

Even Higher Performance

A review of the culture and governance of the Hockey Australia National Women's High Performance Program

Recommendations



CONFIDENTIAL REPORT

Commissioned by Sport Australia/Australian Institute of Sport

Recommendations Dated 11 March 2021

Note

Sport Integrity Australia is managing an independent complaint handling process in relation to specific allegations arising from the Hockey Australia Women's High Performance Program. People are able to make complaints up until Friday, 5 March 2021.

Sport Integrity Australia will assess complaints under Hockey Australia's Member Protection Policy and identify the most appropriate mechanism for resolution. This may include further investigation by Sport Integrity Australia and/or independent dispute resolution facilitated by the National Sports Tribunal.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to acknowledge the support of Richard Redman, Manager, Conduct and Professionalism, Australian Institute of Sport. Richard and a team from EY conducted the preliminary group of interviews for this Review. They did so with independence and integrity and the Panel wishes to thank them. Richard then provided exemplary guidance, support and administrative assistance to the Panel. We are extremely grateful for his high level of professionalism.

We would also like to thank all who were interviewed for this report.

Acknowledgement of Country

This report was prepared on Gadigal Country. We pay our respects to Gadigal elders, past, present and emerging and thank them for their custodianship of their lands and waters.

Photo credit

Front Page - Hockey Australia

Disclaimer

The views of the Panel are based on interviews conducted with dozens of people involved in some way with the High Performance Women's Hockey Program. They do not purport to be findings of fact, nor were we asked to make findings of fact under our Terms of Reference. In the time available, we have had limited opportunity to test all views expressed but have based our observations and recommendations on themes which have clearly emerged during the course of the review.

Foreword

This is a Report about the future of Australia's Golden Girls, the Hockeyroos. Still ranked in the top three in the world, the Hockeyroos' High Performance Squad and Hockey Australia have been recently engaged in a process of soul-searching.

This Report is intended to assist in that process. Its purpose is not to condemn or to lay blame. The Report invites all of the stakeholders to examine their own processes, their expectations of each other, their attitudes towards and communications to each other of all kinds and makes a series of recommendations to the Board of Hockey Australia which are designed to further the objectives of the Hockeyroos High Performance Squad and Hockey Australia.

After receiving a number of letters from the High Performance Squad and meeting with representatives of the Squad, Hockey Australia promptly called for an Independent Inquiry into the matters which are detailed in the Terms of Reference. Hockey Australia has been unfailing in its unqualified assistance to the Inquiry and particular thanks must go to Mel Woosnam, the President of Hockey Australia, and to Matt Favier, the Chief Executive Officer, who responded to many enquiries and requests from the Panel.

The recommendations contained in this Report are to be considered by an autonomous Board of elected directors each of whom have impressed the Panel as people of high integrity, experience and competence who are committed to the overall and individual welfare of each member of the High Performance Squad and the objectives of Hockey Australia and to the broader values of sport in Australia.

It is obvious to the Panel that the Report will be considered by a Board which has already shown its determination to ensure that the issues raised by the High performance Squad have been listened to in a sympathetic and meaningful way. There is much good reason to hope that the path to mutual understanding laid out in this Report will also be followed by the High performance Squad whose good faith ownership of this Report is essential to its future wellbeing and the success of the High Performance Program to the same degree as is Hockey Australia.

I am deeply grateful to my fellow members of the Committee of Inquiry, Gabrielle Trainor AO and Moya Dodd, for their unstinting hard work and dedication. All of the stakeholders in the High Performance Program are the beneficiaries of their efforts. The invaluable continuing assistance of Richard Redman has been acknowledged in the body of the Report and I would wish to take this opportunity to repeat the gratitude of the Panel for his contribution without which the Inquiry could not have functioned as efficiently as it did.

Bruce Collins, QC

Chairman

Independent Review into Culture and Governance of the Hockey Australia National Women's High Performance Program

11 March 2021

1 Recommendations

1A Culture

Leadership

- 1 That the Board consider whether a full reset of the leadership of the High Performance Women's Program is required.

Although since the review began, the dynamics in the program have changed with the departure of the High Performance Director (HPD) and one of the assistant coaches, the review has made many observations about leadership of the program.

The Board should carefully consider whether the replacement of the HPD and the assistant will deliver a sufficient “circuit breaker” that will allow the program to galvanise behind leadership to give the Hockeyroos the opportunity to perform to their best at the Tokyo Olympics and beyond.

- 2 That the Board review the recruitment process for coaching and program staff.

The selection criteria should not only include technical and tactical expertise, but also contemporary thinking on Athlete Wellbeing & Engagement (AW&E) / sports psychology and gender-conscious understanding of player needs. It could also consider the ‘qualities of a great sports coach’ as published by the IOC.

Player Group input could be sought, for example, to prioritise the selection criteria (as opposed to playing a role in the recruitment itself).

