessed sexist comments from men watching women fence, as well as derogative or dismissive comments or attitude from male fencers asked to referee female fencers. A small but noticeable portion of male club members have a tendency to adopt a patronising attitude towards women and to dismiss them as athletes."

"Individual fencer who had a habit of making sexist comments, eg "a really average guy can walk all over a really good woman""

"Some male fencers expect to beat female fencers and they get visibly and audibly upset when they lose to female opponents"

"I felt that the lack of boundaries between the social and competitive sides of Irish fencing allowed for a lot of casual misogyny and harassment that would not otherwise have been tolerated. From what I can tell this culture has improved a great deal since I stopped fencing, though I'm probably too far removed from it now to judge."

"Some general attitude about the importance of women's events by male competitors."

"Comment made on how getting to a women's final is inferior to a mens"

"Male fencers shouting advice from listen side even to female fencers they don't know or train with."

"Not being listened to. Over looked for even tho qualified to help"

"Have been told to shut up. Haven't been giving the same opportunity to develop as other"

"I've heard just a lot of hurtful comments from guys about how women's epee is boring, the worst of them could beat the best of us, and it's not worth the space it takes up."

"Comments regarding ease of women's circuit in comparison to men's circuit, with little foundation in my opinion, specifically in Epée"

"That competition for women don't matter. That they are not as good or competitive as men and that they fence just for fun but not seriously"

Inappropriate behaviour:

"Sexual assault. Was an isolated incident and not related to the club or competition, but entirely down to the individual."

"Inappropriate behaviour (staring and a lewd comment) from the coach during the post-training sauna session, isolated incident. Have also experienced bullying by the coach & some members on a number of occasions, although this was not sexist in nature."

Other:

"Without getting into specifics, I was injured seriously during a non-fencing activity at a fencing event and was unable to compete. I think it would have been a bigger deal if I had been a man and if the men's team had been compromised."

"My sympathies lie with men. At competitions and in the clubs, they are forced to witness women undressing in front of them, walking about scantily clothed and being generally aggressive and impolite. Personally, I find these young athletes bring ageist attitudes towards their own sex and are rude towards men. This was never the ethos of fencing in Ireland and is encouraged by today's coaches who demand that women get in touch with their 'male side'. All of this put me off and spoilt my enjoyment of the sport or attending competitions."

Appendix 2 - Full responses to what Fencing Ireland can do to help women question

What could Fencing Ireland do to improve the experience of women in Irish fencing?

This was phrased as an open question with space to write as much as the respondent wished. A significant portion of respondents took the time to fill out this section. An overview of the responses (with some edits to ensure anonymity) follows.

Comments regarding training:

"More access to training"

"Specific training for women"

"Coaches/clubs should ensure equal focus on both men and women in training, ie that coaching isn't focused on "better" male fencers but women who regularly train feel they are rewarded for their efforts and are not ignored, even if they are not at the same standard."

"Create more female focused training sessions or even competitions. Make it more popular so that more women join and are not intimidated"

Comments regarding attitudes:

"Respect women as athletes"

"working on how improving perception biai from men towards women (consider us as as capable athletes as men) and avoid the boy's club mentality (fencing primarily with themselves) at least at the time"

"Educate male fencers on listening to the women if they refuse help/advice both piste side and in training."

"Encourage strength, without aggression. Set down rules for polite behaviour, including dress.. If men behaved as women do now, there would be uproar."

Comments regarding refereeing:

"Make zero tolerance for ref harassment while piste side, including penalties for coaches and fencers. Always ask poules of women if they are willing to ref themselves before assigning another ref to them (unless all matches are to be fully ref by outside refs in the comp)."

"More female referees would be nice."

"Check the referee allocation at competitions! There seems to be a pattern of competition organisers accepting a lower standard of refereeing for women's competitions than for men's."

Appendix 2

Comments regarding competitions:

"Put more thought into how events are organised to ensure a fair and equal treatment of men and women on these occasions."

"Men's foil is always given the Saturday slot and women's foil is on Sundays. Given the social nature of the competitions, it would have been nice to have a Saturday every now and again."

