

PLAY BY THE RULES: INFORMATION HUB ON INCLUSIVE, SAFE AND FAIR SPORT

Australian Sports Commission, Australian Human Rights Commission, all state and territory departments of sport and recreation and equal opportunity commissions, the Australian and New Zealand Sports Law Association, the Office of the Children's Guardian and the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW

This description comes from the study commissioned by the European Commission on gender-based violence in sport ([Mergaert L., & al., Study on gender-based violence in sport – final report, European Commission, 2016](#)). It was updated within the framework of the European Union-Council of Europe joint project [Pro Safe Sport + "Put an end to sexual harassment and abuse against children in sport"](#), by collecting more recent information from the organisation responsible for the project.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Developing partnerships

Twenty organisations support Play by the Rules' policies and resources within their child welfare, anti-discrimination, and inclusion programmes. These partners collate resources and research on inclusion, integrity, safety and child protection in sport to enhance knowledge of these issues. This is distributed through their networks, and through radio and television advertisements and promotional materials, such as free posters, fliers and an online magazine. Australian athletes support the initiative by participating in advocacy campaigns.

Training for sport stakeholders

Play by the Rules has developed a number of online training courses for different sport stakeholders:

1. Training for Member Protection Information Officers (MPIOs), who are designated people within sports organisations with responsibility for providing information on complaints procedures. This training is available for free or at a nominal charge as a three-hour workshop that is followed up by an online course. The course covers the MPIO role; complaint resolution procedures; definitions of child protection, harassment and discrimination; and ethical and practical considerations relating to the MPIO role. Individuals who complete 90% of the course and pass the online test receive a certification number that is required to register as an MPIO.¹
2. A child protection, harassment and discrimination course for anyone in sports organisations. This covers definitions of discrimination, harassment and child abuse; legislation relevant to equal opportunities and child protection in sport; reporting procedures for allegations; and advice on promoting an inclusive environment in sports organisations. The course is freely available online.
3. A complaint handling course that covers the process and issues surrounding managing complaints at a grass roots level of sport.
4. Mini-courses on Ethics and Ethical Decision Making in Sport, An Introduction to the Integrity of Sport and Organisational Integrity Responsibility. Future courses in 2018 will include Violence Against Women and Sport; Inclusive Coaching.

¹ MPIO Education. Available at: <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/online-courses/mpio-online-course>

Many sports organisations and government departments mandate attendance at these courses for receipt of professional accreditation and funding.

Free educational resources

The Play by the Rules website offers free resources relating to, among other issues, forms of gender-based violence. These include:

- Factsheets on legislation, risks, and responsibilities relating to sexual harassment, sexual assault, and child abuse in sport;²
- A guide to managing gender-based violence such as sexual assault, child sexual abuse, gender-based bullying, and sexual harassment;³
- Interactive scenarios that define sexual harassment in sport and provide information on preventing and managing cases, with embedded links to further information;⁴
- Templates for clubs with information on developing policies and guidelines on, among other things, sexual harassment and child abuse.⁵ This contains a template Member Protection Policy, which includes issues relating to sexual and gender identity in sport.

OUTCOMES AND STRENGTHS

Since its creation in 2001, Play by the Rules has become well known within sporting circles in Australia, in part due to its high-profile media advertisements and its partnership with numerous federal-, state- and territory-level organisations, both within and beyond sport. As a free one-stop shop for information with downloadable resources and (mostly free or low cost) online training courses, a key strength of Play by the Rules is that it is accessible and available to all. No doubt, because of this, the initiative can reach many people. The latest available figures suggest over 50,000 people have subscribed to the initiative online. This large subscriber base seems to have had some success at making sports organisations safer and more inclusive. A small-scale evaluation of 1,204 people within sport found that 77% of respondents agreed the initiative had enabled them to make their sports club or organisation more inclusive,⁶ while 86% said it had enhanced their ability to promote a sport environment free of discrimination and abuse. This accessibility and the fact that the resources available online can be applicable to all sports contexts has encouraged many sports organisations to integrate one or both of the child protection and/or harassment and discrimination free Play by the Rules online training courses into their own training programmes for staff/volunteers. Annual evaluation surveys and ongoing shorter feedback surveys embedded within several of the online training resources also ensures the resources available are meaningful to and valued by users. Teaming up with specialist sports, law, human rights and equality organisations at federal, state and territory level is another key strength of Play by the Rules initiative. This collaborative approach has made it possible to share and cross promote the Play by the Rules initiative across a wide range of sectors (including sport and discrimination/equality networks), increasing the initiative's reach, and means there are more resources available to keep Play by the Rules up and running. It also reduces the risk of the initiative folding if any organisation withdraws or reduces its funding, and allows the initiative to harness the knowledge and expertise of actors in the sport, equality and human rights sectors. Finally, as a capability-building initiative, the focus of Play by the Rules on supporting, assisting and educating sport stakeholders about discrimination, harassment and child safety issues encourages sports organisations to take responsibility themselves for these issues, which is more likely than adopting punitive measures to result in organisations 'buying in' to the Play by the Rules message.

