Tracking Progress towards the International Safeguards for Children in Sport

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Abstract: In 2018, a review was conducted to explore sporting organisations’ use of global safeguarding policies. Due to an increase in the number of organisations now adopting these policies, it is thought that an up-to-date review should be conducted to reinstate what is known. As such, this study aims to assess the current state of sporting organisations on the adoption and implementation of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport. Global organisations were contacted to take part in an online questionnaire which explored their use of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport and adopted a novel use for the activation states theory. Results indicated an international, multi-sector use of the International Safeguards as well as supported the relevancy of these Safeguards. There was some stabilisation in activation states since the last review whilst others have progressed from reactive to active. Similarly, thematic analysis highlighted multiple key indicators important in creating a broader impact through safeguarding, such as an increase in disclosures. Furthermore, the results appear to support the newly developed Safeguarding Culture in Sport model. Overall, this research appears to demonstrate an improvement in organisations’ engagement with safeguarding but also highlights areas where this can be further improved.

Keywords: safeguarding; International Safeguards; abuse; activation states; safety culture

1. Introduction

Recently there has been increased awareness on the situation of abuse in sport, highlighted through victims (for example former British Gymnast Amy Tinkler; Ingle 2020), perpetrators (for example former USA Gymnastics coach Larry Nassar; Fisher and Anders 2020) and television programmes (such as Football’s Darkest Secret; Varley 2021). Over three decades, research has highlighted welfare concerns are present at individual, relational and organisational levels (Brackenridge and Rhind 2014). Brackenridge (2001) emphasised that in response to such high-profile cases the British sporting agenda has taken a devoted interest in engaging with child protection, yet this was not always the situation. Brackenridge et al. (2005) emphasised that in response to such high-profile cases the British sporting agenda has taken a devoted interest in engaging with child protection, yet this was not always the situation. Brackenridge et al. (2005) remarked that governing bodies were firstly cautious in the uptake of safeguarding policies possibly due to a denial of the issue within sport, potential for bad publicity and a sense that it impeded organisation’s integrity. Similarly, the international pace of child protection policies varies considerably. Consequently, a standardised set of safeguards were developed based off of empirical research by Brackenridge et al. (2012). These aided organisations to overcome a range of safeguarding challenges highlighted in past research (Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2020). The International Safeguards for Children in Sport (International Working Group 2016) are:

1. Developing your policy;
2. Procedures for responding to safeguarding concerns;
3. Advice and support;
4. Minimising risks to children;
5. Guidelines for behaviour;
6. Recruiting, training and communicating;
7. Working with partners;
8. Monitoring and evaluating.

Brackenridge et al. (2005) note that a key way to change processes and highlight potential resistance is through assessing the commitment of organisations in adopting safeguarding policies. Using a standardised self-audit tool which matches these safeguards, organisation’s progress can be monitored and a record maintained of how developed, effective and impactful these policies are, something previously noted as needing attention (Brackenridge 2001). Thus, the main aim of this research will be:

To assess the current state of sporting organisations on the adoption and implementation of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport.

1.1. Welfare

Abuse can take many forms but five are most noted in sport; emotional, physical, sexual, neglect, and poor practice (Raakman et al. 2011). During 2011, 652 safeguarding cases were managed by sporting organisations (Rhind et al. 2014). Goosey (2021) noted that individuals who experience harm can be affected through physical and psychological injury, often causing developmental impact. Additionally, Radford et al. (2011) noted that over 90 per cent of children who have suffered abuse experienced it from someone they know. Thus, responsible organisations need to maintain a keen interest in safeguarding practices to limit experiences of organisational abuse, or neglect of an institution in allowing safeguarding concerns to be continued/not investigated (Keeling and Oakley 2021). Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2020) noted that through the Safeguards, participants saw a rise in the number of safeguarding concerns presented potentially due to increased awareness and/or trust in the system. This prompted three research questions:

RQ1. Who is using the International Safeguards for Children in Sport?
RQ2. Where are organisations on their safeguarding journey?
RQ3. What are the broader impacts of the International Safeguards?

1.2. Activation States

The main theory underpinning this research is that of activation states (Brackenridge et al. 2005). The Hawthorn effect tends to appear in research as participants change their behaviour to suit what they feel is expected by the researcher. As such, for individuals to internalise actions they have to accept its importance and have confidence in how to approach it (Brackenridge et al. 2005). This is where the five activation states in child protection originate from; to assess stakeholders’ level of activation towards safeguarding by highlighting what they ‘say’, ‘know’, ‘feel’ and ‘do’ about the subject. Holding an ‘inactive’ position means organisations have no knowledge surrounding safeguarding, ‘reactive’ highlights a reluctance to participate and commit whereas ‘opposed’ underlines an extremely critical view of safeguarding. The final two states are the ideal positions for organisations with an ‘active’ state demonstrating a strong base knowledge and involvement in solving it and a ‘proactive’ state demonstrating commitment and active advocacy. Research conducted in 2002–2003 noted a mixture of reactive and active states (Brackenridge et al. 2005) whilst the latest assessment by Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2020) specifically stated a change in knowledge from inactive to active. Using the activation states within this research is beneficial for assessing whether this has advanced, stabilised or regressed since the last review. This leads to the fourth research question:

RQ4. Where are organisations on the activation states?

