

**REVIEW OF DRUGFREE SPORT NEW ZEALAND
ANTI-DOPING PROGRAMME IN SCHOOL
RUGBY**

17 July 2020

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Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
2. SCOPE OF REVIEW	3
3. REVIEW PROCESS	4
4. BACKGROUND	4
5. DFSNZ's CURRENT PROGRAMME	6
6. FEEDBACK AND DISCUSSION ON THE CURRENT PROGRAMME	7
6.1 Expanding to more sports.....	7
6.2 Education	8
6.3 Testing	9
6.4 Targeted approach.....	10
6.5 Wider issues.....	10
6.6 Working together	11
7. RECOMMENDATIONS	11
8. CONCLUSION	12
8. LITERATURE REVIEW	12

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review was commissioned by Drug Free Sport New Zealand (DFSNZ) to evaluate its anti-doping programme in school rugby that has been running since 2017. The review identifies that the current system is generally well received and can be viewed as a success. However, there are enough concerns raised that a better approach is recommended. The review makes nine recommendations about how the programme can be changed by expanding the education component, and by moving the testing from school sport to elite age group sport.

2. SCOPE OF REVIEW

The scope of this review was set out by DFSNZ in a 3 June 2020 letter to the reviewer.

“The Top 4 project was initiated to address the doping-risks potentially evident in school rugby, specifically through education and deterrence activities. We now wish to review the project after three completed seasons. The overarching question to be addressed is whether DFSNZ has been successful in supporting and protecting our school age rugby players through anti-doping education and (limited) testing. Ultimately the review should address what should happen to this project in the future? Options might include:

1 Cease this work with school sport

2 Continue in its current form with the Top 4 competition (boys and girls competitions)

3 Expand the programme to encompass school age rugby throughout the season (i.e. not just at the Top 4). This might include the 1a competition or the Condor 7s for example.

4 Expand the programme to other school sports. If so, which ones should be included?

In considering the future of the project, the review should look at:

- What worked and what did not? What should or could be done differently*
- Was the education fit for purpose and useful?*
- The rules of the competition required teams competing in the finals weekend only (four boys’ and four girls’ teams) to have received competition in order to take part. Should the rules require all teams entering to receive education?*
- Was sufficient information provided about the testing programme?*
- Were stakeholders aware that the test was based on a partial screen i.e. we only tested for significant prohibited substances e.g. steroids (we didn’t want positive tests for the likes of Ritalin)*
- If we continue in the future should the reduce screen continue?”*

3. REVIEW PROCESS

This review of DFSNZ's anti-doping programme in New Zealand school rugby has been undertaken by Ben Sandford ("the reviewer") on the instruction of DFSNZ. The reviewer is the current chair of the WADA Athlete Committee, a member of the NZOC Athlete Commission and Integrity Commission, a 3-time Winter Olympian in skeleton and a lawyer practising in Rotorua. The reviewer has no position in school sport in New Zealand, no position with DFSNZ, and is not involved with rugby in New Zealand.

On 11th June 2020 DFSNZ sent a letter to a number of stakeholders advising them of the review, the scope of the review, and that they would be contacted by the reviewer.

The review has primarily been conducted by in person or video call interviews. Additional feedback has been received by email, and the reviewer has considered rules, studies, survey's, and articles relevant to the topic.

During interviews notes were taken and then sent to the participants giving them the opportunity to amend the record if necessary.

The time frame to complete the review has been short and it has not been possible to interview everyone that is involved in this space. However, it has been possible to conduct interviews and receive feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. It is recommended that if any of the recommendations are adopted that further consultation takes place with relevant parties.

It should be noted that although there was an intention to consult with parents and school age athletes that this has not proven possible and this can be seen as a potential weakness of this review. It is consultation that would need to be addressed moving forward. Apart from New Zealand Schools Rugby Union, School Sports New Zealand and New Zealand Rugby (NZR), no other National Sporting Organisation (NSO) have been consulted.

4. BACKGROUND

Both internationally and in New Zealand there is evidence of school sport becoming more 'professional' and the pressures on young people competing in school sport increasing dramatically. Even the fact that we refer to these school students as 'athletes' is an example of this. While in school these young athletes are often in sporting academies, competing for professional contracts, engaging with agents, and aiming for representative honours. The stakes are high, or at the very least perceived to be high. The pressure to look a certain way, to increase size and strength, to perform, and to win is large, and has only increased in recent years. These pressures are amplified by social media, schools, teammates, family, friends, coaches, trainers, the media, and the athletes themselves. It has become a high stakes environment where teenagers are thrust into the spotlight and burdened with the responsibilities of what we expect from professional adult athletes. With increased pressure come increased risks, and while many of these issues fall outside the scope of this review it is clear that there are welfare concerns and doping risks in school sport in New Zealand.

