

Beyond the Whistle- Safeguarding Children and Creating Safer Cultures in Sport



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Together we can create a caring
culture where children are safe and
thrive



Safeguarding in the sports sector



Sport participation statistics



5,300,000 children do 30+ minutes of activity a day



41% of primary school age children and 58% of secondary school age children take part in team sports

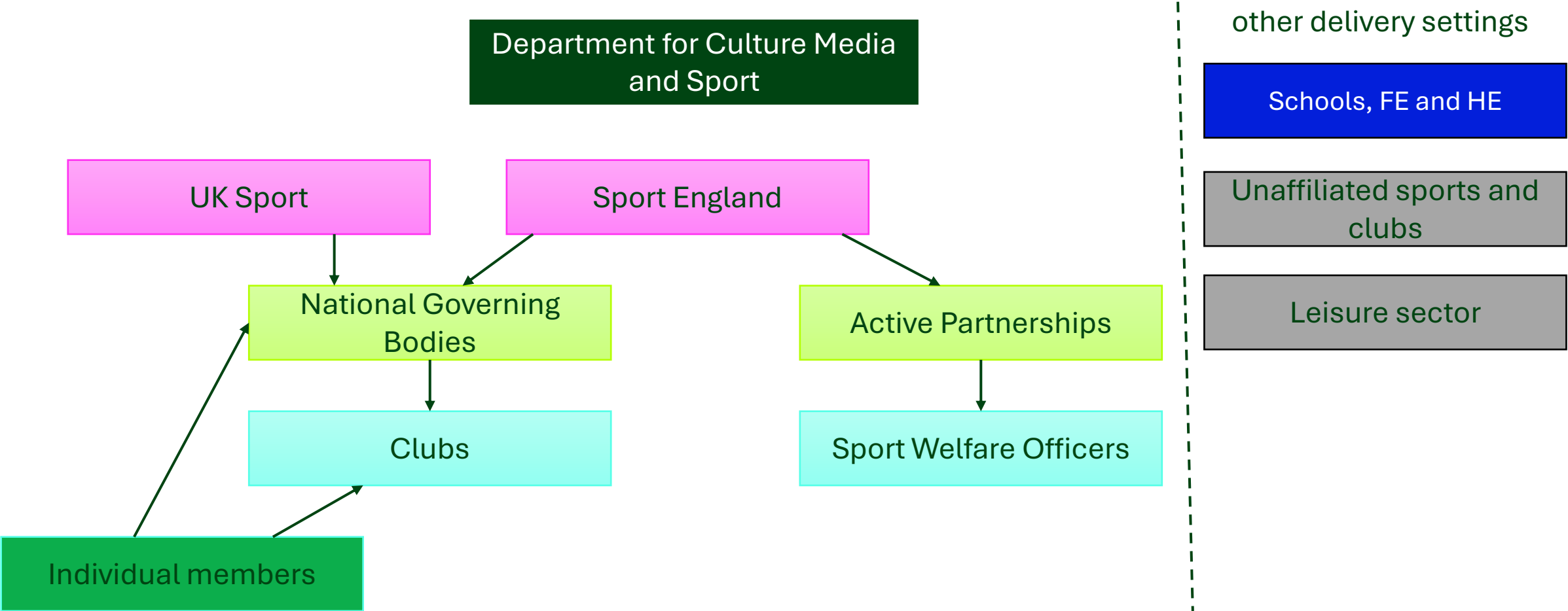


2.3 million children volunteer in sport and physical activity

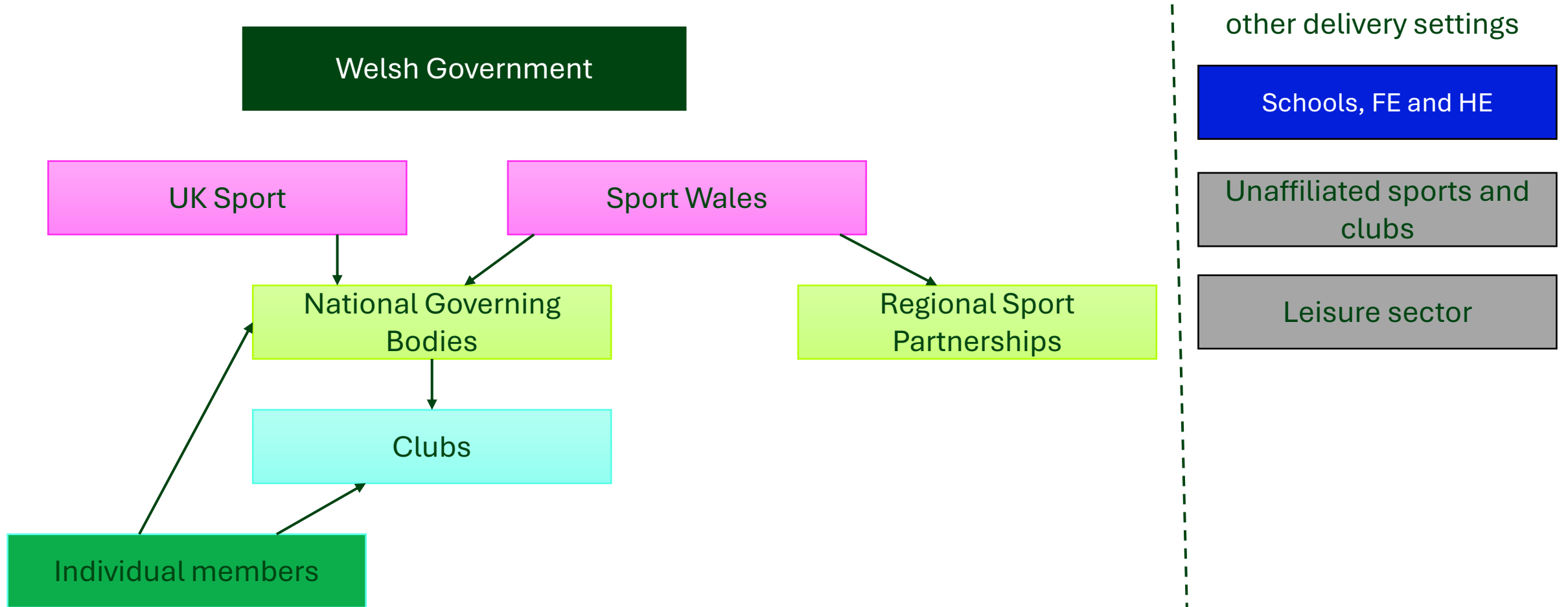


sport should be regarded as a key safeguarding setting alongside education, health, and children's social care

Landscape of sport in England



Landscape of sport in Wales



Differences between statutory sectors and sport



Statutory	Sport
Statutory duties, guidance and inspection	Law applies, but no single regulator or universal system
Standardised reporting and multi-agency procedures	Standards and routes vary by affiliation and funding
Paid, designated safeguarding professionals	Grassroots safeguarding is often volunteer-led
Regular training, detailed records and professional networks	Training, records and networks may be limited
Clear accountability and professional distance	Oversight varies; personal relationships and turnover add complexity

