

The Future Landscape of School Sport – Step 2 “Connection”

Group discussion & exploration of key items

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Attendees:

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Each of the project groups considered the range of current and emerging issues identified in Step 1, selecting the most pressing items for further exploration.

RISK MITIGATION

Key discussion items:

1. **Injury management:** Growing concerns around concussion, injury prevention, and return-to-play protocols.
 - Concussion and injury management identified as one of the key ongoing issues facing schools and associations at present.
 - Difficulties identified around which guidelines to adopt, with various sporting codes providing differing advice. Some sporting codes adopt the Australian Sports Commission (AIS / SMA) guidelines, whilst other policies vary slightly. Key questions: *Who is the expert voice in this issue for school sport? Would it be helpful for all school sport associations to adopt a single policy approach? Can we consider obtaining legal advice as an industry to give schools and associations confidence in adopting a singular policy approach?*
 - Can School Sport Professionals provide access to education around concussion policy, injury prevention and management procedures?
2. **Insurance:** Lack of clarity or consistency in coverage for school sport participants, volunteers, and third parties.
 - Increasing costs are a significant factor for all schools and associations.
 - Program offerings may need adjusting in future to avoid exponential increases in insurance costs (ie, some of the more high-risk events may need modification or removal).

- Consider professional learning for association staff on risk mitigation and insurance.
3. **Climate risks:** Increasing weather-related disruptions (extreme heat, floods, air quality) affecting outdoor sport delivery.
- Associations may need to update their extreme weather policy in conjunction with student safety and event insurance requirements.
 - Consider professional learning for association staff on climate risk / policy.

Other related items not discussed during this session:

- **Child safety compliance:** *Complex and ever-changing requirements around Working With Children Checks, duty of care, and mandatory reporting.*
- **Behaviour management:** *Managing parent, coach, and spectator conduct in increasingly high-stakes environments.*
- **Business continuity:** *Relatively small size of organisations, with significant risk around loss of IP and sustainability with regards to staff turnover.*
- **Cybersecurity & data privacy:** *Rising risks with managing student data in digital platforms (e.g., consent, breaches, tracking).*
- **Reputation management:** *Social media amplification of complaints or incidents; need for proactive communication and crisis planning.*
- **Legal liability:** *Anticipated tightening of liability laws related to concussion, psychological safety, and anti-discrimination in sport.*

STRATEGIC

Key discussion items:

4. **E-sport vs. traditional sport:** Emerging competition from digital forms of entertainment and alternative "sport" models.
- Acknowledgement that there is growing interest in E-Sports amongst schools and associations, with a wider range of events now being offered across a number of different sporting pursuits. For eg: rowing and cycling, as well as the original computer-based games and events.
 - There is a more professional approach to tournaments and events, and a greater understanding of the benefits of participation.
 - There are now pathways for students to progress and develop, including scholarships and university programs offering purpose-built labs for E-Sports.
 - How do we consider a more structured industry approach to this emerging new program of events?
 - Consideration for some associations to expanding virtual or asynchronous competitions in response to rural access issues, or time / cost pressures?

Other related items not discussed during this session:

- **Low sport prioritisation:** Sport often seen as non-core, leading to reduced prioritisation in strategic plans and resourcing.
 - **Limited professional development:** Inadequate training opportunities for professionals in sport leadership or event management.
 - **Inconsistent participation models:** Variability in access, offerings, and delivery between schools, sectors, and states.
 - **Balancing innovation and tradition:** Delivering a contemporary program while respecting the association's traditional foundations, amidst differing priorities and agendas of member schools. Embracing new and innovative technologies.
 - **Declining participation trends:** Especially among girls and teens, due to body image, mental health, or changing social priorities.
 - **Cultural inclusivity:** Need for more culturally responsive programs that reflect Australia's increasingly diverse student population.
 - **Wellbeing integration:** Greater expectation that sport contributes measurably to school wellbeing and mental health strategies.
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OPERATIONAL

Key discussion items:

5. **Staffing shortages:** Difficulty attracting, developing and retaining skilled sport managers, coordinators, coaches, and volunteers.
 - Specific discussion around officiating, with all associations facing similar challenges with an aging or diminishing pool of officials. This affects almost every sport and is similar across all levels of school sport competition.
 - Is there a need to shift the focus of school sport from just participation to incorporate junior officiating? What creative methods can be utilised to encourage an uptake of students into officiating? How do we break down the barriers with state sporting organisations to enable collaborative work on the recruitment, development and retention of officials? Can officiating coursework be hosted by associations and subsidised to expand the pool of officials?
 - Enhancement opportunities exist for engaging a wider range of students in our sporting programs, including through commentary, media, coaching development, officiating, etc. School sport should not just be about the participants or the elite athletes but should celebrate all aspects of sport.
 - Opportunities for schools to explore further engagement of Sport & Rec students in officiating programs or roles within the sporting program. Potential of linking curriculum outcomes with these types of extra-curricular programs.