In 2014 DFSNZ funded researchers from the University of Otago to undertake a pilot study to survey the attitudes, exposure and use of nutritional supplements and banned drugs in 142 elite high-school rugby players from seven New Zealand schools. This study was presented to the DFSNZ board through an

interim paper in 2014 and in a final report in early 2015. Both the interim and final reports identified a range of concerns, including the high use of supplements by those surveyed, the use of Performance Enhancing Drugs (PED's), and the lack of education available to these athletes.

Some of the key findings of this survey were that;

1. *General attitudes in this group, to "sports doping" were consistent with peers in the international setting.*
2. *Two respondents reported their current use of banned drugs.*
3. *Times of personal stress correlated with a potential risk for the use of banned drugs.*
4. *Only 20% of respondents are receiving information about banned drugs.*
5. *One in five feel they are "at risk" of using banned substances.*
6. *Seventy-one percent use 4.4 supplements either daily, weekly or monthly.*
7. *Ninety percent were concerned about the safety of those products.*
8. *About 50% would not report teammates or opposition members who were doping.*
9. *Family/whanau, coaches, friends/team mates and trainers have the greatest influence over advice on sports performance, drugs, nutrition and supplement use.¹*

The range of supplements being taken included drinks like Powerade, but athletes also reported using pre-workout supplements, protein powders and other products. The survey found that excluding recovery drinks, bars and gel, 70% of respondents reported using on average 3 supplements either daily, weekly or monthly². This is similar to a 2009 DFSNZ study into supplement use that reported that 67% of 16-19 year old carded athletes were using supplements.

90% of the rugby players surveyed in 2014 were concerned about the safety of the products.

The factors which lead to these young athletes taking supplements were attributable to coaches, parents and caregivers, and the pressures adolescents feel to attain a certain body shape associated with their sport while they are still growing. 8% of those surveyed reported being encouraged to use banned drugs by friends or family, and 40% felt some degree of pressure to use supplements³.

The survey also found that,

"Athletes want clear, informed advice on performance enhancement from trainers, coaches and health professionals to address drug safety, effectiveness and the appropriate use of supplements in the context of general nutritional advice. There is also very strong evidence for including extended members of the athlete entourage in the educational process both as recipients and deliverers."⁴

During 2015 and 2016 DFSNZ's concerns continued to grow in relation 1st XV rugby. DFSNZ was aware of the decreasing age of 'professionalism' in secondary school rugby throughout New Zealand and the

¹ https://drugfreesport.org.nz/uploads/site/assets/High_School_Rugby_Pilot_Report_Feb_2015.pdf

² Interim Research Report to the Board of DFSNZ, June 2014, Curtis, Gerrard, Burt, University of Otago

³ Interim Research Report to the Board of DFSNZ, June 2014, Curtis, Gerrard, Burt, University of Otago

⁴ https://drugfreesport.org.nz/uploads/site/assets/High_School_Rugby_Pilot_Report_Feb_2015.pdf

pressures that this could create to make a team, get a contract, increase size and strength and be on the path to a professional career.

There was mounting international evidence identifying doping in top secondary school level rugby, and international research that identified performance pressure and increased expectations as influential factors for adolescent doping. The influence of these factors was shown to increase when individuals had not received education or when inaccurate information had been sourced. It therefore became important for DFSNZ to ensure anti-doping education was made available to young athletes, especially those in higher pressure and outcome driven environments.

The international concerns and how they relate to New Zealand are well stated by the following paragraphs from the 2018 Sport Integrity Review,

“In 2015, the South African Institute for Drug-Free Sport (SAIDS) reported that over the 10 years up to 2014, nearly half of all doping violations against rugby players came from the under-19 level and the country's annual Craven Week schoolboys' rugby tournament. SAIDS reported 13 convictions of Craven Week players during that time, and 10 of those had been in the past five years. Further anecdotal evidence from the United Kingdom identified similar issues.”⁵

The evidence from the Otago University survey, coupled with what was happening overseas, the observations of the decreasing age of professionalism in school rugby in New Zealand, and with the lack of anti-doping education in this space lead DFSNZ to set up the current programme.

5. DFSNZ's CURRENT PROGRAMME

DFSNZ's current programme started in 2017. In July 2017 it was reported to the DFSNZ board that a limited testing programme had been agreed to with New Zealand Secondary Schools Council and other key stakeholders, and that this would begin in that seasons Top 4 1st XV competition.