"Also, given that the numbers of women who compete are quite low, I was often the only female foilist from my club but there were plenty of guys. They wouldn't show up on the Sunday to support. Usually because they were too hungover! I'm sure there are probably logistical issues with fencing both foil competitions (and both épée subsequently) on the same day but it would have been nice to have people around for the ladies matches too."

"Rotate competition days so women are not always on a Sunday"

"Give equal prominence and awards to equivalent men's and women's events at all competitions, regardless of the number of competitors or the perceived level of interest among the spectators."

"Encourage female referees. Don't put the female events in the small side rooms as a routine"

"Not clean up when women's finals are on"

"Try to encourage more women to join fencing as regularly at competitions there aren't enough fencers to compete against"

"Hold men and women's weapons (aka men's and women's epee) on the same day"

"Ensure comp organisers treat males and females equally"

"Make concerted effort to have female poules and matches in the main hall areas and on the good pistes even if the poule or weapon is considered small."

"Pay attention at competitions at the turn out for men's weapons vs women"

Better organisation of competitions to ensure there are enough pistes, and that women's events aren't automatically relegated to pistes without time/score"

"Help to encourage women's competitive participation to allow for a larger scale of event enjoyed by men's events, more poules, larger round of number etc"

"Create more female focused training sessions or even competitions. Make it more popular so that more women join and are not intimidated"

Positive comments:

"Very happy overall with Fencing Ireland and gender related issues"

"It has been quite a while but awareness and surveys like these help"

"I think Fencing Ireland does a really good job to promote gender equality. Personally I have never felt discriminated against."

"Ireland fencing has given great opportunity & experience to me."

Appendix 2

Transgender issues:

"Sorry, but maybe because of my age, I really have just always considered myself as a fencer, not a woman fencer. I train happily with men but dislike competing against trans women internationally - but that is another issue!"

"Make events more accessible to/accepting of trans people."

Complaints and appropriate behaviour:

"Take complaints more seriously, & hold people accountable for their words & actions. Provide documentation on appropriate behaviour & how to address sexism & bullying behaviour to clubs."

Other comments:

"None that I can think of. There was discussion in previous years of the language around "Men v Ladies" but I think most competitions / positions are now referred to as "Men v Women""

"continue to encourage them to become coaches and strive for the olympics"

"Ensure equality of access to standard equally well equipped salles"

"More coaching in schools"

"- Advertise more to young girls in secondary school

- With more interest, more clubs can be made available with more girls involved

- I have lots of friends who didn't even know fencing was possible todo anywhere in ireland before I told them about it and would definitely be interested in taking it up

- it can be intimidating when your just starting and there's no one else to match your skill level."

"Promote more female coaches . Promote more female fencer role models."

"try to involve more women in Irish fencing"

"Promote more women in to senior roles . Created a network for women fencers and coaches . Pay attention at competition there are more turn outs and spectators for men's weapons."

"for me a club in waterford area.. impossible to train down here, dublin too far for regular training, when in london train at lansdowne. desperate for something in ireland"

"Have More women in the sport possibly through having more clubs around the country and getting kids started at a younger age to give them a fighting chance at a European level when they grow up."

"Segregate man and woman, old men and young ladies in particular"

"Advertise the benefits of fitness more"

"I think it is more about the person than the gender, on whether they might wish to continue fencing past beginners."

"More sessions outside Dublin"

Appendix 3 - Survey format

Page 1

FENCING IRELAND

Women in Irish Fencing Survey

This survey aims to gather information from women who are or who have been involved in fencing in Ireland. It is open to women who are currently involved in Irish fencing or who were involved in the sport here at any time in the past. Please only complete this survey if you are a woman who is or was involved in fencing in Ireland.


Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey.

Responses are anonymous. All data is processed in accordance with Fencing Ireland's privacy policy which can be found at www.fencingireland.net

Important notes:

There are no questions in this survey which you are required to answer. Feel free to skip any questions you do not feel you have an answer for or which you do not feel comfortable answering.

Fencing Ireland is conducting this survey to enquire into the experiences of women in our sport and community. We aim to encourage and promote the involvement of women in Irish fencing by identifying any areas in which improvements can be made.



