

WOMEN IN SPORT AND EXERCISE
ACADEMIC NETWORK

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

14-15 JULY 2026



www.wisean2026.com



Welcome

Welcome to the Women in Sport and Exercise Academic Network Annual Conference 2026 at Loughborough University.

We are delighted to welcome you to WiSEAN and to Loughborough University, a globally recognised centre for sport, health, and wellbeing research. Bringing together such a diverse and inspiring community, this year's conference reflects both the strength of the WiSEAN network and Loughborough's long-standing commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration and real-world impact.

In keeping with previous WiSEAN events, we have embraced a cross-disciplinary, far-reaching and inclusive approach, while also striving to minimise environmental impact. The programme captures this ambition: four spotlight keynote sessions, six oral sessions comprising and a poster presentation session. Together, these contributions represent over seventy organisations, primarily from the UK but also from Ireland, the United States, Canada, India, Japan and Germany. We hope this breadth of perspectives encourages all delegates to engage, connect and have fun!

Our sincere thanks go to the WiSEAN directors, supporting sponsors, all speakers, contributors, partners and volunteers who have made WiSEAN possible, and to our colleagues at Loughborough University for supporting us host this magnificent event. Most importantly, thank you for being here and for contributing to this collective endeavour. We look forward to an energising and enjoyable event, and to seeing the many ways in which you will strike with purpose across the two days and beyond.

#WiSEAN2026 #strikeywithpurpose #loughborough

WiSEAN 2026 Organising Committee

Conference principles

The next two days are going to be busy and bustling, please carefully read the following principles that underpin how WiSEAN 2026 has been designed.

- **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI):**
We are committed to creating a welcoming environment for all attendees. With that in mind, all name badges have people's names on, as this is an equal space.
- **Respecting Timings:**
Help sessions run smoothly by starting and finishing on time. Speakers are asked to keep to their allocated slots to ensure fairness and flow across the programme.
- **Environmental Sustainability:**
We aim to minimise the environmental impact of the event. With that in mind, pick up your water/coffee cups and use our machines to reuse across the two days.
- **Spaces for Quiet, Calls, Care and Physical Activity:**
Designated spaces are available for quiet reflection, calls, rest, and movement. Please use all these areas, especially going outside and getting fresh air.
- **Social Media and Posting:**
We encourage sharing insights from the event. Please credit speakers, use agreed hashtags, and be mindful of consent when posting photos or quotes.
- **Respecting Different Perspectives:**
Open and constructive dialogue is encouraged throughout the event. Please engage respectfully, listen actively, and value different viewpoints and experiences.
- **Accessibility:**
We aim to ensure the conference is accessible to all attendees. Please be mindful of different needs and contact the team or a volunteer if support is required.
- **Volunteers:**
Our volunteers are here to support you during the event. Please treat them with respect and reach out if you need assistance.
- **Gratitude:**
Throughout the past two years of bringing together WiSEAN 2026, there has been a lot of support and efforts. We aim to share thanks with everyone from caterers to keynotes. The conference is to celebrate speakers and efforts to build this event.

Tuesday 14 July

From 9:00
Arrivals – Martin Hall

10:00-10:15
Opening Address
Room: Martin Hall Theatre

10:15-11:15
Spotlight session one – Dr Kate Ackerman
Room: Martin Hall Theatre

11:25-12:25
Parallel oral session A

1. Education and leadership, Room: Emma Wiggs MBE
2. Governance and representation, Room: Ama Agbeze MBE
3. Life course and health, Room: Sarah Massey MBE
4. Equipment and performance, Room: Mari Thomas-Welland

12:25-13:25 Lunch
Sue Anstiss MBE Exhibition Space and outside spaces.
Menu themed around an afternoon tea

13:25-14:25
Parallel oral session B

1. Education and leadership, Room: Emma Wiggs MBE
2. Governance and representation, Room: Ama Agbeze MBE
3. Life course and health, Room: Sarah Massey MBE
4. Equipment and performance, Room: Mari Thomas-Welland

