

Jonathan Agnew



Am I alone in being left confused by a recent report by the Commons' culture, media and sport committee, which claimed that not enough women are taking part in sport?

Worryingly, the cross-party committee suggested there are now long-term implications for health and social care.

This report coincided with my first visit to the British Equestrian Federa-

tion headquarters in Kenilworth in my new guise as BBC radio equestrian commentator.

To sporting bodies, participation numbers mean cash from Sport England, which is threatening to cut its funding of 'lacklustre' organisations in favour of those that actively boost female participation.

No surprise then, that BEF has launched a new social network campaign to raise awareness of riding and also to make the point that riding is, in fact, a sport.

What else can explain its survey that revealed one million horses in the UK but only 200,000 riders? That leaves 800,000 people – the majority of them women,

I suspect – who do not realise that when they are setting off for a hack, they are officially taking part in sport.

That's one reason to wonder if this report really stacks up. Surely the profile of women's sport has never been higher with the Commonwealth Games coming hard on the heels of London 2012.

Joanna Rowsell, Francesca Jones, Jodie Stimpson and Zoe Smith are all young women at the top of their respective games and ideal role models

for others to get into sport. Furthermore, England's women cricketers take on India in a series broadcast live on BBC radio, with our women now fully paid professionals and having just announced a lucrative sponsorship deal that is entirely separate from their male counterparts.

England's women football team have enjoyed a 100% start to their World Cup qualifying campaign, and the Women's Rugby World Cup is underway in France, promising to be the biggest ever and being broadcast on Sky.

And while the report suggests that girls and women are put off sport by, among other things, gratuitous derogatory remarks by TV com-

mentators and a lack of respect shown to female coaches (Andy Murray is set to keep Amélie Mauresmo as his tennis coach) the official figures show that 500,000 more women are participating now than in 2010.

So doesn't this all add up to a good news story, demonstrating just how far women's sport has come?

Or am I missing something?

'Surely the profile of women's sport has never been higher'

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