Shaping safer sport: The impact of three major reviews

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Three major reviews

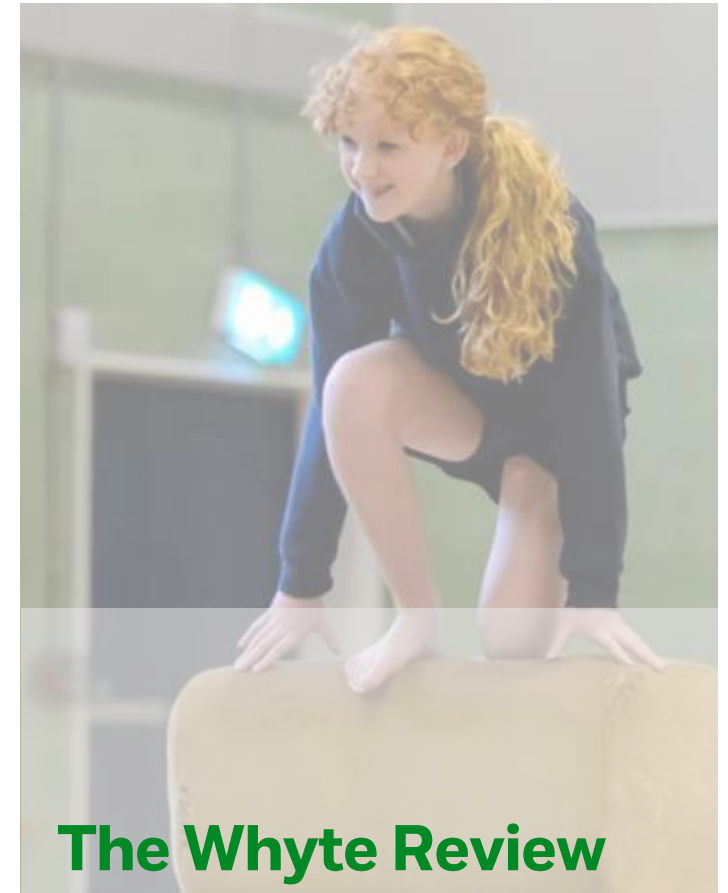
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2020



2021



2022

Trends, Themes and Talking Points

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NSPCC Helpline and Childline statistics

Data period April 2025 – March 2026



Childline counselling sessions

Between April 2025 and March 2026, Childline delivered **71 counselling sessions** where the location of concern was a sports setting.

This was similar to 2024/25 when there were 70 counselling sessions.

Most common concerns

Among these counselling sessions where the location of concern was a sports setting:

Mental/emotional health

32%

Most common concern in sports settings

Other concerns

- Sexual abuse and exploitation
- Friendship issues

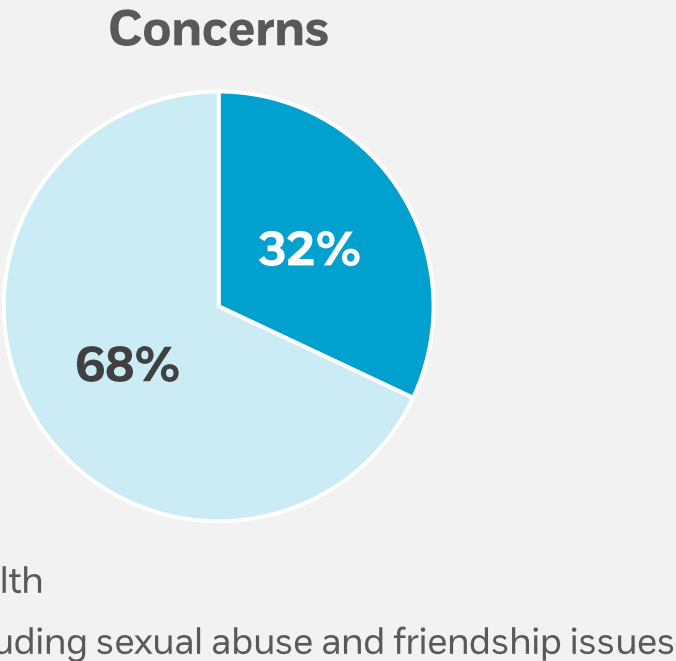
*Specific figures withheld to protect confidentiality

Year-on-year trend

2023/24: **85**

2024/25: **70** ↓ **18%**

2025/26: **71** ↑ **2%**



NSPCC Helpline and Childline statistics

Data period April 2025 – March 2026



NSPCC Helpline contacts

Between April 2025 and March 2026, the NSPCC Helpline handled **683 child welfare** contacts where the risk or concern was taking place in a sports setting.

