

Open Letter to the CEO and Board of Directors of Parkrun UK

May 2023

The Women's Rights Network (WRN) wrote to Parkrun expressing concern over the policy of 'gender' self identification which permits men to say they are women. This is profoundly unfair to women who participate in Parkrun. The reply WRN received did not address any of the issues that were raised, hiding behind a cloak of 'inclusivity'.

WRN will follow this up with a detailed response to Parkrun

Since then, WRN has discovered several Parkrun records that are held in the female category by trans-identifying men. WRN has drawn attention to this via social media.

Parkrun's claims to be non competitive and purely about social participation do not stand up to scrutiny. It has all the trappings of competitive sport which is fine - if done fairly and transparently.

Parkrun records everyone's times, keeps course records, maintains records by age and 'gender' and has age grading to produce a percentage score.

If Parkrun's ethos truly is 'non competitive socially focussed physical activity' as it claims, then there should be no need to record anybody's time (or indeed their age or 'gender'). Should individuals wish to record times, they can do so themselves. All that Parkrun requires is people's names for health and safety reasons.

Men may be interested to know that their age grading scores are adversely affected by trans-identifying males - they receive an elevated percentage simply by identifying as 'female'; therefore a man in the same age category with the same course time will find himself with a significantly lower percentage (possibly as much as 20% less) than the trans-identifying male.

It is disappointing that an excellent event encouraging mass participation in physical activity endorses the erasure of women's achievements. What Parkrun calls 'inclusion' results in the 'exclusion' of women.

WRN is concerned this situation is likely to worsen as bodies like UK Athletics - quite correctly - no longer allows men to compete in the female category. This makes it more likely trans-identifying men will gravitate to unlicensed events such as Parkrun which permits unfettered 'gender' self identification.

WRN does not expect Parkrun volunteers to 'police' participants' sex. Parkrun has been disingenuous in suggesting they would be being asked to do this. They record age, but do not protest about 'policing' that - the expectation is people are honest. At present, Parkrun do not attempt to record sex: they regard female and male to be 'gender identities' and have a separate category for 'another gender identity'.

Parkrun should ask all participants to record their *sex* (at birth) at the point of registration. Parkrun could state that it trusts all registrants will respect this policy and participate in their correct sex category. Transgressions are likely to be obvious - indeed WRN have already alerted Parkrun to a number of these. When flagged by other participants, Parkrun can develop a system for these to be reported and dealt with by paid employees (of which we understand there are 24). Any course records, records by sex and age, age graded scores wrongly recorded would then be corrected.

WRN asks Parkrun to follow the example of other sporting bodies in ensuring fairness for female participants (whilst acknowledging it isn't a formal race) - the most relevant of these being World Athletics, UK Athletics (UKA) and English Schools Athletic Association (ESAA).

Fairness matters AT ALL LEVELS - not just elite. WRN believes Parkrun should be trailblazers for fairness for women and girls at grassroots level.