² See <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources/templates>

³ See <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources/ebooks>

⁴ See <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources/interactive-scenarios/homophobia-and-sexuality-discrimination>

⁵ See <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources/templates>

⁶ Play by the Rules (2015) Making your sport inclusive, safe and fair, p.8

LIMITATIONS

While it is laudable that the Play by the Rules initiative is evaluated annually, to date the evaluations have been relatively small in scale (n = 1,204) compared with the number of people who have subscribed to the initiative (n = 50,000). As a result, while the findings to date are broadly positive,⁷ it is impossible to conclude with any certainty how widespread these perceptions are. In addition, the most recent evaluation data found that while most respondents suggested the Play by the Rules' resources increased their capacity to ensure their environments are safe, fair and inclusive for all, fewer reported actually taking steps to do this as a result of signing up to Play by the Rules.⁸ Recent evaluation processes set up for the child protection online course suggest that around 60% of course participants take action to address issues of child safety in the months following completion of the course and that these changes will lead to cultural and/or behavioural change. However, further research is needed to investigate the impact of the initiative on embedding long-lasting cultural change. Similarly, there is no evidence to date relating to which of the facets of the Play by the Rules initiative are most effective or why. On a positive note, the partners behind Play by the Rules are aware of these limitations and are developing a new evaluation system that seeks to identify the short-, medium- and long-term impact of key facets of the initiative, such as the other online courses.

A further limitation of the Play by the Rules initiative is that it is only useful to organisations and individuals that know about it. The latest available figures suggest that 15% of respondents were not aware of the initiative at all and of the 12% who reported only limited familiarity with the initiative, 20% of these had never visited the Play by the Rules website.⁹ As such, more needs to be done to increase awareness of the initiative and use of the website for Play by the Rules to be optimally effective.

Finally, Play by the Rules does not currently provide sports organisations with any mechanism for auditing their current levels of safety, fairness and inclusion, or assessing their progress in these areas. The latest evaluation of the initiative identified this gap and recommended the creation of a self-monitoring tool to assist sports organisations in this regard and that could then be used for marketing/promotional activities and to report on progress to funding bodies.¹⁰ However, this has yet to be enacted.

LESSONS LEARNT

Teaming up with key organisations in the sport, equality and human rights sectors has benefited the Play by the Rules initiative in several important ways. As well as increasing the network through which the initiative can be promoted to widen its reach, working with these partners enables Play by the Rules to draw on the combined expertise and collective impact of its partners. This allows Play by the Rules to develop a wide variety of resources that are accurate and up to date as well as useful to stakeholders in a range of positions – from those in sports organisations responsible for legal issues to athletes and their parents, designated Member Protection Information Officers (MPIOs), equality officers, and coaches. This holistic approach is more likely to encourage sport stakeholders to accept their personal responsibility for developing an inclusive, safe and fair environment in sport. The involvement of well-established expert agencies in Play by the Rules also enhances the initiative's credibility.

In addition, the strategy of educating and supporting sports organisations in the development of an inclusive, safe and fair environment in sport encourages them to take ownership of the issue and facilitates positive engagement with the topic compared with more punitive, top-down strategies that seek to impose change. The success of this approach is evidenced by the number of sports organisations that use the Play by the Rules

⁷ Most respondents said they felt the initiative had enabled them to make their sports club or organisation more inclusive, and that it had enhanced their ability to promote a sport environment free of discrimination and abuse.

⁸ See: http://play-by-the-rules.s3.amazonaws.com/PBTR_Eval_2014.pdf

⁹ See http://play-by-the-rules.s3.amazonaws.com/PBTR_Eval_2014.pdf

¹⁰ See http://play-by-the-rules.s3.amazonaws.com/PBTR_Eval_2014.pdf

resources and have integrated the training courses into their own policy frameworks. Making the resources and training available for free (or at a nominal cost) has been crucial in this regard as it is easier and cheaper for sports organisations to require staff/volunteers to undergo a free course than it is for them to create their own.

Finally, the linking of some federal, state and territorial agencies' funding and recognition for sport staff/volunteers to successful completion of the Play by the Rules training courses reinforces the importance of sports organisations addressing child protection, sexual harassment and discrimination. It also ensures staff and volunteers that take this and the MPOIs course are receiving standardised and up-to-date information on these topics. This should be expanded to cover all federal, state and territorial agencies' funding and accreditation systems for sport.