

# ANNUAL REPORT 2022



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# INTRODUCTION CHAIRMAN

If the previous year had been one of 'ups and downs' and one where seismic decisions were made for the future of the sport, then 2022 can be described as a year of transition. We first put in place the changes to move our great sport to what we hope will be a sustainable and growing future, and this allowed us to see the first signs of how the sport is benefiting from realignment.

The most visible sign of the new era was the move into the new home of rugby league on the Etihad Campus. This is a modern and spacious office which houses all of the staff from both the RFL and RL Commercial, on a vibrant sporting campus. It has certainly helped with collaborative working and is a fitting home for the sport.

The recruitment of Boards, NEDs and Executive teams was a particular focus of last year.

We reformed the RFL Board. Firstly, we reduced by over 20 per cent the fees payable to Board members, ensuring appropriate value for money in the current climate. A lengthy recruitment process saw Dr Cherrie Daley added as an NED, and later, we added Ed Mallaburn from IMG and Jamie Jones-Buchanan as Observer Board members. The Board now has pleasing diversity of thought, background and experience, and this will enhance the Board's ability to scrutinise the Executive, oversee the strategy and lead the sport.

We also saw a change at Senior Executive level with the appointment of Tony Sutton as CEO, following the departure of Ralph Rimmer and Karen Moorhouse. Tony has hit the ground running and is bringing a new style to the leadership of the sport.

Ralph and Karen both made lasting contributions to the RFL and much of what we have done this last year builds on the strong foundations in terms of realignment, financial sustainability and good governance that they laid down.

Ken Davy and I, supported by IMG and Perrett Laver, appointed Frank Slevin to be the first Chair of RL Commercial. Frank started immediately, bringing a fresh commercial approach to the new joint venture. Frank then led the recruitment of the rest of the Board, bringing in Jonathan Murphy and Peter Hutton as the SLE-appointed independent directors, and Anna Chanduvi joining me as the RL-appointed directors. With Ed Mallaburn appointed on behalf of IMG, the Board of RL Commercial has access to huge talent, skill and experience and we are fortunate to have a Board with such impressive reputations to oversee the crucial work of RL Commercial in growing the revenues from all the assets in the game to the benefit of the whole sport.

Rhodri Jones was appointed as the MD of RL Commercial and he led the transfer of staff from both SLE and the RFL into the new team. I am very pleased to see how quickly RL Commercial has got to work in growing the sport's revenues.

In October, IMG presented the detail of their Reimagining Rugby League proposals, the first of a number of steps they are taking under their 12-year partnership with rugby league. Their proposals were wide ranging and a number of workstreams are underway. Much of the attention centred on their proposals for restructuring of the competitions, the calendar, the digital exploitation and centralisation of certain functions. The proposal for the introduction of grading to determine league position generated robust debate and discussion, before it was agreed by an overwhelming margin at a vote of Council.

On the field, the main highlight of the year was the successful hosting of the postponed Rugby League World Cup 2021. It lived up to its promise of being the biggest, the best and the most inclusive World Cup ever. It delivered memorable moments, great crowds, a carnival atmosphere and a lasting legacy of investment in grassroots facilities, in people, wellbeing, and volunteering. There were numerous

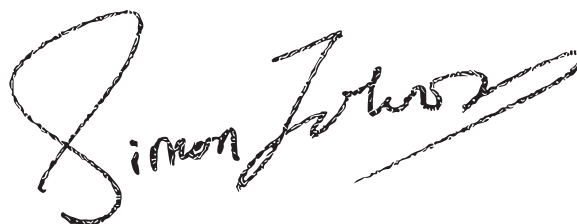
records broken for attendances at the men's, women's and wheelchair World Cups and it was pleasing to see the country get behind our three England teams.

We were immensely proud of the England wheelchair team, who became world champions in a memorable final at Manchester Central, and the England PDRL team who also became world champions in their final at Warrington. One disappointment arising in the aftermath of RLWC2021 was the cancellation of the RLWC2025 in France. This was established as a way of building on the legacy of RLWC2021 and continuing the strategic benefit of France hosting the tournaments. Rhodri and I, as directors of the IRL, will be working to ensure that the 2025 World Cup can continue to be part of a coherent hosting strategy and build on the huge success of RLWC2021.

Staying in the international arena, we were all extremely proud of St Helens for winning the World Club Challenge in a thrilling victory over Penrith Panthers. It has, we hope, dispelled some myths about the lack of quality in the Super League compared to the NRL.

Since the World Cup, there have been benefits for the whole of the sport. Attendances are up at all levels, there have been pleasing increases in levels of participation, especially in the women's and wheelchair games, and all of our metrics are up at the time of writing.