HA should also consider the inclusion of an independent expert on the Panel e.g. a leading sports HP culture expert with credentials in Athlete Wellbeing and / or sports psychology. Review the job description of coaching staff, incentives, bonuses and performance plans to include Athlete Wellbeing & Engagement metrics as KPIs (eg regular e.g. quarterly “Pulse” survey favourability results > x%)

- 3 That the process for recruiting the HPD and HP program staff, including selection criteria and Panel members, also be reviewed in light of this review.

- 4 That a regular process be adopted to seek direct player feedback to the Head Coach (HC) on the program.

The HC should have at least twice yearly “Stop/Start/Continue” session with the Player Group to promote an open and transparent commitment to listening and continuous improvement.

Wellbeing

- 5 Athlete Wellbeing as a priority HP program outcome should be embedded in performance indicators, bonus incentives and ongoing professional development programs for HP program staff.

Staff training could include modules on psychological safety, leadership for HP women's teams, embedding wellbeing in decision-making.

- 6 That the HP Program reviews its progress in implementing the AW&E Framework, including relocation support policies and practices and outcomes, to ensure consistent, caring support is provided to relocating athletes and their families so they can train and perform at their best and achieve their desired Hockey/Life balance.
- 7 That the HP program make a concerted commitment to hockey-life balance.

This was recommended in the Davis report into Rio and is a feature of the HA AIS AW&E framework and appears not yet to have been consistently taken to heart by the HP staff.

The AW&E framework provides for Hockey goals to be supported by Life goals.

The HPD should regularly report to the HPC on how this objective is being met in addition to the continued liaison with the AIS.

Cultural Transformation

- 8 That the Board and the HP Women's Program commit to, design and implement a cultural transformation program through a facilitated process.

Steps could, for example, include:

- A briefing to the Player Group and, in a separate session, the coaching, support and administration staff, by the Board, covering the observations and recommendations of this review, the response of the Board and any decisions about the manner and timing of their implementation. This session will give an opportunity for the Player Group to discuss their response to the review and the status of their Tokyo preparation. Ideally, these sessions should be in person.
- The Player Group revisiting its values and behaviours (as developed in January 2020) with a greater focus on the behaviours that flow from the values they commit to. This again should be a professionally facilitated session, ideally by a qualified professional new to the group, conducted to maximise honesty, generosity, cohesion, and where appropriate, apology and forgiveness for past negative behaviours with a commitment to learning from the experiences.
- The coaching and other program staff conduct a similar exercise, to be followed by a plenary session to align the team values and behaviours with the program leadership by way of mutual commitments - a pledge or compact between all those in the program.
- Values and behaviours should be reinforced at the meetings and a commitment made to embed them in the daily training environment (DTE) - used as guideposts to resolve issues as they arise.

The same values-anchored process should be adopted for intra-team meetings and coaching and ancillary staff meetings.

Then program, activities and outcomes should be systematically reported and discussed as a standing agenda item at each meeting of the High Performance Committee of the HA Board (or other Committee charged with this responsibility).

- 9 That the HPD be co-located with the program to provide the best opportunity to create positive and consistent relationships with staff, athletes and other

stakeholders and contribute to the on field and off field objectives of the HP Program, especially culture change.

The new HPD should consider the best practice model for driving and sustaining culture change in Olympic teams, described in the study by Cruickshank, Collins and Minten¹.

Player Group

- 10 That the Player Leadership Group, voted by the players according to a set of criteria that is developed together with the HP program staff, be reinstated. They should have regular, ideally weekly, meetings with the HC and coaching staff. The HC and coaching staff should appoint the captain from the Leadership Group unless agreed otherwise with the Leadership Group.
- 11 That the Player Group should recognise that leadership is a quality which must also come from within the squad. Their leadership, as well as emerging leaders, should receive leadership training, mentoring and development as part of an ongoing and rolling program.

Training modules could include issues/conflict resolution, constructive communication, delivering and receiving difficult messages, resilience, public presentation etc. The whole squad should be consistently given opportunities for personal development as part of their Life Plans.

The Player Group should, in line with its values, take responsibility for developing a culture that responds to the commitment that each player has made to excellence and to each other by being part of the HP program. In that spirit, wherever possible, individual and “team dynamic issues” are resolved openly and with a generosity, within the group. The group should also be able to openly discern issues that require escalation and determine how that is best done.

- 12 HA should work with AHPA and Player Group to enter an agreement in order to recommit the Player Group and HA to working together in a rebased relationship, underpinned by agreed values, better processes, communication and formalised engagement and new governance structures to support AW&E and Hockey/Life outcomes in the program.

Safe and Respectful Behaviours

- 13 That the Board, through the HP Program, ensures that:
 - (i) education and training on respectful behaviours is an ongoing feature of player development and compliance programs in both male and female squads and for the program management. That the HP Program provides a safe and respectful environment should be a basic feature of its culture, reinforced also by the model behaviours of player and management leadership,
 - (ii) protocols for player tours to ensure safe and respectful behaviours can be systematically reinforced prior and during each tour through specific briefings and emphasis in the Code of Conduct policy and Player Agreement,

¹ Cruickshank A, Collins D and Minten S, Driving and Sustaining Culture Change in Olympic Sport Performance Teams: A First Exploration and Grounded Theory Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology, pp 107-120, February 2014.