The programme included providing schools that were likely to qualify for the Top 4 1st XV competition with education, and then testing was to be done on 8 players on the first day of the tournament (two tests on each team) using a limited screen. The limited screen was agreed upon to reduce the potential for 'innocent' positive tests.

The education was done by DFSNZ facilitating workshops at schools, in 2017 this involved 303 players in 14 secondary schools. The education programme was named 'Good Clean Sport'.

To make this happen rules were inserted into the New Zealand Schools Rugby Union (NZSRU) tournament rules. As of 2020 the relevant rules read;

“1.10 The Principal of each school is responsible for all students, staff, team officials, parents and spectators' matters pertaining to the Championship Rules. The Principal will ensure that: ...

iv. Appropriate permission has been obtained for any player to be drug tested, in any match that Drug free Sport New Zealand (DFSNZ) determine they will undertake testing during any of the

⁵ <https://sportnz.org.nz/assets/Sport-Integrity-Review/Sport-Integrity-Review-Discussion-Document-30-October-2018.pdf>

2020 Championships. Further, a condition of competing in the Championships is the agreement that the team has participated in an education workshop if offered by DFSNZ; the workshop must be completed in the year that the team participates in the Championship. Note: DFSNZ has indicated that testing in the 2020 Championships will take place for those competing in the National 1st XV Competition and the National Girls 1st XV Championship."

In 2017 DFSNZ had a significant presence at the tournament with an outreach booth that could be visited by those present and Keven Mealamu was present at this. A number of interviewees spoke positively of this and said how important they thought that visibility was, and how well the athletes responded to having Keven Mealamu there supporting and reinforcing the anti-doping messaging. It was commented that this or something similar should be present every year and should where possible be expanded to other tournaments.

In 2017 the programme was only run with boy's 1st XV teams, in 2018 it was extended to girls' 1st XV teams but the number of tests (8) has stayed the same. Testing has not taken place on 1st XV teams in the co-educational tournament.

After initial feedback on the notification provided about the 2017 programme, in 2018 a new system of notifying the schools was implemented. DFSNZ now writes to all the school principals at the start of term two and Keven Mealamu and the Chief Executive of DFSNZ write letters to all parents of potential players in the tournament providing additional support and information to them.

In 2019 the programme gave education to 622 students from 25 schools. In 2020 the Top 4 1st XV rugby tournament has been cancelled due to Covid-19.

6. FEEDBACK AND DISCUSSION ON THE CURRENT PROGRAMME

The current programme is generally seen to be one that could be substantially improved.

Views as to the success or failure of the current programme were nuanced and varied between the stakeholders depending on what the objectives of the programme were seen to be. The simple fact that the programme is running and providing education can be seen as a success.

The dominant view was that schools are a good place to be delivering anti-doping education and that this has real value, but that school sport was not an ideal place to be conducting testing.

6.1 Expanding to more sports

The current programme is seen as being too limited due to its focus on 1st XV rugby and the perceived focus on boy's 1st XV rugby. Although the initial reasons for focusing on 1st XV rugby were well founded it was generally felt that other sports had high risk factors associated with them, and that the students participating in those sports would benefit from receiving anti-doping education if it were made available.

There are currently about 300 High School 1st XV teams in New Zealand, and although it can be considered a success that the programme delivered education to 25 schools in 2019 there is still a large amount of students involved in 1st XV rugby that are not receiving education.

Discussions on what sports to extend education to included rugby 7's, rugby league, football, rowing, cycling, basketball and athletics.

6.2 Education

The education that has been provided has been seen very positively. It has been fit for purpose and worthwhile. This is anecdotally verified by comments that rugby players leaving school are more aware of their anti-doping responsibilities than athletes in other sports. There were no comments made that DFSNZ should cease delivering education in schools.

Although the current education was seen to be very good it was generally felt that it should evolve in the future. A range of comments were made that education within schools should be values based, health focused, and something that really added value to the students and the schools. There was a strong view that delivering education like this would fit well into the work that schools and the government are doing around well-being.

It was believed that to have the best impact and reach any new education, should be co-designed by a number of stakeholders, including DFSNZ, the players association, NSO's, schools, and students.

There was a lot of comment that education should not be limited to a few schools participating in 1st XV rugby but should be extended to other sports and students within schools. Views on the best way to do this included, inserting rules in the various sporting tournaments to ensure compliance, making the education of a high enough value to schools and students that they wanted it, and making it more accessible online. Again, it was viewed as vital that DFSNZ worked across the sector and in particular with College Sport, Regional Sport Trusts and Regional Sport Directors to make this happen.