This represents a **↑10% increase** compared to 2024/25, when there were 623 child welfare contacts.

Most common concerns

Among these child welfare contacts where the location of concern was a sports setting:

Sexual abuse/exploitation

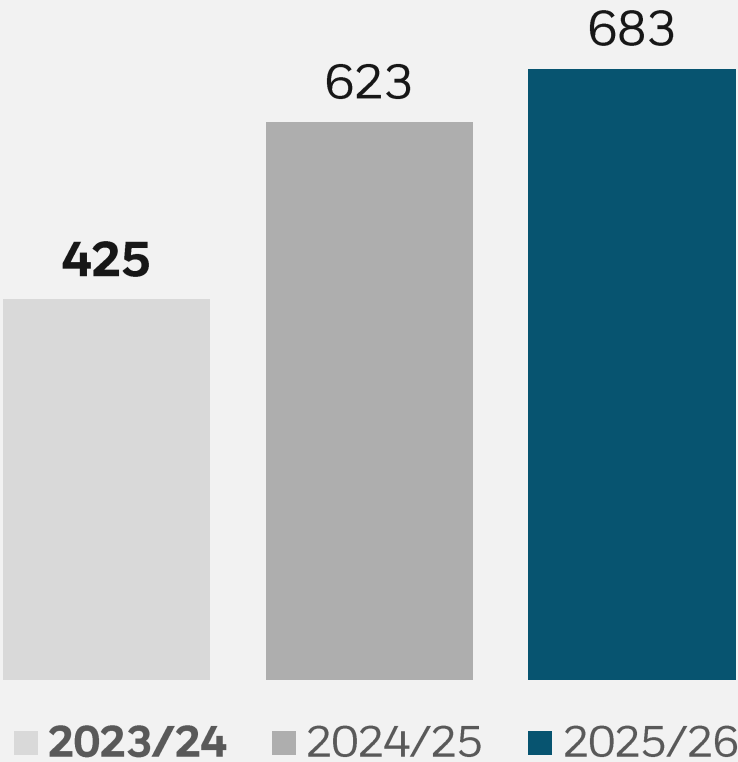
18%

Most common concern in sports settings

Emotional abuse

16%

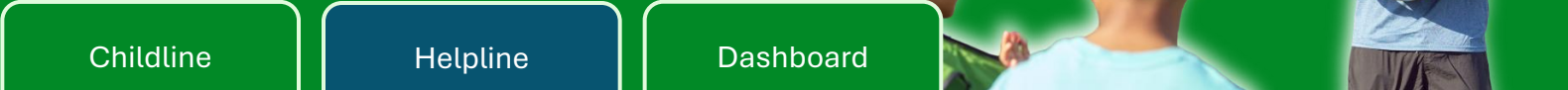
Second most common concern in sports settings



Key themes

NSPCC Helpline and Childline statistics

Data period April 2025 – March 2026



Contacts from sports professionals

In 2025/26, the NSPCC Helpline handled **152 child welfare contacts from sports professionals** (e.g. coaches, instructors, club staff, volunteers, safeguarding leads).

