



Bowls England Trans and Gender Diverse Revised Policy

November 2025

This document provides a revision of the existing Bowls England Trans and Gender Diverse Policy (2021) in light of the Supreme Court ruling of May 2025. It is effective from January 1st 2026.

The revised policy confirms that bowls is an inclusive sport and that Bowls England is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. The revised policy confirms that bowls remains a gender affected sport. The revised policy changes the eligibility criterion for women's competitive bowls to birth sex; elaborates the eligibility of trans bowlers and non-binary bowlers to compete in various categories of competition, develops how the "open" category of bowling can enhance inclusion, and reduces the age at which young players can compete in any bowls competition by the agenda they identify as from u18 to u12

The policy is supported by a series of advisory notes and an Equality Impact assessment.

1. Legal framework

The policy outlined in this document ensure the following UK legislation is considered:

- Supreme Court ruling 202D
- Data Protection Act 2018
- Equality Act 2010
- Gender Recognition Act 2004

2. Bowls is a gender affected sport

A sport is defined as gender-affected if the physical strength, stamina or physique of average persons of one gender would put them at a disadvantage to average persons of the other gender as competitors in events involving the sport. The sport of bowls is a gender-affected sport where women are at a disadvantage to men due to factors of muscular strength and power, and factors associated with skeletal size and shape. The scientific evidence shows that gender-affirming hormone therapy in trans- women does not fully moderate the male advantage. There are no differences affecting the safety of play between men and women.

The 2025 Supreme Court ruling provides that the term sex in the equality act refers to biological sex for the purposes of the act and therefore should be used as the basis for restricting sporting competitions to one sex where that sport is gender-affected in terms of fairness of competition or safety.



3. Competitive and non-competitive bowls

The policy is designed to achieve an appropriate balance between fairness and inclusion in the provision of a wide range of opportunities to bowl. Since bowls is a gender affected sport fairness in competitions requires separate competitions for men and women. In friendly and recreational bowls, the competitive outcome is lessened and the importance of inclusion and participation heightened. For these reasons the policy distinguishes between competitive bowls where there are eligibility requirements, and non-competitive bowls where there are usually none. The impact of these changes is described in the Equality Impact Assessment.

4. Competitive bowls

Competitive bowls refers to matches that are part of a formal competition structure, typically a knock-out competition or a league as organised by Bowls England, County Bowls organisations, affiliated clubs, and affiliated leagues and tournaments.

To ensure fairness of competition where there are single sex competitions for men and women the eligibility requirements shown below must be followed. Mixed competitions rules about the number of each sex in a team must follow the same eligibility requirements.

As well as single sex and mixed competitions Bowls England and affiliated counties, clubs, leagues, and tournaments may also offer Open competitions without eligibility requirements based on sex or gender.

Eligibility in competitive bowls

The women's category is for bowlers who are female by birth sex. Transgender women (i.e. male by birth) are not eligible to compete in women's competitions but may compete in men's competitions.

Transgender men (i.e. female by birth) are eligible to compete in women's competitions providing they have not started any hormone treatment as part of transitioning. Once hormone treatment has commenced, transgender men are not eligible to compete in women's competitions but become eligible to compete in men's competitions.

Mixed competitions where there is a designated number of men or women must follow the eligibility rules above. For example, a mixed four with a requirement for two men and two women might comprise two women (by birth sex) and two men (by birth sex or trans men)

The open category is open to all bowlers and there is no eligibility requirement based on sex or gender.

Children up to the age of 12 can compete in any bowls competition by the gender they identify as.



5. Non-competitive bowls

Refers to all other forms of bowls that are played as friendly or recreational activity. For example, inter-club friendly matches, internal club events, roll-ups, bowls bash, etc.

Eligibility in non-competitive bowls

To foster inclusivity there are usually no eligibility requirements for non-competition bowls. An occasional exception is allowed where the activity is designed to increase participation of a particular group. Advice is provided in the FAQs

6. Commitment to a welcoming culture

We commit to creating a safe and welcoming space for all players. We will ensure that all individuals will be able to take part in bowls without fear or harassment and that all club members and visitors will be able to enjoy our sport and feel comfortable in the environment it provides.

All members of Bowls England affiliated clubs must:

- Treat all trans and non-binary members with respect.
- Welcome all trans and non-binary member as any other member.
- Accept all members in the gender they present.
- Respect the privacy of all members' information, including their gender identity.
- Take the lead from the member. Ask their name and if presented with a pronoun use them.
- Not make assumptions about any member's gender identity or related characteristics or stereotypes attached to that gender.
- Provide toilets and changing facilities in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the EHRC.
- Report any incidence of a breach of this policy to Bowls England.

7. Compliance

We will take appropriate measures for any breach of this policy in line with Bowls England disciplinary policies, procedures, and processes. All information will be collected and stored in accordance with GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018.

Bowls England will communicate and monitor this policy to ensure:

- Fairness and integrity of competitions.



- Members only compete in the category of competition for which they have satisfied the eligibility criteria set out in this policy. Sanction B of the general competition rules will apply in cases of non-compliance.
- No direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment or victimisation is taken against a member on the grounds of their gender identity.
- Any other breach or non-compliance with this policy.

8. Review

It is acknowledged that the 2025 Supreme Court review has implications to sports bodies that may not yet be fully established by legal cases or EHRC guidance. This document has been produced in good faith to enable the sport governing body for lawn bowls – Bowls England - to act legally with regard to fairness in its competitions and to support diversity of opportunity to play and compete. The policy will be reviewed in November 2026, or sooner should there be any relevant legal, EHRC, scientific, Sport England or World Bowls developments.

9. Glossary of Terms

This glossary is designed to support our understanding of transgender and gender diversity terminology in the context of bowls. It reflects current UK legislation, recent legal rulings, and Bowls England's commitment to inclusive, respectful sport environments.

- Transgender (Trans)

A person whose gender identity is different from the sex they were assigned at birth. For example, a person assigned male at birth who identifies as a woman.

- Cisgender (Cis)

A person whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g., someone born female and who identifies as a woman).

- Gender Identity

How someone personally identifies their gender – as a man, woman, both, neither, or somewhere in between.

- Gender Expression

The way someone presents their gender to others (e.g., clothing, voice, or mannerisms).

- Non-Binary

A person who does not identify exclusively as a man or woman. They may identify as both, neither, or another gender.

- Gender Diverse



A broad term that includes all people whose gender identity or expression differs from traditional expectations.

- Transition

The process someone may go through to live in their gender identity, including social, legal, or medical changes.

- Trans Woman

A person assigned male at birth who identifies and lives as a woman.

- Trans Man

A person assigned female at birth who identifies and lives as a man.

- Affirmed Gender

The gender a person lives as and identifies with, regardless of their birth sex.