1.3. Safeguarding Culture in Sport Model

Owusu-Sekyere et al. (2021) created a model to understand safeguarding culture within sport. Previously, research has centred on individual, organisational and interactional ways to curtail child maltreatment, yet the culture of sport is often mentioned as
another factor in the development of abuse (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2021). The researchers thought that one way to satisfy this is to integrate a safety culture into sport from other settings such as aviation. As defined by Edwards et al. (2013, p. 77) a safety culture is:

The assembly of underlying assumptions, beliefs, values and attitudes shared by members of an organisation, which interact with an organisation’s structures and systems and the broader contextual setting to result in those external, readily visible, practices that influence safety.

Consequently, Owusu-Sekyere and colleagues developed the Safeguarding Culture in Sport Model (SCSM) explaining three themes important to the conceptualisation of a safeguarding culture in sport. Firstly, safety management systems (SMS) aid the creation and maintenance of robust cultures. This includes the sub-themes of safeguarding policy, incentives, planning and prevention, communication channels, training, and monitoring and evaluation. Next, stakeholder engagement explains the care and personal investment of safeguarding held in the culture and includes further sub-themes of appreciation, awareness and motivation. Lastly, leadership commitment was identified to explore how the highest levels of authority often hold the majority of influence on organisational safeguarding culture. Another finding within the research that did not emerge as a main theme was the variety of internal and external contextual factors that represent both mediating factors and potential resultants of the main themes (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2021, p. 15). This model provides another potential avenue for investigation within present research as to whether this new concept can be supported.

1.4. Current Research

The 2018 review assessed the global status of safeguarding in thirty-two sporting organisations working with children (Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2020). It was noted by the end of the research that 125 organisations endorsed the International Safeguards. Roughly 400 organisations globally now use the Safeguards to develop policies and practices and therefore, another review of the current status of safeguarding in sport is required to explore whether the state of safeguarding has developed, stabilised or reduced.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

This study was comprised of organisations that were signed up to the International Safeguards newsletter by 7 June 2021. Discussions were held around exclusion criteria, but to truly explore the current state of safeguarding it was felt that all organisations including those who implemented the Safeguards in 2021 should be included. Four hundred organisations were contacted via the owner of this list, through an invitation email containing the participant information sheet and informed consent form allowing them to gain information about the research before agreeing to take part. Contact information for the researchers was also included so that any questions could be directed and answered appropriately. Sixty-nine participants accessed the survey through the invitation link provided. They were reminded that they had the right to withdraw, the confidentiality and anonymity of data, as well as participation being voluntary. To ensure anonymity, limited descriptive details were recorded. Participants were asked about the location(s) of their organisation, the sector(s) in which they work, their job role, and when their organisation began using the International Safeguards. I.P. addresses and other identifiable information, such as questions asking for the specific sports in which they operate, were not recorded to further protect the participant’s identity.

2.2. Procedure

Ethical approval was granted by the University’s Ethical Committee prior to data collection. A third-party organisation, International Working Group, worked on the researchers’ behalf to send an invitation email to participants. This was because they have access to the list of organisations dedicated to the International Safeguards newsletter,
as well as protected the organisations’ identities from the researchers and any potential bias that may have resulted. Participants were asked to complete their latest self-audit measure of the Safeguards, offered in April 2021, before completing the questionnaire. Next participants accessed the survey through a link provided in the email. From here they agreed to the informed consent statement, through a forced response, before beginning the survey. The questionnaire took participants around fifteen minutes to complete, depending on the length of reply to open response questions. Once the end of the survey was reached, the response was automatically recorded. The initial invitation email was distributed on 7 June 2021 with reminder emails being sent in late June and early July to increase responses. This procedure was taken due to the global reach of the participants and restrictions in place due to the ongoing pandemic.

2.3. Materials

A questionnaire, following a similar structure to that conducted by Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2020), was distributed to participating organisations. Minor changes were made to the questionnaire based off of collaboration between the researchers and the external collaborator as well as feedback from the University’s ethical committee. The final questionnaire was comprised of 18 questions addressing issues relating to the organisation itself, their current status on the implementation of the Safeguards, personal experiences, and the reporting of abuse. The self-audit tool was also employed as it encourages self-reflection by asking organisations to consider potential headway they have made towards safeguarding, thus monitoring their progress. Two questions included in the current survey were focused on the results of this standardised and implemented measure, aiding comparison for how imbedded the Safeguards are within the participating organisations. A range of open and closed questions were used, allowing individual experiences to be grouped and summarised as well as aiding the understanding of real-world experiences of safeguarding in sport. The main survey was produced in English (United Kingdom) which could mean that, due to the global nature of the study, certain questions may become lost in translation to those participants who are not fluent in English and/or may discourage a participant from taking part. To counteract this, the researchers had prepared a shorter version of the survey in French; Spanish; Portuguese; Arabic; and Japanese consisting of mostly closed questions so that open responses were not impacted by translation issues. This was utilised to encourage more participants from non-fluent English-speaking countries to also be included and therefore reduce losses from the sample due to any potential language barrier.