6. **Time pressures:** Increasing demands on teacher time for planning, travel, supervision, and reporting.
 - Professional development opportunities for school staff for utilisation within different school sport roles?
 - Managing increasing “cost” (in time and money) of staff involvement in school sport is a particular challenge facing schools. Reduced involvement negatively impacts the viability and quality of the school sport experience for all participants.
 - “Volunteerism” in school sport is slowly disappearing, with greater expectations by staff members of reward for involvement (time in lieu / financial compensation).
7. **Scheduling conflicts:** Clashes with academic and individual school calendars, and other extracurricular commitments.
 - Important for strategic discussion and high-level planning within associations and agreement on prioritising relevant events or sporting activities.
8. **AI and automation:** Need to integrate AI tools for event planning, communication, and administration — requiring digital upskilling.
 - Consider professional development specific to AI integration in planning and delivering school sport events.
 - Technology is evolving rapidly and has enormous potential if utilised effectively within the association management process.
9. **Access to facilities:** Limited availability of school and community sport venues for training and competition. The provision of free and paid access to school facilities for the benefit of the wider community.
 - Opportunity for greater engagement between associations and local government authorities (LGA's / local councils). Promotion of the importance of school sport in the overall education of our students and the positive role that LGA's can play in supporting this process. Relationships with key contacts within LGA's is critical, as well as considering an industry-wide promotion around LGA and association partnerships.
 - Most facilities are facing usage pressures, particularly with schools needing to utilise LGA facilities outside of regular school hours. Opportunities exist for schools to approach this issue collectively and to consider shared usage or centralised venue utilisation.
 - Online booking systems for some LGA venues often requires payment by credit card during the booking process, with association staff responsible for the booking not always having access to a business credit card. Consideration to working with LGA's to develop alternate payment options for schools / associations.

10. **Transport logistics:** Rising transport costs and increased travel time.

- Increasing cost of transport is a significant risk to all schools and associations.
- Explore options including more centralised competition venues, adjusting event times, or developing partnerships with transport companies.

11. **Communication:** inefficiencies in communication practices and provision of information.

- Exploration of various communication platforms and processes to find the best fit for each respective organisation.
- Various paid project management software platforms available for utilisation. Consideration for further exploration / professional development through School Sport Professionals.

Other related items not discussed during this session:

- **Technology integration:** Lack of fit-for-purpose systems for scheduling, team management, communication, and results tracking.
 - **Competition management:** Complex fixturing requirements, match scheduling, uneven draws, team changes and withdrawals.
 - **Hybrid/remote sport delivery:** Expanding virtual or asynchronous competitions in response to rural access issues or future disruptions (e.g., pandemics).
 - **Sustainability practices:** Pressure to reduce the environmental impact of events (e.g., travel emissions, single-use items).
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FINANCIAL

Key discussion items:

12. **Rising costs:** Increasing fees for association staffing, venue hire, travel, uniforms, and external coaches or officials.

- Important for associations to constantly review spending and seek ways of utilising limited funds more effectively and efficiently.
- Third party providers are being utilised more often by many associations – for example, provision of officials, event staffing, etc.
- Consider upskilling association staff in basic bookkeeping to help reduce the cost of engaging external accountants.

13. **Budget constraints:** Reduced school funding or limited allocation for sport and extracurricular activities.

- Potential for associations to consider business partnership programs, linking school-focussed suppliers with associations / member schools. Business partners pay a fee for access or promotion, helping to keep member school costs to a manageable level. This could also be in the form

of a “contra” relationship for suppliers of sporting goods, uniforms, trophies, etc.

Other related items not discussed during this session:

- **Equity in participation:** *Financial barriers for families limiting student access to representative or competitive sport.*
 - **Privatisation pressures:** *Increasing encroachment of private sport providers into school spaces, shifting the control and culture of school sport.*
 - **Performance-based funding models:** *Potential government or sectoral shifts towards funding linked to outcomes or participation metrics.*
 - **Broader economic challenges:** *Impact of inflation and cost-of-living pressures on family and school sport contributions.*
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NEXT STEPS

1. Concussion

- Engage with the Australian Sports Commission / AIS / SMA for discussion on current guidelines and protocols.
- SSP to provide professional learning opportunities for members around injury prevention, concussion and injury management.
- Establish or utilise current advice document as the “expert voice” for members to utilise in planning their own policies and procedures.

2. Insurance

- Engage with insurance industry professionals for advice and guidance for members.
- SSP to provide professional learning opportunities for members.

3. Extreme weather policies

- Engage with relevant authorities (for eg Sports Medicine Australia) and provide documentation and advice to SSP members.
- Where relevant, SSP to provide professional learning for members.
- Encourage sharing of resources amongst members.

4. E-Sports

- Engage with leading practitioners, including Queensland University of Technology (QUT), to explore current programs and future opportunities.
- SSP to provide professional learning opportunities for members, as well as encouraging the sharing of ideas and current resources / programs.

5. Staffing – officials

- SSP to host a forum on officiating in school sport.
- Encourage sharing of ideas, challenges, strategies to provide uplift in volunteerism and professionalism in officiating.

6. AI & automation

- SSP to provide professional development specific to AI integration in planning and delivering school sport events.

7. Communication

- Further exploration of available software platforms available on the market.
- Provide professional development and sharing of information through SSP.

8. Rising Costs

- Explore the various third-party providers that associations are currently engaging with. Share feedback, information and resources amongst members.
- Explore accounting software packages suitable for school sport organisations and provide summarised details for members.
- Provide basic bookkeeping learning opportunities for members to assist with financial knowledge and skill.

9. Budget constraints

- Explore alternate funding models for school sport associations, including business partnership models. Provide opportunities for members to share ideas and resources.