14:35-15:35
Spotlight session two – Dr Kelsie Johnson
Room: Martin Hall Theatre

15:45-16:45
Parallel oral session C

1. Education and leadership, Room: Emma Wiggs MBE
2. Governance and representation, Room: Ama Agbeze MBE
3. Life course and health, Room: Sarah Massey MBE
4. Equipment and performance, Room: Mari Thomas-Welland

16:45-17:45
Poster session and drinks reception
Sadia Kabeya MBE Poster Space. Menu themed around fizz and nibbles

Optional:
17:45 - Tour of facilities
Arranged during event check-in

18:30 - Evening event
Edward Herbert Building, terrace.
Menu themed around a Great British BBQ

Wednesday 15 July

Optional:
From 07:30 - Sport and physical activity sessions
Arranged during event check-in

From 9:00
Arrivals – Martin Hall

10:00-10:15
Opening Address
Room: Martin Hall Theatre

10:15-11:15
Spotlight session three – Dr Nicole M. LaVoi
Room: Martin Hall Theatre

11:25-12:25
Parallel oral session D

1. Education and leadership, Room: Emma Wiggs MBE
2. Governance and representation, Room: Ama Agbeze MBE
3. Life course and health, Room: Sarah Massey MBE
4. Equipment and performance, Room: Mari Thomas-Welland

12:25-13:25 Lunch
Sue Anstiss MBE Exhibition Space and outside spaces. Menu themed around a Teddy Bear’s picnic
#PaddingtonBear

13:25-14:25
Parallel oral session E

1. Education and leadership, Room: Emma Wiggs MBE
2. Governance and representation, Room: Ama Agbeze MBE
3. Life course and health, Room: Sarah Massey MBE
4. Equipment and performance, Room: Mari Thomas-Welland

14:35-15:35
Spotlight session four – Panel - From Grassroots to Elite: Supporting Women and Girls in Sport
Room: Martin Hall Theatre

15:45-16:45
Parallel oral session F

1. Education and leadership, Room: Emma Wiggs MBE
2. Governance and representation, Room: Ama Agbeze MBE
3. Life course and health, Room: Sarah Massey MBE
4. Equipment and performance, Room: Mari Thomas-Welland

17:00-17:30
Closing address and prize ceremony
Room: Martin Hall Theatre

Prizes to be awarded:

- **Outstanding poster presentation**
In partnership with Routledge
- **Outstanding oral presentation**
In partnership with Care Fertility
- **Outstanding symposium session**
In partnership with Loughborough Sport
- **Outstanding student contribution**
In partnership with boobydoo
- **Spirit of WiSEAN award**
In partnership with WiSEAN directors

Optional:
17:45 - Tour of facilities
Arranged during event check-in



Spotlight Speakers

For WiSEAN 2026, our spotlight speakers bring a wealth of global expertise, leadership and lived experience, representing some of the most influential and forward-thinking voices shaping women's sport today.



Kathryn (Kate) Ackerman, MD, MPH, FACSM

Co-founder and Director, Co-founder and President of the Women's Health and Performance Institute (WHSP), the Biennial International Female Athlete Conference, and an Associate Professor of Medicine at Harvard Medical School

She founded the Female Athlete Program at Boston Children's Hospital. She trained at Cornell, Johns Hopkins, Harvard and Pennsylvania, completing fellowships in sports medicine and endocrinology.

A global leader in female athlete health, she chairs USRowing's Medical Committee and co-chairs the USOPC Women's Health Task Force. She has authored over 175 publications on REDs and performance. Formerly an elite rower, she still competes as a masters athlete.



Nicole M. LaVoi, Ph.D

A Senior Lecturer in social and behavioral sciences at the University of Minnesota and Director of the Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport.

An internationally recognised scholar of gender, leadership and coaching, she has published over 100 peer-reviewed works. Her book Women in Sports Coaching and the Women in College Coaching Report Card have influenced policy and practice. She founded Coaching HER® and co-created Body Confident Sport.

An award-winning athlete, coach and educator, she provides global thought leadership advancing equity for women and girls in sport systems worldwide globally and sustainably.



Kelsie Johnson, PhD

An academic in sport and exercise sciences specialising in nutrition and physiology at Liverpool John Moores University.