For this study, the aim was to develop a quantitative method to assess the activation states of the organisation. The activation states are typically used qualitatively to explore the subtle wordings used by participants in interview responses, and therefore attempting to adapt them into a quantitative measure appears to be novel. To do this a matrix table was formed using example statements for each of the activation states and their corresponding actions provided by Brackenridge et al. (2005, p. 248). For example, the first action in the matrix related to voices, or what people ‘say’ about safeguarding in sport. Multiple examples were provided as to what spoken responses of this action include and from this, one example of each activation state was taken and used as an item for participants to identify. Participants were also asked to give their honest opinion of where their organisation currently is to attempt to minimise the Hawthorn effect.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The survey was distributed via Qualtrics XM, where responses were also recorded meaning that incomplete surveys could be easily identified before analysis began. The number of responses obtained caused a change in analysis from an inferential statistic to descriptive approach to be taken. Analysis was structured around the four research questions. Firstly, the descriptive information provided was used to explore RQ1. This involved exploring the location, sectors and year in which organisations began implementing the
Safeguards, allowing for the global reach of the Safeguards to be understood as well as exploring whether the standards are still relevant to organisations.

Secondly, quantitative data for the year in which the organisation began implementing the Safeguards and the step within the Safeguards identified through their self-audit was analysed descriptively and the representative activation state identified, answering RQ4. Analysis comprised of dividing participants into separate groups depending on the response step and year in which they began implementing the Safeguards and then identifying the modal response of participants in those corresponding groups. The activation states were assigned a number in which the modal response related to was identified, i.e., if the modal response for years 2016 and 2017 was 3 for ‘say’ this identified a reactive activation state for the action of voices whereas a score of 5 would symbolise a proactive state. Furthermore, this allowed discussion around the current analysis and previous research, establishing whether the activation states have further progressed or stabilised since the last review.

Thirdly, the qualitative questions were analysed through thematic analysis. This allowed the researchers to explore the key themes relating to RQ2 and RQ3. Finally, questions to comprehend the number of children who are protected under the International Safeguards and whether more or less cases are being reported since the Safeguards have been in place were used to further explore the indicators of broader impact.

3. Results

Sixty-nine responses were recorded, 68 from the English and 1 from the translated version of the survey. From these, nineteen were removed as participants had only stated their informed consent and answered no further questions. This resulted in a sample of fifty participants for analysis.

3.1. Who Is Using the International Safeguards for Children in Sport?

Participants were asked on the sector in which their organisation operates, where they are geographically based and the year in which they began using the Safeguards, allowing for the international nature of the Safeguards to be updated. The demographics relating to sporting sector, geographical location and the year in which organisations adopted the Safeguards as a model of practice are presented in the relevant tables below:

Table 1. Sporting sector in which organisations are based.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elite</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport for Development</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>47.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>74</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Some participants indicated multiple responses, hence the higher count total than number of participants who answered this question (n = 50). Responses in the other category included: “all”, “child protection”, “education” and “international development and humanitarian”.

Table 2 demonstrates the year in which the organisations adopted the International Safeguards into their model of practice.
Table 2. Geographical location of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia/Oceania</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Country/Countries</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>32.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.99%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Some participants responded to multiple options hence the higher count total than participants who answered the question (n = 50). Responses for the specific country option included but were not limited to: “Brazil”, “Botswana”, “Switzerland”, “Caribbean St. Lucia”, and “China and Pakistan”.

Table 3 demonstrates the year in which the organisations adopted the International Safeguards into their model of practice.

Table 3. The year in which the organisations began developing the International Safeguards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016 (Original Pioneers)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>23.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25.64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The lower count than total participants noted was due to attrition in the number of participant responses.

3.2. Where Are Organisations on the Activation States?

The activation states (Brackenridge et al. 2005) underpinned the research and considered the theory from a quantitative, rather than traditionally qualitative, approach. The dependent variable of activation state was divided into the four sub-sections: ‘say’, ‘know’, ‘feel’ and ‘do’, and compared against the individual variable of year in which the organisations began implementing the Safeguards and the five steps within the Safeguards they identified from their self-audit measure.

3.2.1. Length of Time Engaged with the Safeguards versus Activation State

As shown in Table 4 below, a comparison was conducted to establish if the length of time organisations had been engaged with the International Safeguards lead to greater progression along the activation states. These groups identify those engaged with the International Safeguards since they were pioneered (2016/17) and newer organisations (2019/20/21). The three years for the second group was to make participant numbers for each group comparable and due to the fact that the year 2021 represented roughly six months due to the research timing.