- (iii) breaches on tour or at social functions, including breaches involving alcohol, should be dealt with appropriately, with commensurate consequences and in a timely way, and
- (iv) safety and misconduct policies are regularly reviewed and aligned with best-practice.

Complaints and grievances, resolving issues

- 14 That all avenues for player complaints about misconduct and integrity breaches, especially through Sport Integrity Australia but also those within the program and team environment, be fully explained and discussed with players and management staff as part of their induction and on an ongoing basis.

Professional Support Team

- 15 That a team psychologist be appointed, preferably on a full-time basis.
- 16 That the confidentiality protocols and professional obligations surrounding psychology services to the HP program be clarified with the Player Group and confidentiality protocols for AW&E staff also be clarified with the Player Group and with the AW&E staff themselves.

The exceptions for preservation of confidentiality that apply to the psychologist and the AW&E staff appear to have been conflated in a recent formal warning letter provided to a player. This appears to indicate a lack of clarity within HA.

Players need to know the respective standards that apply to avoid any ambiguity and create a relationship of trust with a team psychologist.

Player Performance Feedback and Selection

- 17 That the HP program managers set clear expectations and provide systematic feedback about performance and progression against targets. The reviews should allow players to know and clearly understand where they are in terms of their progress. Non-selection should not come as a surprise to any player.

The present system requires the squad selection be notified by email. Although some expectation management is performed by the coaching staff, it does not seem to be applied consistently. The notification protocols should be reviewed with the Player Group.

The HP program should consider developing a detailed policy and process on transitioning players out of the squad, such as that in the review into the world class program into British Cycling (2017)¹

1B Governance

Oversight of implementation of these recommendations

- 18 That the Hockey Australia Board adopt an accountable and transparent process for the adoption of the recommendations of this review.
- 19 The Board should consider whether it should appoint an expert group to advise on implementation, possibly including representatives of the AIS and/or qualified independent contributors.

Responsibility for tracking and monitoring the implementation should sit with a mechanism such as a committee of the Board and there should be transparency on the implementation process. This could include half yearly reports to stakeholders on progress - players, parent group, sponsors, the hockey system etc to be published and from time to time personally presented.

That in the context of implementing the recommendations of this review, the Board revisit the Davis report on the HP Program and Rio 2016 Review and include recommendations yet to be implemented in full.

“Culture” governance

- 20 That the Board should apply the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD) tool - *Governing Organisational Culture*, using external facilitation if necessary, to audit the culture of the HP Program and the organisation more broadly, and develop a multi-year program to improve it, based on a set of agreed values, behaviours and metrics to be embedded in the organisation.
- 21 The Board should add as a standing item to its agenda the organisational culture and the culture of its HP Programs.
- 22 That the Board should consider broadening the remit of the HPC to specifically include structured oversight of the HP Program culture. (Alternatively, it could consider establishing a People & Culture Committee, perhaps by broadening the scope of the HR & Remuneration Committee with responsibility for recommending to the Board initiatives and plans for employees of HA and athletes in the HP program.)

Assuming the HPC continues in essentially its present form, it should focus on the oversight of the development of a People & Culture Plan to attract, develop and retain talent in the HP Program and promote High Performance outcomes.

The KPIs of such a Plan could include initiatives such as regular engagement and performance management systems including regular “pulse” surveys, progress against which to be included in the CEO’s and other relevant executives’ KPIs, exit surveys, AW&E and grievance/complaints data.

The HPC Terms of reference (last updated August 2018) commendably include Culture & Leadership as a matter to be considered by the HPC but there does not appear to be a measurable, planned, accountable way for it to do so.

- 23 That the HP Program AW&E manager report to either the CEO or the People & Culture executive at HA.
- 24 That one or two independent experts be invited to join the HPC (in line with its 2017 Terms of Reference), and management not be members but attend to report.

Preferably, the independent member(s) would have credentials or experience in Athlete Wellbeing / sports psychology for high performance teams at Olympic level, and bring a diverse perspective.
- 25 That Performance Management and Professional Development be more rigorously attended to with more relevant metrics applied to HP staff, arising out of a bespoke HP strategic plan.

While the present template for discussions on Performance Planning and Career Development refer and cascade from the overall HA strategic priorities, a separate

strategic plan be developed for the HP Program with performance accountability tracked against directly relevant strategic plans for the program.

The Board should continue to invest in development of coaching staff across the system and plan for succession.

- 26 That the HA Board engage HP stakeholders more often and more directly

The Board/HPC should develop and implement an annual stakeholder engagement plan and report against the plan at each Board meeting.

- 27 That the Board put in place, through the Company Secretary, a policy revision regime so the Board can ensure the various policies and agreements are current, workable, relevant and accessible

- 28 That the Board make improvements to the flow and quality of records of proceedings from the HPC to the Board.

Within its resources, the HA Board may wish to provide training (for example, through the Governance Institute) to an appropriate person in the organisation to help continuously improve the quality of Board papers and minutes.

- 29 That the Board revise its director training program to include training on issues such as psychological safety and athlete well-being.