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Women in Irish Fencing Survey

General information

Weapons fenced (select all that apply)

☐ Foil

☐ Épée

☐ Sabre

Are you currently involved in fencing in Ireland?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Other: _____

If you are not currently involved in fencing in Ireland, in approximately what year did your involvement cease?

Your answer _____

If you are no longer fencing, why did you stop? (select all that apply)

☐ Lack of time

☐ Financial issues

☐ Family reasons

☐ Geographical - No fencing club nearby

☐ Social - e.g. lack of a connection to people in a club


☐ Lost interest in fencing


☐ Age

☐ Injury

☐ Lack of clear competitive goals

☐ Other: _____





Appendix 3

How often a week do/did you train?

☐ Less than once a week

☐ Once a week

☐ Twice a week

☐ Three or more times a week

How often do/did you compete in fencing events?

☐ I did not compete

☐ Less than once a year

☐ 1-2 a year

☐ 3-5 a year

☐ More than 5 times a year

What element(s) of fencing do/did you enjoy most? (select all that apply)

☐ The competitive nature of fencing

☐ Fitness benefits

☐ Tactical nature of fencing

☐ The technical nature of fencing

☐ The social aspects

☐ Learning a new skill

☐ Other: _____

What barriers, if any, have you experienced to taking part in fencing in Ireland? (select all that apply)

☐ Distance to club(s)


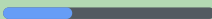

☐ Financial issues

☐ Finding training of an appropriate level

☐ Injury

☐ Accessing coaching

☐ Other: _____

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FENCING

I R E L A N D

Women in Irish Fencing Survey

Behaviour and attitudes in Irish fencing

Rate these statements based on how much you agree with them:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel Fencing Ireland values women and men equally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel my club values women and men equally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel competition organisers value women and men equally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel my coach(es) values women and men equally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel respected as a woman in Irish fencing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel respected as an athlete in Irish fencing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel safe at Irish fencing events	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Getting involved with fencing has been a positive in my life	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you ever experienced sexist behaviour or attitudes in Irish fencing?

Whether this occurred at competitions, in your club, at social events or other events associated with fencing and no matter the severity of the sexist behaviour/attitude.

☐ Yes
☐ No

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This page was only visible to those respondents who answered "Yes" to the final question on page 3.

FENCING

I R E L A N D

Women in Irish Fencing Survey

Experienced behaviour or attitudes

Do you feel the sexist behaviour or attitudes you experienced was an isolated incident or part of a wider pattern?

☐ Isolated incident(s)
☐ Part(s) of a wider pattern
☐ I have experienced both
☐ Other: _____

Did you report the behaviour to any relevant authority?

Amongst others, relevant authorities might include Fencing Ireland, a coach, competition organisers, a school, a university, or the Gardaí.

☐ Yes
☐ No

If you have reported sexist behaviour or attitudes, were you satisfied with the response and actions taken by person/group to whom you reported it?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Other: _____

Can you provide some general information on the nature of the sexist behaviour/attitudes you experienced? NOTE: please only provide general, anonymous information here, if you wish to make a specific complaint/report, please use Fencing Ireland's official reporting structure, which can be found here: www.fencingireland.net/make-a-report

Please only provide as much information as you feel comfortable sharing. Any incident is relevant, whether it occurred at a fencing competition, in a club setting or at a social event connected to fencing.

Your answer _____

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FENCING IRELAND

Women in Irish Fencing Survey

The future

What could Fencing Ireland do to improve the experience of women in Irish fencing?

Your answer

Further comments:

If you have any further comments or suggestions to share relevant to the subject of women in Irish fencing, please share them here.

Your answer

If you would be interested in taking part in future projects to address the needs of women in Irish fencing, you can enter your details below.

Alternatively, if you would prefer to leave this survey response anonymous but still want to express your interest in taking part in future projects, please send your contact details to development@irishfencing.net

Name

Your answer

Email address (optional)

Your answer

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FENCING IRELAND

Women in Irish Fencing Survey

Reporting Behaviour

Fencing Ireland is committed to ensuring that all our members can enjoy the sport of fencing in a friendly and welcoming environment. If you ever wish to report an issue wherein a Fencing Ireland member or club acted in a manner that does not fit with the policies set down by Fencing Ireland you can find relevant information regarding how to make a report here:
www.fencingireland.net/make-a-report

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