Table 4. Year of International Safeguard introduction versus activation state.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Say</th>
<th>Know</th>
<th>Feel</th>
<th>Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016/17 (n = 12)</td>
<td>Active (n = 6)</td>
<td>Active (n = 5)</td>
<td>Active (n = 10)</td>
<td>Reactive, Active &amp; Proactive (n = 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019/20/21 (n = 14)</td>
<td>Active (n = 7)</td>
<td>Active (n = 7)</td>
<td>Active (n = 9)</td>
<td>Opposed (n = 5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N represents the number of modal responses obtained for the corresponding state identified.
3.2.2. Step Identified through Self-Audit versus Activation State

Next, Table 5 demonstrates how the activation states compared against the stage identified by the organisations via an external self-audit. Steps 1–3 represent the initial stages and steps 4–5 the later stages of development. The results are summarised below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Say</th>
<th>Know</th>
<th>Feel</th>
<th>Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, 2 and 3 (n = 8)</td>
<td>Reactive (n = 3)</td>
<td>Reactive (n = 5)</td>
<td>Active (n = 5)</td>
<td>Reactive (n = 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 and 5 (n = 19)</td>
<td>Active (n = 12)</td>
<td>Active (n = 9)</td>
<td>Active (n = 15)</td>
<td>Active (n = 11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N represents the number of modal responses obtained for the corresponding state identified.

3.3. Where Are Organisations on Their Safeguarding Journey?

Table 6 demonstrates participants’ results from their independent self-audit measure. Participants identified on a scale for each of the eight International Safeguards whether their organisation had them fully in place. The results are demonstrated below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Safeguard</th>
<th>Fully in Place</th>
<th>Partially</th>
<th>Not in Place</th>
<th>Total Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>28 (70.0%)</td>
<td>9 (22.5%)</td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>22 (55.0%)</td>
<td>16 (40.0%)</td>
<td>2 (5.0%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>23 (57.5%)</td>
<td>14 (35.0%)</td>
<td>3 (7.5%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>29 (72.5%)</td>
<td>9 (22.5%)</td>
<td>2 (5.0%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>28 (70.0%)</td>
<td>10 (25.0%)</td>
<td>2 (5.0%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>19 (47.5%)</td>
<td>17 (42.5%)</td>
<td>4 (10.0%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>23 (57.5%)</td>
<td>12 (30.0%)</td>
<td>5 (12.5%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>17 (42.5%)</td>
<td>15 (37.5%)</td>
<td>8 (20.0%)</td>
<td>40 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The lower count than total participants noted was due to attrition in the number of participant responses.

3.3.1. Thematic Analysis

The open questions led to multiple themes being acknowledged. Three main themes, as seen in Figure 1 below, were identified in relation to where organisations are on their safeguarding journey: stakeholder engagement, environment and safety management systems (SMS). Further to this, some of the sub-themes also highlighted impacts of safeguarding culture and thus, a fourth theme was created to encapsulate this.

![Figure 1. Key Theme Framework.](image)

Stakeholder Engagement

Firstly, stakeholder engagement is used to detail the development in understanding and advancement of safeguarding practices in recent years. This was further divided into three sub-themes: awareness, appreciation and support.
Awareness

Through the implementation of the Safeguards, multiple participating organisations highlighted that there is now increased awareness in multiple areas around safeguarding in sport. Primarily the range of understanding across departments within organisations was noted, for example “stronger awareness and practices at many levels across the organization” (Safeguarding Project Manager) and “children’s rights awareness among every workplace in the institutions” (Safeguarding Coordinator). Moreover, an Outgoing Director noted “more people from our network [are] completing basic safeguarding awareness training”. However, one participant noted that “more awareness about safeguarding to the general public [would] be greatly appreciated” and this might begin to “make it [a] must for all organisation[s] dealing with children” (Country Manager).

Appreciation

Appreciation is used in this context to describe how safeguarding appears to have become more important to organisations. Participants highlighted how increased awareness and engagement has led to “the safeguards [becoming] the very first thing most people engage with when they come to the organisation” (Chairman). Participants also noted how the Safeguards have become more important in cultures where this has not always been the case, for example an Outgoing Director noted that there is “good evidence of coaches in the Caribbean demonstrating awareness of safeguarding and becoming advocates in their organisations”. Furthermore, a Programme’s Manager noted how “sport for development organisations [have] gathered together to discuss the importance of embracing the International Safeguards into their organisations, as well as committing to it”. Furthermore, in terms of the reporting of abuse, one participant noted that the importance of “working with well-informed staff and directly doing specific safeguarding activities with children has led to greater notification and perception of cases needing attention” (Sports Coordinator).

Support

The final sub-theme for stakeholder engagement is support. This explores how backing for the Safeguards has increased within and outside of organisations. In terms of within organisation support, multiple participants noted how this has improved such as “increased cooperation of all stakeholders to ensure safeguarding is in place” (Get into Rugby Manager) and how working in alliance creates a “co-responsibility [approach] over safeguarding” (Coach Responsible for Child Protection). Multiple organisations also noted how parental support for organisations to utilise the Safeguards has intensified. For example, a Get into Rugby Manager noted that “there was an increase in parental support” and a Coach noted how “parents are very satisfied according to interview”. However, the amount of support appears to still vary between cultures, with one participant stating that their country is still “slow to support” (President).