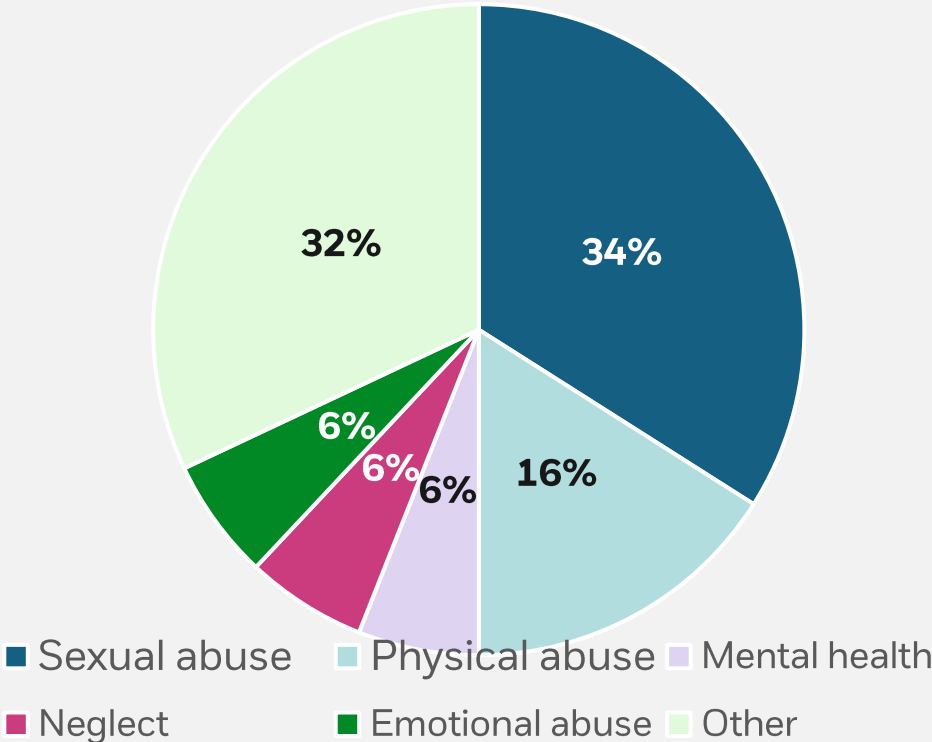
This was a **↑13% increase** compared to 2024/25.

Sexual abuse/exploitation

34%

Most common concerns reported by sports professionals.

This is different to last year, when physical abuse was the most reported concern.



Year-on-year

**When sporting
culture makes
unsuitable behaviour
harder to recognise**

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Sporting culture and concerns

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- Performance can sometimes obscure risk
- High standards should never come at the expense of welfare
- Normalised behaviour isn't always safe behaviour
- Intent and impact are not always the same
- The child's experience is critical to understanding risk



When No Single Organisation Holds the Whole Picture

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The cumulative picture

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- Risk is rarely revealed through a single concern
- Individuals often move across multiple organisations and roles
- Each agency may hold only part of the picture
- Patterns emerge through cumulative information
- Effective information sharing strengthens decision-making



**When potential risk
extends beyond the
original concern**



Extension of risk

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- Risk doesn't stop where the concern originated
- People in positions of trust often work across multiple settings
- Sport may hold relevant information others don't see
- Access to children can extend far beyond one organisation
- Professional curiosity helps uncover the wider picture



**When the threshold
isn't met, but
concerns remain**



When concerns remain

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- Threshold decisions answer a specific question
- Suitability concerns may remain even when threshold isn't met
- Lower-level concerns can create a significant cumulative picture
- Consultation supports proportionate decision-making
- Professional judgement remains essential



Final thoughts



Beyond allegations...

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- Look beyond the allegation
- Look for the wider picture
- Understand what it means for the child



Useful resources

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- [NSPCC Sport | Safeguarding children in sport](#)
 - [Report Remove | Childline](#)
 - [NSPCC Sport LinkedIn](#)
 - [Keeping Your Child Safe in Sport – for professionals](#)
 - [NSPCC Sport YouTube playlist](#)
 - [The NSPCC Sport podcast](#)

Taking care of yourself

- If you are personally affected or concerned by any of the issues raised by today's session, you may find these contact details helpful:
- The NSPCC Helpline
- Call **0808 800 5000**
- Email **help@nspcc.org.uk**
- Whistleblowing Advice Line
- Call **0800 028 0285**
- Visit **nspcc.org.uk/whistleblowing**