

PARTICIPATION VERSUS PERFORMANCE

Managing (dis)ability,
gender and cultural
diversity in junior sport

This is a synthesis of the key findings of an Australian Research Council project led by Victoria University in partnership with VicHealth, the Australian Football League and the Centre for Multicultural Youth.

Our aim was to understand how junior sports clubs can support the inclusion of people of all backgrounds and abilities. It was informed by interviews, surveys and observations across five sports: cricket, netball, Australian Rules football, soccer and basketball.

FAST FACTS

 **Female club members** generally reported stronger positive attitudes towards inclusive participation and were more accepting of diverse groups participating within the club.

 **The high-performing ('best') players** were more likely to be considered culture setters, friends and trusted people, and were seen to provide support within the club's social networks. They were also seen as key drivers towards upholding greater diversity in club culture due to their status.



WHAT DID WE FIND?

 **Most junior sports clubs recognised the benefits of diversity**, with regard to increased membership and volunteers, club capacity and sustainability, as well as delivering social and health benefits to the community. However, club members frequently felt under-resourced to deliver on calls by national and state sporting organisations to promote and support diversity. Clubs often see diversity and inclusion as peripheral to their 'core business'.

 **Commitment to diversity is often dependent on an individual champion driving change** rather than something that is institutionalised within the junior sports club's culture. Whilst these individuals do important and necessary work, their efforts are fragile and may end if the champion leaves. Where diversity is institutionally supported and prioritised, the work of champions can have an important positive 'ripple effect' throughout many aspects of the club's operations.

 **Junior sports clubs usually focus on one aspect of diversity**, such as gender or cultural diversity, whilst paying little attention to all others or to how the different aspects of diversity intersect, for example culturally diverse girls and women.

 **Clubs that supported a participation ethos ('sport for all') were more supportive of diversity** compared to clubs that valued performance (winning) more.

 **Junior sports clubs are organised and structured in a way that tends to devalue certain forms of diversity.** For example, girls' and all-abilities teams are frequently allocated the worst pitches, furthest away from the main club building. Club houses are often used to showcase celebrations of senior men's team successes and can be unwelcoming for diverse young players.

 **There is a lack of specific guidance and support for junior sports clubs in improving diversity and inclusion.** Where resources and support do exist, there appears to be somewhat of a disconnect between the diversity initiatives and resources provided by national and state sporting organisations and their actual use at the club level. Community clubs are often not aware of, or do not engage with, these existing resources.

WHAT CAN THE COMMUNITY SPORT SECTOR DO?



Let's talk

Conversations about diversity are important. Clubs are confused by what diversity is and what it practically means. Discussions are needed at all levels of sport to identify what is meant by diversity and what clubs can do in this space.



One size does not fit all

Clubs engage with diversity in different ways and are at different stages of the journey, depending on their social characteristics and context. Support from stakeholders needs to reflect this and recognise that some clubs need more support than others.

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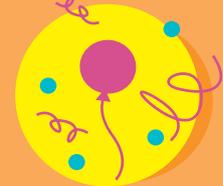
Make it relevant

National and state policies that support diversity are rarely actively used in clubs. To be practically useful, policies need to move beyond broad policy statements and codes of conduct to provide specific guidance and resources on how clubs can engage with and embed diversity.



Champions of change

These individuals are key and need looking after to support long-term change. These individuals should be identified and it should be determined what resources and support they need to promote diversity and gain institutional level support so it does not rely solely on them into the future.



Celebrate success

There is a wealth of good practice within junior sports clubs, but this is rarely communicated outside of clubs. Diversity related successes should be shared amongst other clubs, local government, national and state sporting organisations so that other clubs can recognise what is possible and how to achieve this.

WHAT CAN YOUR CLUB DO?



Coaches are key

Coaches are the main interface between a club's culture and reinforcing this among young players. They need support and training on how to promote and support diversity among the club's players.



Get best players onside

Best players have significant influence within clubs. Having them onside as diversity champions is important to change cultures within clubs.



What is our culture?

Clubs need to look critically at the culture they are promoting across all levels and aspects of the club. Questions to consider might be: Which participants do we prioritise? Who do we pay the most attention to? How welcoming are our facilities? What type of people are on our committee? Who are our coaches? These are all important questions for considering what type of culture a club has and how welcome to diverse players it will be.



Who's on our committee?

For diversity to become normalised within clubs it is important that club governance structures and leadership roles are also diverse. Encouraging diversity among those taking on coaching, management and committee level roles and recognising that they might need more support to do this is important for promoting and supporting diversity within the club as a whole.



Participation and performance: where do we stand?

There is a perception that clubs which are participation and diversity focused do not do as well from a performance perspective. This perception is unfounded. We need to challenge the perception that embracing diversity and inclusion compromises performance. Performance and diversity of participation can coexist in junior sport.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

Summary and full reports of the study, key findings and good practices are available. Please visit:
cmy.net.au/publications/participation-versus-performance

Contact the Lead Investigator: Professor Ramón Spaaij
Institute of Health and Sport, Victoria University
T: (03) 9919 4683 | E: ramon.spaij@vu.edu.au

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