Environment

The next key theme identified was environment, relating to how the culture around safeguarding within sport is beginning to shift. This was divided into three further sub-themes: disclosures, change and trust and inclusion.

Disclosures

The sub-theme of disclosures captures how the atmosphere on the reporting of cases and the organisational environment has been affected since the introduction of the Safeguards. For example, organisations expressed how there have been greater responses in regard to the follow up of cases with the guidelines that the Safeguards provide. Participants expressed how a change in attitude has been noted, for example “by working with the children directly on the Safeguards, we have noticed a significant diminution of physical and especially verbal aggression” (Sports Coordinator). One compelling story from a Sport Development Officer noted that “children [who] participate in sport have become more
aware and have reported cases of abuse which [has led to] cases being reported to the courts and perpetrators of abuse being sentenced”. Another comes from a President who noted that “the international safeguards and policies adopted by organisations we work with directly have really assisted in preventing any adverse incidents due to the constant reporting and communications required”.

Change

An aspect of change widely expressed by the participants was the ability to use the Safeguards to standardise the sporting sector. For example, a Programme’s Manager noted that using the Safeguards means that they can become a part of the “worldwide safeguarding procedure agenda” and how the Safeguards can be used as a “reference point across the entire sport for development sector, aligning with like-minded organisations” (Global Director of Programmes and Grants). Another organisation noted how they are “being used to model good practice” and how they have through the Safeguards been able to “influence other codes [of practice] in the country on safeguarding children in sport” (Training and Education manager).

Trust and Inclusion

Multiple organisations noted how “building a safe environment” (Safeguarding Coordinator) often led to greater feelings of trust and inclusion from within the organisation. A Country Manager noted that utilising the Safeguards has allowed a “safer program for children to be in and participate”. Likewise, a Chair of the Council, also noted how by utilising the Safeguards can build trust with parents, “children can participate in sport with the parents being assured that the safeguards are in place to ensure student safety”.

Safety Management Systems

The final main theme on the current review of safeguarding is safety management systems. This is used to summarise the standardisation and global nature of the International Safeguards that the participants noted in their responses. This is divided into two sub-themes: safeguarding policy and practice, and informing and coordinating.

Safeguarding Policy and Practice

This theme encompasses the participants’ expression of how the Safeguards are aiding the introduction and regulation of safeguarding within the sector. A Coach Responsible for Child Protection noted how their organisation now approaches “safeguarding as a whole, in its different aspects, and point[s] them out in [their] policy”. A compelling story came from a director who noted:

As evaluators, we consistently find issues where safeguards are not applied by the organisations we are evaluating. The Safeguards provide a framework that we can use to assess where programs are at with regard to safeguarding and to provide those organisations with a framework and tools to meet their obligations. For our own organisation, it provides a framework to ensure that we are on boarding our consultants and staff and ensuring that safeguarding and protection are front and centre of our approaches to all of our work.

Another note of importance was how organisations recognised that they were “following global best practices in safeguarding as a basis for [their] own practices, structures and guidelines” (Board Member) and were now “part of a recognised international body working on safeguarding” (General Manager Government and Stakeholder Engagement). This standardisation was also stated as being helpful when relating to behavioural practices of members within the organisations, “having clear guidelines and policies help with our staff, so there is no question of what is ok and what is not ok in terms of our behaviour etc.” (Director). Similarly, a Country Manager noted that “a lot of youth we work with do not know how to interact with children the right way so through this program
they know now who to directly handle children safely by protecting themselves as well” (Country Manager).

Informing and Coordinating

Informing and coordinating describes how through the Safeguards organisations are becoming more knowledgeable about what constitutes abuse, how it can be prevented and how organisations are working together to prevent future cases and build a safer system. In terms of informing, participants noted how an understanding around the forms of abuse have aided a reduction in incidence, “children now understand the damage that pejorative nicknames can cause others and are stopping using them” (Sports coordinator). Another noted that they now understand “how a safeguarding policy can contribute to the reduction of violence in daily relations” (Sports coordinator).

A Get into Rugby manager noted how they are supporting the coordination of safeguarding, “having the most experience—I am to represent our NOC soon in the IOC’s safeguarding course in September 2021 so we can train more if not all NGBs [National Governing Bodies] to have and implement Safeguarding Policies”. Participants also expressed how they “share [their] protocol [and] processes” (Coach Responsible for Child Protection) and “have safeguarding in mind whenever [they] develop programs with [their] counterparts” (Chairman).

3.4. What Are the Broader Impacts of the International Safeguards?

A question concerning the job role of the participants was included in the survey to explore the range of roles engaged with safeguarding in organisations. Answers ranged from “Staff”, “Head teacher” and “Coach” to “President”, “CEO [Chief Executive Officer]” and “Director”. A few organisations also recorded themselves as holding a direct child protection or safeguarding role, such as “Safeguarding project manager”, “child wellbeing and protection officer”, “coach responsible for child protection” and “safeguarding coordinator”.

Two questions were asked to explore how many children are protected by the Safeguards. The number of children noted as directly under the protection of those involved was 10,945,514 and the indirect number was noted at 11,609,120. Placed together, from the 47 and 46 participants, respectively, who answered these questions it means approximately 22,554,634 children are being protected in some manner by the International Safeguards.