Her work bridges research and practice in female athlete health. Her interests include gastrointestinal symptoms, menstrual cycle and performance, carbohydrate metabolism and gut training.

She is committed to translating science into practical strategies that enhance athlete wellbeing and performance across training and competition environments for elite and developing female athletes in diverse sporting contexts worldwide today.



Jo-Anne Downing

Programme Strategy Manager at the Lawn Tennis Association, leading national initiatives to increase participation and diversity in tennis. With over sixteen years' experience in sports development, she has delivered major programmes including the Prime Video LTA Youth Girls initiative.

Working with Judy Murray, she supports growth of the female coaching workforce. A Level 3 coach and lifelong county player, she is passionate about removing barriers and creating inclusive opportunities for women and girls across community and performance pathways in tennis. Her work focuses on sustainable impact through partnerships innovation and evidence-based programme design nationally and locally.



Kirsty Goldie-Brammer

A Senior Project Manager at the Rugby Football Union, with over twenty years of experience across multiple sports.

She leads strategic projects advancing the women's game, focusing on growth, performance and long-term sustainability. A key area of leadership is female health, where she drives initiatives to better understand and support athletes at all levels.

Her work prioritises environments that enable women and girls to thrive with appropriate knowledge, resources and support systems. Passionate about meaningful change, she brings deep industry insight and collaborative leadership to elevating athlete experiences broadly across grassroots and elite sport settings nationwide and internationally.



Eve Joseph

Head of Social Impact at British Triathlon, leading strategy on sustainability and equity, diversity and inclusion. She previously spent fifteen years at Microsoft, working across UK and global markets on business and ESG transformation.

Her expertise lies in turning strategic ambition into practical programmes with measurable social impact. She has extensive experience engaging stakeholders and building partnerships that deliver change at scale. Passionate about inclusive sport, she focuses on embedding purpose and responsibility at the heart of organisational decision-making and delivery systems driving innovation collaboration and long-term value for communities and participants across the sport sector globally.



Kate Kenyon

Strategy Lead for Female Health at the Football Association, with over fifteen years of experience in sport development and programme management.

She currently leads initiatives advancing health, wellbeing and performance in women's football, connecting medical, research, coaching and performance functions. Her work embeds female-specific considerations across grassroots to elite environments.

She pioneered the FA's first Female Athlete Health Framework, shaping policy and practice nationally. She has built a strong reputation for expertise in women and girls sport development, strategy and national scale project management, driving the success of impactful projects and initiatives across schools, community, higher Education and major events.



Sarah Lewis, OBE OLY

An international sports leader with extensive experience across the Olympic Movement.

An Olympian alpine skier, she represented Great Britain at Calgary 1988. She served as Secretary General of the International Ski and Snowboard Federation from 1998-2020 and led the Association of International Olympic Winter Sports Federations.

She has contributed to multiple IOC commissions and global sport forums. Currently she chairs the GB Olympians Association Committee and holds advisory roles. Awarded an OBE in 2018, she mentors leaders and supports sustainable development across international sport systems and continues to influence policy strategy and governance worldwide today.



Distinguished Alumni Spaces

We have a proud history here at Loughborough and for WiSEAN 2026 we have renamed our conference spaces to reflect six of the striking voices and people from our women in sport ecosystem.



The Ama Agbeze MBE presentation room

Ama Agbeze MBE is a former England netball captain and Commonwealth Games gold medallist, widely recognised as one of the most influential leaders in modern netball. She captained England to a historic gold medal at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, a defining moment for the visibility of women's team sport in the UK.

Ama studied at Loughborough University, where she completed a Master's degree while competing for Loughborough Lightning, reflecting the university's long-standing integration of academic and elite sporting excellence. Her connection to Loughborough continues through its sporting legacy and alumni community.

Beyond performance, Ama has been a powerful advocate for leadership, diversity, and athlete voice within sport. Her journey—balancing elite sport with a legal career—illustrates resilience and purpose. In both her on-court leadership and off-court influence, Ama exemplifies what it means to strike with purpose: using sport as a platform to challenge norms, inspire others, and drive lasting change.