There were some comments about the variation between different education presenters, what worked best for schools in this regard and who should be presenting it. It was also noted that remoter schools struggled more than schools in the main centres to get the education delivered at times suitable to them.

Who was best to be delivering the education was an open topic and it probably depends on where, and to who. What was apparent was that successfully implementing changes will require good cooperation across the sector, whether that is in the co-design of the education material or the delivery of it. Different organisations are able to play different roles and it will be important to utilise the existing structures to maximise the effectiveness of uptake and delivery.

Across school sport the view was that schools are a good place to deliver education, but that testing if it is required should be happening in the elite age group sport space under NSO's and outside of schools.

Some of the concerns about the effectiveness of the current program related to schools willingness to provide the education, that sometimes it had been quite difficult to get schools to commit to the education, and that they had only done so when they knew they were going to the Top 4 tournament. This on one hand highlights the benefit of having rules that made the education compulsory, but on the other show that some schools did not see the benefit in the education beyond it being a compliance requirement. Some of the comments from schools on this point were that it was easier for them to wait until they knew they were going, and this also meant they knew which of their students would require

the education. This issue highlights how challenging it is getting education of any sort into schools and that for DFSNZ and the stakeholders in this space to be successful in expanding the programme they are going to have to work together to develop something that is attractive, valuable and of benefit.

There was a strong view that education in schools should be values based and focused more on health and wellbeing. This education should touch on anti-doping but would not be anti-doping focused. Then in elite age group sport (sport outside schools) there would be more specific anti-doping education that was tailored to the needs of the sports. This would hopefully result in a young athlete receiving education at school, specific education within their sport and then if needed testing in that environment as well. There was a strong view that the focus of the programme should be education and that a young persons first contact with anti-doping should be education.

6.3 Testing

The main view was that testing in school sport was an uncomfortable fit and that it would be better to be moved into the elite age group sport space outside of school sport.

There were several reasons given for this. Firstly, that even though a lot of resources go into 1st XV rugby it is not elite rugby even at the age group level, and the 1st XV Top 4 tournament does not have the best players in the country. Secondly, that testing would be more appropriate in the elite age group sport environment where the best players are concentrated. Thirdly, that the aim and mission of schools to be creating safe spaces for students to develop did not fit well with a testing programme.

There was generally a good understanding that testing was done on a limited screen. Different stakeholders expressed different initial opinions about this, but all stated that they were now comfortable with it.

Generally, there seemed to be a view that enough information had been provided about the testing programme and how it would work, but there were comments about whether it functioned well enough or not at the tournaments.

In relation to how well the testing functioned, comments were made about the Doping Control Officers (DCO's) struggling to find the correct athletes or initially identifying the wrong athletes, and that this potentially damaged the professional perception of the system.

Another issue that was raised was the age of the DCO's versus the age of the students being tested, and issues the students had in having access to appropriate support personnel during the testing.

A couple of the interviewees pointed out issues related to the results of the testing and that the students who were tested needed to be provided with the results of the tests even if the results were negative. There was also uncertainty about in what circumstances the organisers would be told of the results.

There was discussion about whether the testing was adding to the pressures and over professionalisation of school sport. This aligned with the view the schools should be safe spaces for young people to development and they were better suited to be places of education.

There was no support to extend testing to other school sports, all comments on this were that testing should happen in the sporting system outside of the school sport system

6.4 Targeted approach

Another concern that was raised was that the current system was not targeted enough, and this was another reason given for moving any testing from school sport to elite age group sport. Currently in the boy's 1st XV tournament each squad is made up of 23 players, this means that there are 92 players at the tournament and there will be 4 random tests. It was felt that the vast majority of the 92 players, although good rugby players to be playing at this level, would never go onto professional contracts or to play beyond school or club level. This led to the view that the tests were too random and not focused enough and that there was a better place to be conducting tests.

Of interest on the above point is that the 2014 Otago University study found that the few national level players in the study tended to have higher PEAS (Performance Enhancement Attitude Scale) scores than lower level players, and that a more favourable attitude towards banned drugs was associated with a higher PEAS score⁶.

Although there were concerns expressed about supplement use and potential use of PEDS by students it was felt that if the objective of the current system was to try and catch potential cheats then it was not the right approach. As mentioned above, the narrow, limited testing would not be enough to do this. If the aim of the testing was to be a deterrent then again the same logic could be applied, so few of the students nationally involved in 1st XV rugby were going to be tested that only for a very small group at one particular time of the year could it be considered a deterrent. There is no evidence to show that the testing at Top 4 creates a deterrent to PED use across 1st XV rugby, however, there is evidence to show that the education is of value and benefit to the students who receive it.