3.4.1. Thematic Analysis

Some of the themes identified from the thematic analysis also identified signs of cultural change. This led to the fourth key theme, indicators, describing how the Safeguards appear to have had a broader impact on organisations and the young people they work with.

Awareness

Through increased awareness around the Safeguards and policies, multiple organisations expressed that young people are becoming more aware of their rights and are engaging with safeguarding practices. A Director of operations noted that “despite not being best placed to respond in many cases this is the first time many young people have been made aware of their rights and that something that has happened is not ok”. Similarly, a safeguarding coordinator stated “[the Safeguards have] helped to increase children’s knowledge about what a safeguarding policy is and also different forms of violence”. When remarking how the reporting of cases has changed since the introduction of the Safeguards, a director of operations notes that “better awareness of participants and coaches rather than staff knowledge” has led to more cases and issues being raised.

Change

Multiple participants noted how the culture of safeguarding in sport is changing and improving, even in some cases to say that safeguarding is shifting “the entire culture of the organisation” (Chairman). Organisations gave examples of how using the Safeguards have
allowed for “improvements across all areas of [safeguarding] internally and externally as well as more regular reviews” (Director of operations) and how over time they have been able to have “developed, enhanced and revised” (Head of safeguarding) their approach to safeguarding, thus progressing the change within their organisation. A safeguarding coordinator expressed how they are the “first Spanish soccer elite team with [a child] safeguarding policy [and] the first . . . with [a child] safeguarding coordinator”. However, a President noted that not all cultures were so willing to change, describing their respective country as holding a “head in sand mentality” towards safeguarding.

**Trust**

Organisations explained how by using the Safeguards within their organisation, children have developed the support to trust them with matters occurring outside of sport, for example a director of operations noted that “increased awareness of [their] work on [safeguarding] has led to [them to become] a first port of call for young people who have reported incidents outside of [the programme] and [are] looking for support”. Furthermore, a chairman shared a compelling story about how the environment they have created through the Safeguards has allowed openness and trust:

> After our training in 2019 and our new group of mentors began working in our community, we saw a wonderful energy and openness to change and inclusion. This led to our first young man coming “out” as openly gay. In our context this is an amazing reality, but it was clear he trusted the staff mentors and participants in the safe space we had created within his community. He was able to share his fears and concerns and we were able to meet and exceed his expectations. In our cultural context this was a massive step forward and indirectly led to further training on inclusion and acceptance for our staff and mentors.

**Disclosures**

A sport development officer noted how “increased reporting of cases of abuse in sport [has] increased collaboration of sport and NGOs [Non-Governmental Organisations] to address abuse in sport”. Participants noted how the Safeguards have created an environment where “children have been able to open up and share their experiences” (Training and education manager) and another explained that “it [is] clear [people trust] the staff mentors” (Chairman).

Furthermore, a specific question in the survey addressed how the reporting of abuse has changed for organisations since the introduction of the Safeguards. Table 7 illustrates participants’ responses relating to the change in the number of cases reported or recorded since the introduction of the International Safeguards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes More Cases</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes Less Cases</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>28</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The lower total count is due to attrition in participant numbers by this section of the survey.*

For those who noted a drop in case numbers, they sited that their policies were working effectively, “we are very happy with the awareness and practical measures introduced to create a positive attitude towards the safety of children in our sports” (President). Alternatively, those stating no change related this to a lack of sufficient policy, “lack of paperwork or recording, but it is included in plans” (Rugby Coordinator with Community Engagements), or not holding a policy at all, “reporting lines have not yet been promoted as much as we are still in the process of finalizing policy and procedures” (Board Member).
4. Discussion

The aim of this study was to assess the current state of sporting organisations on the adoption and implementation of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport. Consistent with previous research, multiple organisations identified adopting the Safeguards as a model of practice to develop their own policies and practices. The descriptive results and thematic analysis conducted identified key areas where the commitment to and the culture of safeguarding has improved as well as potential areas of further improvement.

4.1. Who Is Using the International Safeguards for Children in Sport?

The demographic results highlight the international, multi-sector spread of the International Safeguards as well as the progression that has been made since the last review. Firstly, a range of sectors within sport have utilised the Safeguards, demonstrating the progression and engagement across the industry. Secondly, whilst the numbers for some continents accounted for a low percentage of the overall sample, there was representation from all emphasising the ability of the Safeguards to be culturally adaptable and highlights the change in safeguarding practices across the globe. Thirdly, the Safeguards still appear to be relevant as multiple participants noted an uptake during the last few years, highlighting that there is still further progression to be made as new organisations are interested in utilising the Safeguards to develop their policies and practices.