The Emma Wiggs MBE presentation room

Emma Wiggs MBE is a three-time Paralympic champion and one of the most decorated athletes in paracanoe, with multiple Paralympic and World Championship titles. Her journey from life-changing illness to global sporting success has become a powerful story of resilience and determination.

Emma has a strong connection to Loughborough University, having been awarded an Honorary Doctorate in recognition of her sporting achievements and her advocacy for inclusion. She has also collaborated with the University's research community, particularly in disability sport and innovation.

Alongside her competitive career, Emma is a leading voice for equity and inclusion in sport, working to challenge structural barriers faced by disabled athletes. Her involvement with initiatives such as the Women's Sports Trust highlights her commitment to advancing women's sport. Emma's career embodies striking with purpose—demonstrating how determination, evidence, and advocacy can redefine what is possible, both in sport and across society.



The Mari Thomas-Welland presentation room

Mari Thomas-Welland is a sports engineer and entrepreneur, best known as the founder of MAAREE, an innovative sportswear company transforming performance support for women. Her work is grounded in scientific research and practical insight, challenging long-standing assumptions in sports equipment design.

Mari's connection to Loughborough University is central to her journey: she studied sports engineering there and went on to work in its laboratories, testing sports bras for major global brands. It was through this research-led environment that she identified critical gaps in how women's bodies were supported in sport.

Through MAAREE, Mari has focused on improving comfort, confidence, and participation for women and girls, addressing a key but often overlooked barrier to activity. Her work sits at the intersection of science, innovation, and inclusion. By translating research into real-world impact, Mari exemplifies striking with purpose—using evidence-based design to enable more women to engage in sport, perform confidently, and remain active throughout their lives.



The Sue Anstiss MBE Exhibition Space

Sue Anstiss MBE is a leading advocate, author, and entrepreneur who has spent over three decades driving change in women's sport. As the founder of Fearless Women and co-founder of the Women's Sport Collective, she has built influential platforms that amplify the voices and achievements of women across the sector.

Sue studied at Loughborough University and has since been recognised as a Distinguished Alumna for her outstanding contribution to sport and gender equality. Her work spans media, policy, and leadership, including her award-winning podcast *The Game Changers* and her book *Game On*, both of which document and accelerate progress in women's sport.

Awarded an MBE in 2018 for services to grassroots and women's sport, Sue continues to shape national conversations around equity, visibility, and opportunity. She embodies striking with purpose through sustained advocacy—connecting people, influencing systems, and ensuring that the growth of women's sport benefits all.



The Sarah Massey MBE presentation room

Sarah Massey MBE is a highly respected sports leader with a global career spanning Olympic sport, international federations, and major event delivery. She was the Managing Director of the Women's Rugby World Cup England 2025 and has recently been appointed Director of Sport at the British Olympic Association.

A Loughborough University graduate, Sarah's career reflects the institution's legacy in developing leaders across the sport sector. From roles within international governing bodies to leading major global events, she has operated at the forefront of high-performance sport and organisational excellence.

Sarah has played a key role in delivering some of the world's largest sporting events, with a focus on innovation, collaboration, and legacy. Her leadership in women's sport, particularly through the Rugby World Cup, is helping to redefine scale, visibility, and impact. She exemplifies striking with purpose by shaping environments where athletes, audiences, and communities can thrive through sport.



The Sadia Kabeya MBE Poster Space

Sadia Kabeya MBE is one of the most exciting talents in international rugby, representing England's Red Roses and Loughborough Lightning as a dynamic and influential flanker. Still early in her career, she has already played a key role in England's success, including their Rugby World Cup victory, where she delivered standout performances on the global stage.

Her connection to Loughborough University is both academic and athletic: she studied at the University and competes for Loughborough Lightning, one of the leading clubs in Premiership Women's Rugby. Within this high-performance environment, she has developed into a core member of both club and country squads.

Sadia represents a new generation of women in sport—vibrant, visible, and unapologetically ambitious. She has spoken about the importance of representation and inclusivity in rugby, helping to broaden access and inspire future athletes. Recognised with an MBE following England's World Cup success, she exemplifies striking with purpose: combining elite performance with a commitment to shaping a more inclusive and representative future for sport.

