

## Deakin women scale the heights of elite sport



Ashlee Hendy climbing in Grampians. Pic Jess Davis

By [Lisa Bigelow](#)

**Ashlee Hendy** is a ‘rockstar’. She is just one of numerous Deakin women participating in every type of sport at every level. From a national rock climbing champion to umpiring state and national basketball, Deakin is encouraging and supporting women to achieve all of their sporting goals — through the new [Women in Sport and Exercise Hub](#) initiative — while they continue their university careers.

The 2014 Victorian and Australian rock climbing champion, Ashlee also works in Deakin’s School of Exercise & Nutrition Science as a lecturer in Motor Learning. Ashlee has been climbing competitively for 16 years. The years when she was state and national champion coincided with her undergrad, honours and PhD studies at Deakin then her early work as a researcher. She still competes — now with a sneaky eye on the 2020 Olympic Games — training several times each week.

Praising Deakin’s flexible work arrangements that allow her to start earlier or later, outside of lecturing commitments, Ashlee said Deakin also assists staff by providing great shower and change facilities. But, she said, staff have to make the time and find their own commitment if they want to stay involved in sport.

*‘Time won’t find you, you need to make time but the sacrifice is well worth it,’ Ashlee said.*

‘People often see barriers to their own fitness, but making time for yourself often has really great impacts on productivity and health.’

**Dr Julia Walsh**, Deakin senior lecturer in Sport Coaching and **2015 Basketball Victoria Female Coach of the Year** has also competed and coached throughout her career in Australia and in Ireland. Julia says one of the things she likes most

about being involved in elite-level sport is ‘always being surrounded by women who just get on with it’.



Dr Julia Walsh with Deakin Melbourne Boomers Development coach Lauren Jackson at the 2016 WISE Symposium.

‘There’s so many more opportunities for women now in sport,’ Julia said.

*‘We’ve seen 120 years of governments subsidising men’s sport, now we need more funding for women so they can be the best they can possibly be without struggling to feed themselves and pay their costs.’*

‘We also need to ensure education is a part of the mix so they have careers after their short life competing in elite sport.’

### **Women in Sport program**

**Dr Natalie Saunders**, lecturer at Deakin’s [Faculty of Health](#), explains that Deakin’s new Women in Sport and Exercise (WISE) Hub initiative is the extension of the university’s ‘long-standing commitment to championing the right of women to participate and benefit from sport’.

‘[Women in Sport](#) focuses on numerous partnerships and initiatives that make a real difference,’ Natalie said.

‘A university setting such as Deakin, has the resources and capacity to utilise a multitude of channels and create opportunities to make an impact on cultural change in a context such as women in sport.’

'Whether it be the University's relationship with the [Deakin Melbourne Boomers](#), the [Geelong Cats women's program](#), the [Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race](#), or in-house initiatives such as the [Deakin Women in Sport and Exercise \(WISE\) Hub](#), they collectively create a wealth of opportunities.

Natalie explains, the University's involvement also touches on many levels, starting from grass roots to community, school and faculty level and all the way to corporate partnerships.

*'I have always supported the view that sport is a powerful vehicle for achieving positive health outcomes for the community.'*

'Therefore, providing opportunities and sustainability in sport, relies on the community and partnerships across all levels of participation and engagement,' Natalie says.

Although the objective is about fuelling passion, another important aspect is to build a community of women dedicated to breaking the mould. Beyond creating platforms and outlets for female sport participation, it is thus equally important to provide clear pathways.

**Troy Selwood**, Academy and VFL Manager for the Geelong Cats for example, explains that a core factor of supporting women in sport is building those clear pathways.

'We see our VFL Women's Program as a way to provide pathways for local female athletes in pursuing their passion to play AFL, as well as providing a pathway for Deakin students to forge careers and experience working in the sports industry,' he says.

### **More information**

Find out more about this University-wide initiative, including upcoming, topical events, on the [Women in Sport and Exercise \(WISE\)](#) web page.