4.2. Where Are Organisations on the Activation States?

This study also explored whether the length of time that organisations have been engaged with the Safeguards correspond with a progressed activation state. Both the pioneers (2016/17 group) and newer users (2019/20/21) of the Safeguards displayed active states for three of the four sub-sections: ‘say’, ‘know’ and ‘feel’. Specifically in terms of knowledge, this subsection appears to have stabilised from the last review (Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2020). One potential reason for the active state across both groups is that as the concept of safeguarding in sport has grown, so has organisations’ initial reactions to what they know and say about safeguarding and how they feel about having a safeguarding policy in place. The area of difference between the two groups was ‘do’, or the actions that organisations take. Here there was a split between the pioneering group with an even representation between reactive, active and proactive states suggesting that even though these organisations have been engaged with the Safeguards for the longest, there is a difference between how quickly they are actively putting actions into place. A reason for this could be the length of time and resources needed to successful employ measures. This would coincide with the other finding of the newer group displaying an opposed state as they have not necessarily had the time and/or resources to act on their newly developed procedures.

The second measure of activation state was against the organisations step on their self-audit. Here, participants in the earlier steps (steps 1, 2 and 3) displayed mostly a reactive state. The fact that the only active was for the sub-section ‘feel’ could be due to the potential rise in the prevalence of cases being revealed and the multi-sport nature of them (Ingle 2020; Fisher and Anders 2020; Varley 2021), potentially leading to an increase in organisations’ feelings that they need to become engaged with safeguarding. In comparison, the participants who identified as further along this journey (steps 4 and 5) displayed an active state for all four sub-sections. This appears to support the idea that being further along in the states suggests a more actively engaged approach and therefore, the earlier stages have not yet had the time needed to develop the same level of activation state. However, for both of these comparisons further investigations would be needed to draw more definitive conclusions about the correlation.

4.3. Where Are Organisations on Their Safeguarding Journey?

The results surrounding this question appear to paint a positive picture on the current state of safeguarding in sport. For all of the eight Safeguards, the majority of participants
recorded policies as being fully in place. There were some, for example Safeguards 6 and 8, that were a closer divide between fully and partially in place which could be due to the varying lengths of time to fully implement each individual Safeguard. Results from the thematic analysis appear to align with the SCSM (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2021) with similar themes appearing throughout the current research.

4.3.1. Stakeholder Engagement

For stakeholder engagement, the key findings related to a shift in awareness of safeguarding, appreciation or importance of the topic and support for better policies to be held by organisations. Whilst there was still a mix around how much engagement is being seen, the majority of open responses noted a positive shift from members within organisations. Similarly, the awareness on the implications of holding the Safeguards as a set of standards was gaining response from the young people partaking in sport as well as leading guardians to have more interest in and support for the safety of their children within the organisation they belong to. Furthermore, organisations noted how the question of whether they are using the Safeguards are now becoming part of a stronger pull for other organisations to work with them or vice versa, highlighting how the engagement with an international set of standards is now becoming part of the wider coordinating agenda. The issue of abuse in sport appears to be gaining engagement from a variety of sources, strengthening the concept of and case for better safeguarding practices.

4.3.2. Environment

The next key theme lends support to the idea that the environment within organisations around safeguarding is beginning to positively shift. Multiple organisations noted how by using the Safeguards to create a safer environment, they have seen responses in how people involved in the organisation, be it coaches, athletes or others, are feeling more confident and safe to report incidents of potential abuse and neglect. They also note how these are being taken more seriously and investigated. Multiple organisations noted how NGBs and other governing organisations are now beginning to implement safeguarding policies within their institutions, highlighting an important environmental and cultural change.

4.3.3. Safety Management Systems

A key point noted with reference to this theme was how the Safeguards are now allowing the industry itself to follow standardised guidelines. By having a set of standards which are continually assessed, the Safeguards appear to be generating conformity amongst organisations meaning standards can be maintained and upheld. This conformity could potentially be building on confidence of sufferers of abuse that their cases will be investigated properly due to the standards being upheld. From the current research there appears to be better co-operation between organisations and a greater acceptance of the issue, something which has progressed from findings in the early 2000s (Brackenridge et al. 2005), signifying that the safeguarding agenda is moving in a positive direction.

4.4. What Are the Broader Impacts of the Safeguards?

The range of job roles noted by participant’s potentially highlights that the importance of safeguarding has risen since the last review as specific safeguarding job roles are appearing within organisations, potentially signifying the importance and need for these roles within a sports setting. Similarly, the organisations surveyed identified as working directly with around 11 million children which is a rise from 6 million noted in 2018 (Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2019). Overall, the current numbers suggested by participants for both the direct and indirect totals suggest around 22.5 million children are being protected by the International Safeguards. However, given the higher number of organisations contacted in this present study, it is hoped that the actual number is much higher than that represented.
Some of the subthemes identified from analysis also indicated how the culture of safeguarding has been impacted. Through increased awareness, a change in environment, trust in the systems in place and a change in disclosure process, organisations noted a broader understanding of safeguarding. Compelling stories relating to members of organisations feeling safe to come out to their counterparts as gay may not appear on the surface to be related to safeguarding, but the participants note how building the system that they now have in place, through the Safeguards, has led to this individual to feel more comfortable and open in the environment. Similarly, other participants noted how members of their organisation identify to them safeguarding concerns outside of sport as they have confidence in this particular organisation to help them. These are examples of how the culture created through the Safeguards is seemingly leading for individuals to feel more comfortable and lead to more open conversations around abuse.

