

News story: PM welcomes Women's World Cup stars to Downing Street

England's women's cricket and rugby teams today enjoyed a Downing Street reception to celebrate their recent achievements in what is fast becoming a year to remember for British women's sport.

The England women's cricket team secured their fourth World Cup title in July in front of a sold out Lord's Cricket Ground, beating India by nine runs, while the England women's rugby reached the World Cup final, falling to New Zealand in Belfast on Saturday night, in a thrilling finale to a fantastic tournament.

The success of both teams comes at a time when women's sport is enjoying a marked increase in grassroots participation, elite-level success, record investment and global coverage.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

It has been a watershed summer for women's sport in our country and it was a great honour to welcome two teams, whose achievements have been such an important part of this breakthrough moment, to Downing Street today.

Interest in women's sports is at an all-time high and with record attendances and huge global interest I hope we can seize this opportunity to grow women and girls' sport in communities across the length and breadth of the land.

Thousands of women and girls across the country will be inspired by the achievements of the current generation of stars and they are fantastic ambassadors for the nation.

England women's cricket team captain, Heather Knight said:

It's been an incredible summer for women's cricket and we've enjoyed every second of it. I would never have imagined that we could sell out Lord's so to lift the World Cup in front of a packed house was beyond special.

The support from our fans helped us on our way to the trophy and it's also evidence of how much our sport has grown. It just feels like there's never been a better time for women and girls to get involved in cricket – some of my favourite memories from the tournament are signing autographs for the young girls who came to watch and cheer us on. Hopefully they'll now be desperate to follow in our footsteps.

It was an honour to meet the Prime Minister and share some stories with her from inside the camp. We saw her mention us after we'd beaten Australia in the group stages so it's great that we've had a chance to come and say thanks!

England bowler and player of the match, Anya Shrubsole said:

Growing up you see successful sportspeople visiting the Prime Minister and it feels a million miles away. To be here today is an indication of how far women's cricket has come.

This summer was the product of a lot of hard work – on and off the pitch. We've got more to do but we want to keep winning trophies and we want to inspire as many young girls as possible to pick up a bat or a ball and start playing.

When I was a young fan watching cricket, I didn't think I'd take six wickets in a World Cup final at Lord's in front of 25,000 fans and win Player of the Match – hopefully that goes to show young girls that there are no limits to what you can achieve.

England women's rugby team captain, Sarah Hunter said:

It's been an honour to be invited to attend the reception in Downing Street today to celebrate what has been an exciting summer of women's sport. While as a team we are disappointed not to have brought the World Cup home, we are proud of everything that we have achieved this year in showcasing women's rugby.

Hopefully we have played a part in inspiring the next generation to get involved and give rugby a go.

Through the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport England's Sporting Future strategy the Government is determined to build on these successes at the grassroots and elite levels to encourage more women and girls playing sport.

Tackling the gender gap is a priority for this Government and we are determined to continue to make progress in the broader women's sporting landscape. The Sporting Future strategy has a strong emphasis on attracting under-represented groups such as women, disabled people, those in lower socio-economic groups and older people into sport.

Better participation and elite-level success is a great step forward but to build on this we also want to help improve the representation of women on the boards of sports governing bodies. Through the Code for Sports Governance, we are ensuring that all sports governing bodies that receive public money will have at least 30 per cent gender diversity on their boards. Better female

representation on the boards of sports governing bodies can help grow women's sport.

Sport England's recent Active Lives survey found that in terms of 'being active' men are 63% more likely to be active while women are still just 59% more likely. Encouragingly the sports gender participation gap has dropped from over two million to around 1.55 million but more still needs to be done – that is why Sport England is committed to tripling its investment to tackling inactivity to £250 million.