

Audit Report No. 12 2008-2009

Active After-school Communities Program

Background

- 5.1 The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) is a statutory agency operating under the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997*, and the *Australian Sports Commission Act 1989*. It is governed by a commission that is appointed by, and reports to, the Minister for Youth and Sport, and its Chief Executive Officer is responsible for its day-to-day operations.
- 5.2 The ASC is responsible for implementing the Government's sports policy. It manages the Australian Institute of Sport, and is the principle funding body for national sporting organisations. It has also provided sports participation opportunities for school children through programs such as Aussie Sport and the Active Australia Schools Network, delivered through the States and Territories.

Building a Healthy, Active Australia

- 5.3 In November 2002 Australian Health Ministers agreed that the increase in obesity was a significant public health problem, and established the National Obesity Taskforce in 2003. The Taskforce developed the *National Action Agenda – Healthy Weight 2008* to address the rising level of obesity levels and the declining level of physical activity.

- 5.4 In June 2004, the then Prime Minister announced the *Building a Healthy, Active Australia* package to address the issues of obesity and declining physical activity. A major component of the package was the Active After-school Communities (AASC) Program.
- 5.5 The ASC was given \$90 million in funding over three years to establish an after-school physical activity program in over 3,000 primary schools and Out of School Hours Care Services (OSHCS) for an estimated 150,000 children. The program was extended to 2010 in April 2007 and was provided \$124.4 million in additional funding. Implementing the program increased the number of ASC staff by 180, from 458 in June 2004 to 655 in June 2005 – an increase of over 30 per cent.

Active After-school Communities program

- 5.6 The AASC delivers physical activity sessions for primary school aged children at sites after school between 3.00pm and 5.30pm. The sessions are conducted in over 3,000 locations in metropolitan, rural, regional and remote communities in Australia. The activities are designed to increase children's participation in structured physical activity, to develop motor skills, and to promote a life long love of physical activity.
- 5.7 The initial objectives of the program were to improve the health and physical activity levels of children, and to build community capacity. In January 2005, the objectives were revised to give a greater emphasis to physical activity.
- 5.8 The current program objectives are:
- enhance the physical activity of Australian primary school aged children through a nationally coordinated program:
 - ⇒ increase participation levels of inactive children within structured physical activity;
 - ⇒ attitude of inactive children to structured physical activity improved;
 - ⇒ increase in fundamental motor skill development of inactive children;
 - provide increased opportunities for inclusive participation in quality, safe and fun structured physical activities; and
 - grow community capacity and stimulate local community involvement in sport and structured physical activity.

Delivering the program

- 5.9 The program is coordinated nationally and managed in States and Territories through a network of State and Regional Managers and Regional Coordinators.
- 5.10 It is only run at ASC approved sites, and all sites must provide appropriate facilities, nominate a co-ordinator, contract and pay ASC registered deliverers, supervise participating children, and develop strategies for targeting inactive children. The day to day administration of the sessions are then the responsibility of the site.
- 5.11 Sites that have been accepted are eligible to apply for grant funding. This funding does not cover the administrative costs associated with running the sessions, but is to be used for specific program expenses, such as deliverers' fees, cost of supervision, venue hire, transportation costs, and equipment.
- 5.12 The funding agreement requires the sites to engage ASC registered deliverers to run the sessions. All deliverers are required to complete the Community Coach Training Program (CCTP) and receive a satisfactory national criminal history check before becoming fully registered with the ASC.

The audit

Audit Objectives

- 5.13 The audit objective was to assess the effectiveness of the implementation and administration of the AASC program by the ASC. The extent to which the ASC is able to determine that the program is achieving its objectives was also examined. Particular emphasis was given to the following areas:
- the implementation and the ongoing management of the program; and
 - the selection of sites and administration of grants funded under the program.
- 5.14 The elements of the *Building a Healthy, Active Australia* package undertaken by other agencies were not included in the scope of the audit.

Audit Conclusions

- 5.15 The audit report made the following conclusion:

The AASC program was established in 2004 as a national initiative to help address the declining physical activity levels of children and the increase in childhood obesity. In 2007–08, approximately 150,000 children and 3,250 sites Australia-wide participated in the physical activity program that is underpinned by the ASC's 'Playing for Life' philosophy.

The ASC successfully implemented this program within a very short timeframe. National and State managers and a network of Regional Coordinators administer the program and oversight the delivery of the activity sessions and the sites. The ASC established a management framework for the program and a quality based approach to training and registering deliverers. Systems and processes for selecting sites and administering the grants provided to sites were also developed. Although this management framework is reasonably effective, improvements could be made to strengthen the governance arrangements supporting the program and a number of administrative processes could be streamlined. Quality control processes would also be strengthened through better monitoring of the program's quality standards.

