

“To what extent were the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games gender equal?”

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games were heralded by many as “The Women’s Games”.

On 15th November, 2012, the Anita White Foundation (AWF) held an event at the University of Chichester that drew together a panel of people who were directly involved in the Games to discuss their experiences, and debate the question “To what extent were the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games gender equal?”. Delegates at the event, which marked one year since the launch of the AWF, acknowledged that progress had been made, with women included in all 204 participating nations and in all sports for the first time, but recognised that there was still a long way to go.

The panel, chaired by Dr Anita White OBE, reflected upon London 2012 and gave a valuable insight into each of their different areas of expertise. Panel members consisted of:

- Sue Tibballs (CEO of the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (WSFF)),
- Emma Wiggs (Paralympian and Captain of GB Sitting Volleyball and former student of the University),
- Dr Tim Holder (Sport Science Support to the London 2012 GB Synchronised Swimming team, and Senior Lecturer at the University),
- Sarah Porter (London 2012 Gamesmaker, Aquatics Officer for the ASA and former student of the University)

Dr Holder gave an insight into the preparation and planning needed for an event such as synchronised swimming in the lead-up to, and during, London 2012.

Emma Wiggs spoke of her journey from a Talent ID course to competing in a home Paralympics.

Sarah Porter described the excitement of being a Gamesmaker and testing the pool that was later to be used by names such as Phelps, Adlington and Simmonds.

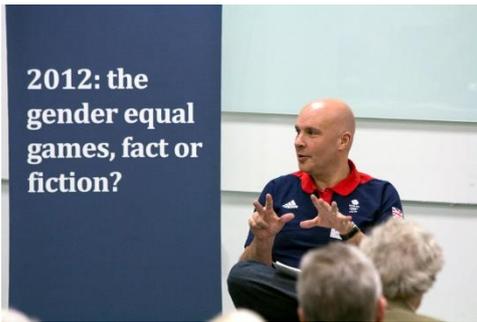
Finally, Sue Tibballs gave an overarching view of the position of women in sport. This included positives such as greater opportunities than ever before for women at London 2012 but also negatives that include continuing issues with media representation of female athletes, lack of funding and facilities, and a growing realisation of the lack of females in the wider sport structure such as coaches and managers. She commented that London 2012 “was no question, the most gender equal Games so far, but not gender equal”.



Elizabeth Pike



Emma Wiggs



Tim Holder



Sarah Porter



Sue Tibballs

The event was attended by an audience of approximately 100 who were invited to ask questions of the panel. The questions ranged from the influence of winning medals to the inequalities in leadership, coaching, and funding. Additionally, factsheets provided by the AWF in the delegates welcome packs provided the base for some questions. The factsheets outlined the continuing inequities women face at the Olympics (Donnelly and Donnelly, 2012) and the Paralympics. The debate was lively and continued after Dr Elizabeth Pike's update on the work of the AWF in its first year and Professor Clive Behagg's (Vice-Chancellor of University of Chichester) closing speech.

The AWF would like to thank all those who attended and donated to the AWF fund. As you will be able to see from our website, the money raised so far has already been put to good use and we are determined this will continue in the future.

For those interested in the continuing debates surrounding women and sport, the WSFF has recently established an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women's Sport and Fitness that is pressurising and lobbying government ministers to change the position of women in sport.