Sponsors and Supporting Partners

We have been supported by a number of organisations, networks and spaces to bring together WiSEAN 2026. A huge thank you to the following organisations who have dedicated time and resources.



Routledge is a leading global academic publisher and a valued supporting partner of WiSEAN. Known for its extensive portfolio across sport, health, and social sciences, Routledge plays a key role in advancing research and knowledge exchange, supporting the dissemination of evidence that shapes policy, practice, and progress within women's sport.

CARE FERTILITY

Care Fertility is a leading fertility treatment provider and a proud supporting partner of WiSEAN. With a strong focus on evidence-based practice and patient care, Care Fertility contributes to wider conversations around women's health, wellbeing, and life course considerations within sport and active communities.

boobydoo™

Boobydoo is a specialist sports bra retailer and a valued supporting partner of WiSEAN. Dedicated to improving comfort, confidence, and participation for women and girls, Boobydoo champions the importance of appropriate support in sport, helping to remove barriers and enable performance at all levels.



The Global Sport University Network is an international collaboration of leading universities and a supporting partner of WiSEAN. It connects academic institutions to advance research, innovation, and education in sport, fostering global exchange and interdisciplinary approaches to emerging challenges and opportunities in women's sport.



The Women's Sport Collective is a community-driven network and supporting partner of WiSEAN. It brings together women working across sport to connect, collaborate, and drive change, creating opportunities for shared learning, professional development, and collective action to advance gender equity across the sector.

UNION OF SPORT

The Union of Sport is a forward-thinking organisation and supporting partner of WiSEAN, dedicated to connecting and supporting the global sport industry. Through its networks and events, it fosters collaboration, innovation, and leadership, helping to shape a more inclusive and sustainable future for sport.



Malcolm Arnold Academy is an inclusive secondary and sixth form academy and supporting partner of WiSEAN. With a commitment to opportunity, achievement, and community engagement, the Academy supports young people to access sport and education, contributing to pathways that encourage participation and aspiration among future generations.



Loughborough Sport and Loughborough Lightning are key supporting partners of WiSEAN, representing one of the UK's leading high-performance sporting environments. With a strong commitment to women's sport, Lightning teams compete at the highest level while driving visibility, participation, and pathways for female athletes.



Recognising the urgent need for collective action, the Global Observatory for Gender Equality and Sport (GO) was established to advance gender equality and empower women and girls in all their diversity in and through physical education, physical activity, and sport. Our shared aim is to combat gender inequalities in a comprehensive and meaningful way, while promoting safe, fair and inclusive environments across the sports ecosystem and beyond. In doing so, the GO acts as a global catalyst for lasting, systemic change.



The Centre for Para and Disability Sport Innovation at Loughborough University is a leading research centre and supporting partner of WiSEAN. It advances interdisciplinary research and innovation to improve performance, participation, and inclusion in disability sport, physical activity and physical education, working closely with athletes, practitioners, and partners to drive impactful, system-wide change.



The Sport Technology Institute at Loughborough University is a global leader in sport innovation and a supporting partner of WiSEAN. Bringing together engineering, design, and human science, it develops cutting-edge solutions to enhance performance, participation, and inclusion, particularly in relation to women's sport and equipment.



The Women in Sport Research and Innovation Hub in partnership with Vitality is based at Loughborough University. A pioneering initiative and supporting partner of WiSEAN. It brings together interdisciplinary expertise to advance research, innovation, and impact in women's sport, driving collaboration between academia, industry, and policy to create meaningful and lasting change.



Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park are a dynamic innovation hub and supporting partner of WiSEAN. It brings together academics, businesses, and entrepreneurs to accelerate research impact, supporting collaboration and enterprise that advances sport, health, and wellbeing, including innovations relevant to women's sport.



The School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences at Loughborough University is a world-leading academic institution and supporting partner of WiSEAN. Renowned for its research excellence, it plays a central role in developing evidence-based insights that inform policy, practice, and innovation across women's sport.