A sub-committee of the ASC Board was established to advise and oversee the program. However, its role and responsibilities were not clearly defined. The Board sub-committee last met in March 2008 and was dissolved in June 2008. The governance mechanisms supporting the program were oral briefings to the Board by the Chair of the sub-committee and fortnightly meetings between the CEO, program Director and General Manager. Key decisions and some approvals were not always sought or appropriately documented, particularly for the evaluation project. At the time of the audit, there were no management reports provided to the CEO (or the Board). Oversight of the program would be improved if the program area was to report regularly on the performance of the program.

In designing the program, the ASC established two key quality controls – deliverers of the structured physical activity sessions must: complete the Community Coach Training Program (CCTP); and have satisfactory criminal history checks. To monitor program delivery at sites, the ASC developed a national quality

management model, with the quality assurance role being undertaken by the Regional Coordinators. However, a number of exemptions to these two quality controls have been granted to probationary deliverers, which risks undermining the standards and philosophy that underpin the program. In 2007, 634 probationary deliverers received an exemption from training and 298 from the criminal history check, without oversight or review by State Managers or at the national level.

Sites were selected to participate in the program either through an expression of interest process or direct recruitment by Regional Coordinators. In the earlier years of the program, assessments were not properly documented, particularly for those sites directly recruited by Regional Coordinators. The assessment process for selecting sites improved considerably in 2007. Sites received grants ranging from \$320 to \$3,518 to assist them in running the program. Given the number of grants and the relatively small amounts involved, the processes currently in place to assess and acquit the grants are overly complex and resource intensive. Improvements could be made by simplifying processes and assessing the merits of automating the grant application process.

The ASC is undertaking an evaluation project to determine the success of the program and the final report for Phase One (2004–2007) is expected to be finalised in late 2008. Phase Two will cover the period 2008 to 2010. The ANAO has highlighted a number of issues relating to the evaluation methodology and reporting the evaluation results. The ASC has advised that it will ensure that all relevant caveats and interpretation notes are included in the final report.¹

ANAO Recommendations

5.16 The ANAO made the following recommendations:

Table 1.1 ANAO Recommendations, Audit Report No. 12 2008-09

1.	To improve the management of quality standards for the Active After-school Communities program, the ANAO recommends that the Australian Sports Commission: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop and apply a minimum standard for training and criminal
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1 Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) Audit Report No. 12, 2008-09, pp. 16-18.

	<p>history checks, and</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor the use of exemptions at the State and national levels. <p><i>Australian Sports Commission response: Agreed.</i></p>
2.	<p>To determine whether the Active After-school Communities program database is meeting the program's current and future needs, the ANAO recommends that the Australian Sports Commission review the purpose and function of the database.</p> <p><i>Australian Sports Commission response: Agreed.</i></p>
3.	<p>To reduce the resources currently required to process grant applications for the Active After-school Communities program, the ANAO recommends that the Australian Sports Commission review and streamline existing processes and assess the merits of automating the grant application process.</p> <p><i>Australian Sports Commission response: Agreed.</i></p>
4.	<p>To improve the efficiency of acquitting the Active After-school Communities program's grants, the ANAO recommends that the Australian Sports Commission adopts a risk based approach that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an assessment of the control environment for the program; • a sampling methodology for selecting grants; and • a process for analysing and communicating results. <p><i>Australian Sports Commission response: Agreed.</i></p>

The Committee's review

5.17 The Committee held a public hearing on Monday 16 March 2009, with the following witnesses:

- Australian National Audit Office (ANAO); and
- Australian Sports Commission (ASC).

5.18 The Committee took evidence on the following issues:

- conducting the program;
 - ⇒ governance;
- child and community involvement;
- exemptions from criminal history checks; and
- program evaluation and finances.

Conducting the program

5.19 The Committee noted the rapid roll out and popularity of the Active After-school Communities (AASC) program, and asked the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) about the distribution of sites taking part in the program. The ASC noted that there was unmet demand for the program, but that it had worked with several remote communities to bring together

a program that could be delivered under difficult circumstances. The program was currently being administered at 3,250 sites, or approximately one third of Australian primary schools.²

5.20 The Committee asked if the program was only conducted on primary school sites, with the ASC replying that Out of School Hours Care Services (OSHCS) also conducted the program in many cases.