Overall, the findings display a rise in cases being reported to organisations since they have had the procedures and policies in place suggested by the Safeguards with ‘no change’ being noted as second highest and a drop in cases being slightly less common. This was noted by participants as being for a variety of reasons. Primarily, the reporting of cases was apparently heavily affected by the efficiency of the organisation’s policies, with some signifying sufficient procedures whilst others note that they are still developing. Another potential reason for why cases rose was awareness of individual’s rights. This implies that the Safeguards have potentially led to a broader impact on the culture of the organisations as sufferers of abuse appear to feel more confident in the system when coming forward and are more aware of their individual rights and how organisations can support this.

4.5. Strengths and Limitations of the Current Research

A unique element of this research was how the main researcher identified similar key themes to those of the SCSM (Owusu-Sekyere et al. 2021) without prior knowledge of this newly published model, which became apparent through initial discussions of the results. Specifically, the key themes of engagement and SMS held very strong similarities to those of the SCSM as well as some sub-themes such as awareness and policy and practice. Similarly, initial themes that were not reflected as universally also drew similarities, such as a few participants noting better training and communication within and amongst organisations. Upon review, the researchers felt that there was a strong connection and support for the SCSM and the current research, strengthening this new concept within safeguarding.

This research was pioneering in its attempt to use the activation states in a quantitative method. By using the example statements provided in Brackenridge et al. (2005), a simple matrix table which provides options for each action and state was created. This novel approach allowed the researchers to quickly ask a global spread of participants whether safeguarding is efficiently being practiced within their organisation rather than conduct follow-up interviews, as was the procedure over three years that Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere (2020) had for the first review. If used as a future method to quantitatively measure the activation states, more vigorous testing will be needed to ensure its integrity. Yet for this study, as the pioneers of this, the researchers feel that it was a sufficient novel use of the states and provided some compelling, logical results.

Despite the strengths of the present research, there were a few limitations. Firstly, there was a high rate of attrition in the number of participants that fully completed the questionnaire. The total number of responses recorded was 69 which then dropped to 50 once the data was cleaned, a drop of ~27 per cent. By the end of the questionnaire the response total from that 50 dropped to 28, ~44 per cent attrition. This could have been for a variety of reasons including the length of the survey and the time needed to complete it or the additional information that was required, such as self-audit scores. When tracking the responses, the researchers noted that many of the partially complete responses were only completed up to the self-audit questions, roughly a third of the way through. As noted in the invitation emails distributed to participants in preparation for the survey, the latest self-audit was required to be able to answer some of the questions. It appears that
participants may have reached this point within the survey, realised that they had not completed the self-audit and forgotten to return to complete their response. Whilst using the self-audit measure provided an accurate way of gaining a standardised response, the lack of completion from participants may have impacted the current review.

Secondly, due to the international nature of the Safeguards, the questionnaire was limited by language barriers. Even though translations of the survey were offered, only one participant contacted the main researcher directly to explain translation issues for a language that was not predicted. Similarly, another participant responded to some of the answers for the English survey in Portuguese. Due to time limitations as well as the impact that may have occurred on the integrity of the study, the use of interviews to counteract this issue was rejected as the questions may have become more leading in an interview setting and the translation issues may have still been apparent. Even though this was an issue that the researchers had considered due to the global participant sample, it may have needed greater attention so that all organisations using the Safeguards can be included in future reviews.

4.6. Future Research

In terms of future directions, reviews on the current state of safeguarding within sport should continue to be held at regular intervals so that a consistent picture can be gained and direct feedback from organisations using the Safeguards can be explored and developed. Participants involved in the current study suggested a few areas of weakness in which greater research could be beneficial. Firstly, the cultural difference within safeguarding was something noted as needing further exploration. Potential avenues for research include exploring why certain countries hold opposed views and are therefore slower to change and adopt not only the Safeguards but safeguarding as a whole and vice versa for those who are leading the charge. Another potential avenue is organisational safeguarding issues as participants within this study noted a lack of organisational responsibility to safeguarding. An example of potential research could be exploring historical issues of safeguarding in sport and whether those are the organisations that have changed the most or the least. Lastly, research around the public knowledge of safeguarding within sport could be useful in persuading more organisations on the severity of the issue. Whether this is for example, interviewing guardians and children involved in sport, or the general public around the time of a major event to gain their understanding on the issue, this could be beneficial to the overall movement of safeguarding in sport.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, the direction of safeguarding in sport appears to be positive. Since the last review, more organisations have agreed to become a part of the International Safeguards for Children in Sport, up from 125 to 400, and a change from a reactive/active spilt in the last review appears to have become a more active state for those who have been engaged with safeguarding for a longer period. This all demonstrates a progressive movement of sporting organisations towards safeguarding and implementing policies and practices to aid children and young people to be better protected from abuse and other welfare concern. However, organisations need to stay committed to and engaged with the safeguarding movement for the wider impacts and message to be recognised.

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References