Another comment about the general approach in school sport at the moment was that it appeared to be test, catch, then investigate, and that this approach is only likely to catch the unlucky athlete who is not aware of the rules. A better approach would be to be led first by investigations, and then test in the sport space outside of schools in a targeted manner. This was also part of the opinion that testing of school aged students should not be happening without good reason.

6.5 Wider issues

Any review of the current programme would not be sufficient without mentioning the current high school sport system that this exists in. As the background information has shown there is data to suggest high amounts of supplement use in high school rugby in New Zealand, and it would be naive to believe there either has not, or is not, use of prohibited substances, either inadvertently or intentionally. This is further corroborated by the international data. Since the Otago University survey in 2014 it would be hard to argue that the pressures in school sport have decreased, and the majority of people interviewed for this review spoke of how there are more pressures on school athletes now than ever before, and the dangers that this presents to the welfare of those athletes.

One of the concerns related to the current programme on this topic was whether it was contributing to the view that 1st XV rugby was more important than other sports within schools because they were the only ones getting anti-doping education and possibly being subject to testing, and if this imbalance contributed to the existing patriarchy that we should be working to deconstruct.

⁶ Interim Research Report to the Board of DFSNZ, June 2014, Curtis, Gerrard, Burt, University of Otago

6.6 Working together

There has been a strong signal from the interviews that one of the keys to being effective in this space is working together, whether that be consultation, co-design, or co-delivery. There has been a consensus from the interviews that the topics are important and that by doing the work together, and with the right co-operation, the outcomes will be far more beneficial than by acting alone.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are not made because the current system is not working but instead are based on the learnings of the last three years, what is working, and how things could be improved. The reviewer believes the following recommendations strike an appropriate balance between education and deterrence, school and sport, and the pressures of youth and adulthood.

1. That the current approach should be changed.
2. That education should be expanded to other sports and other students in schools. That this education should be co-designed by a range of stakeholders.
3. That this education should be values and integrity based, and focused on health and wellbeing. That it should be designed and presented in a way that makes it relevant, of value, focused on personal development, and is something to be achieved instead of required.
4. That to enable the delivery of this education DFSNZ work with School Sport New Zealand (New Zealand Secondary Schools Sports Council) to have rules put in place that make it a condition of entry to School Sport New Zealand events that schools and their students in those sports have undertaken or completed this education.
5. That more specific anti-doping education should be provided to athletes in elite age group sport.
6. That the testing in the 1st XV Top 4 tournament should be stopped.
7. That any testing that is required should take place in elite age group sport outside of school sport.
8. That the aim should be that a student receives the school education, then the specific sport based anti-doping education as their first experiences of anti-doping, and that testing follows this.
9. That school sport tournaments and elite age group sport tournaments for rugby and other sports provide a good opportunity for DFSNZ to engage with athletes and provide awareness and education. DFSNZ's work in this area should continue and be enhanced where possible.

8. CONCLUSION

The current approach has worked in so far as the objective of it was to support and protect school age rugby players that participate in the Top 4 1st XV Tournament. Although a number of concerns were raised about the current approach during the review, and although the review recommends changing the approach going forward this does not take away from the fact that school rugby players have been receiving anti-doping education, there have been no positives tests during the three years the programme has run, and it has been stated that school rugby players are leaving school with a better knowledge of anti-doping than their peers in other sporting codes. It would be interesting to be able to compare the 2014 Otago University survey to a survey done now asking the same questions from the same age/group of students to see if attitudes and concerns have changed.

8. LITERATURE REVIEW

https://drugfreesport.org.nz/uploads/site/assets/High_School_Rugby_Pilot_Report_Feb_2015.pdf

https://www.otago.ac.nz/sopeses/research/research_nzcspp.html

<https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/otago-uni-research-finds-steroids-supplements>

https://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news/article.cfm?c_id=4&objectid=11896322

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/265809/supplement-use-has-'dangers'>

<https://www.odt.co.nz/sport/rugby/school-rugby/schoolboy-drug-testing-incredibly-disappointing>

<https://sportnz.org.nz/assets/Sport-Integrity-Review/Sport-Integrity-Review-Discussion-Document-30-October-2018.pdf>

<https://www.nzrugby.co.nz/assets/NZR-Secondary-School-Report-Executive-Summary.pdf>