5.21 Further, the ASC reported that there were approximately 600 schools and OSHCS waiting to take part in the program.³ The Committee asked whether this number had increased or decreased over time, with the ASC replying that sites rotated on and off the list of sites selected to deliver the program.

Governance

5.22 The Committee noted the ANAO finding that the governance structure for the program was insufficient, and asked what changes had been made in light of the report. The ASC reported that the Active After-School Communities Subcommittee had been reconstituted to provide oversight of the program, and that the Subcommittee had been given the target to operate the program in a certain number of sites, and to reach a specific number of children within the program's operating budget.⁴

Child and community involvement

5.23 The Committee asked whether the number of children being retained in the program was being measured, with the ASC replying that it was unable to track child retention due to privacy concerns. However from a combination of research and anecdotal evidence suggests that 85 per cent of children indicated they wished to continue the program in the following term.⁵ Further, the ASC advised they encouraged children taking part in the program to move into community sport⁶, and that more than 75 per cent of deliverers from the sporting community had reported

2 Mr Espeland, Australian Sports Commission (ASC). Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 3.

3 Ms Flanagan, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 5.

4 Mr Espeland, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 3.

5 Ms Flanagan, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 3.

6 Ms Flanagan, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 4.

increased numbers of children taking part in community sport as a result of the program.⁷

- 5.24 The Committee asked about the involvement of community sports clubs in the delivery of the program, with the ASC noting that there had been an increase in the participation of sporting clubs in the program over the last three years.⁸

Exemptions from criminal history checks

- 5.25 The Committee expressed its concern at the ANAO finding that some providers had been given exemptions from criminal history checks. The ASC replied that it had since adopted a position in which there were no temporary exemptions granted, whether permitted by state legislation or not,⁹ and that there were now no people working in the program with an exemption from a criminal history check.¹⁰

Program evaluation and finances

- 5.26 The Committee inquired whether activity levels and the motor skills of children had been improved by the program. The ASC replied that according to its evaluation, more than 85 per cent of children involved in the program were previously considered inactive,¹¹ and that motor skills were not currently being measured due to a lack of resources.¹²
- 5.27 The Committee notes that the development of motor skills is a key factor in developing a longer term interest and sport and physical activity. The Committee is concerned that while the development of motor skills is a clear program objective, there is currently no mechanism in place to measure whether or not this objective is being met. Accordingly, the Committee recommends:

7 Mr Espeland, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 4.

8 Mr Espeland, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 6.

9 Mr Espeland, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 5.

10 Mr Espeland, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 6.

11 Mr Espeland, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 4.

12 Ms Flanagan, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 7.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Sports Commission determine ways in which to measure the development of motor skills of children participating in the Active After-school Communities Program, and that it seeks to have funding for the measurement of motor skills included in its next funding bid.

- 5.28 The Committee noted the complicated grant application and acquittal process, with the ASC noting they had reduced the administrative burden on both ASC staff as well as schools and OSHCS, and that an automated grants system was being examined.¹³
- 5.29 The Committee looked at monitoring and evaluation of the program, and encouraged ASC to improve the ways in which the success of the program was measured. The ASC noted that it was looking at a new evaluation plan, subject to its resources¹⁴, but that it was possible given current resourcing levels to set and report on targets more fully.¹⁵

Conclusion

- 5.30 The Committee is greatly encouraged by the ASC's rapid development of the program, and is pleased to see how much the program has matured since its inception.
- 5.31 It is glad to see the ASC has addressed the governance issues raised in the audit, and it hopes the new structure and the development of clear goals and targets will enable the ASC to further enhance the program.
- 5.32 The Committee was greatly concerned that many program deliverers had been given exemptions from undergoing a criminal history check, but concludes that the ASC has taken the recommendations from the ANAO seriously in fully addressing this issue.
- 5.33 Further, the Committee notes the focus on increasing physical activity amongst primary school aged children, and urges the ASC to continue to

13 Ms Flanagan, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 13.

14 Mr Espeland, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 12.

15 Ms Flanagan, ASC. Committee Hansard, Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Review of Auditor-General's reports Nos 3 to 17 (2008-09), Monday 16 March 2009, p. 12.

promote physical fitness and activity amongst children, rather than promoting an 'ideal' body type.

- 5.34 Finally, the Committee believes the adoption of its recommendation relating to measuring the development of the motor skills of program participants would enable the ASC to better determine whether or not the program is achieving its objectives. By measuring the performance of the program against this objective, an already successful program would be further strengthened.