There remain many challenges ahead, but we are confident that we will be reaping the benefits for many years to come of the decisions that we all took last year and which we began to implement during the course of the current year.



**Simon Johnson**  
RFL Chairman



# INTRODUCTION CEO

2022 was a huge year for rugby league in England: amongst a myriad of other things, we hosted a World Cup for the first time since 2013; the sport was realigned in both governance and corporate terms; and some long-standing and very influential colleagues left the sport. We also completed the delayed migration of the governing body's headquarters from Yorkshire to Lancashire.

The hosting of RLWC2021 saw the delivery of 'a tournament with a purpose' including 473,606 attendees, an economic impact in the north of England of over £38m and a cumulative free-to-air match audience of 35.5m. From the hugely-impressive men's semi-finals at Elland Road and the Emirates Stadium and becoming Wheelchair Rugby League world champions on Friday night of the finals weekend at Manchester Central, to the spectacle of the men's and women's finals on a truly memorable night at Old Trafford, the tournament delivered many, many different memories for those involved.

The sport was also realigned. RL Commercial Ltd, created to more fully exploit the sport's commercial, broadcast and event rights, came to life on January 1, 2023, with all consultation, agreements and approvals having been completed throughout 2022. Realignment was not just completed in governance and corporate terms: two of our most senior colleagues, Ralph Rimmer and Karen Moorhouse, as Chief Executive Officer, and Chief Regulatory Officer and Company Secretary, left the RFL

at the end of 2022 having completed significant periods of tenure both within rugby league and latterly at the RFL. This led to me being confirmed in the role of RFL Interim Chief Executive Officer and Rhodri Jones being appointed as Managing Director of RL Commercial. The Boards of both the RFL and RL Commercial were remixed and confirmed, enabling the RFL to further reduce its governance costs and reduce its number of directors by two.

Supported by the game and strategic partners IMG, the new framework was put in place to be fully operational from January 1, 2023. This was the result of extensive discussion, negotiation and collaboration between many areas of the sport and sets rugby league on a different course for the coming years.

On the field of play, St Helens won the Super League Grand Final, setting up an appearance in the World Club Challenge in Australia against NRL champions Penrith Panthers. Leigh Centurions won the Championship Grand Final to gain promotion to Super League in 2023 in a season which also saw them defeat Featherstone Rovers in the AB Sundecks 1895 Cup final, played as a curtain-raiser to the 2022 Betfred Challenge Cup final at the magnificent Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. Wigan won the Challenge Cup for a record 20th time by beating Huddersfield 16–14 in a thrilling encounter between two great sides. Keighley Cougars won the title in League 1, gaining promotion to the Championship for 2023.

In the women's game, St Helens retained the Challenge Cup by beating Leeds at Elland Road whilst the Rhinos defeated York in the Betfred Women's Super League Grand Final. The growth in the women's game, driven by the pre-World Cup tournament legacy, was strong, and followed a competition update in which the format was changed to be played across two groups for 2022 to grow the competition in each group.

In terms of facilities, the much-vaunted Our League Life project in Beswick in East Manchester was postponed indefinitely due to massive cost inflation in the construction sector, making it unaffordable. A partnership with Manchester College Group to deliver positive social benefits for the community in East Manchester was commenced in its place. Following much delay due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the RFL and Super League finally moved into Rugby League headquarters at the Etihad Campus, Manchester. This put the sport back under one roof for the first time since before the 2013 World Cup.

It is also only right to thank the President and Vice President for their input over their extended tenure period. Clare Balding, who was appointed a CBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours, and Mike Smith, presided visibly and magnificently during their respective terms and on behalf of the game, and of Ralph personally, I thank them for that.

The result of the sport's strategic partner IMG's first phase of work led to the revealing of seven strategic recommendations for rugby league. This direction was fully supported by the sport and appropriate diligence was taken to ensure this was so. During the second half of 2022 these recommendations were taken forward, particularly the work on Club Grading Criteria to bring worked up and detailed positions for the sport to vote on in early 2023.

The draft Consolidated Financial Statements for 2022 show a loss of £987k. This group position includes the financial result of both RLWC2021 and the RFL. The RFL's financial position was heavily affected by the increased pricing of its insurance renewal, particularly the liability policy put in place to provide cover for clubs. This pricing was in turn heavily impacted by the underwriter's uncertainty about the long-term impacts on participants of playing contact sports and the legal position developing in this area.

Care and protection of those who play our sport has long been central to decisions taken and made by the RFL on the sport's behalf. This will not change as data and information about the effects of participation in all contact sports, including our own, continues to grow and be more fully understood. This issue will be a very important and core issue as rugby league moves forward, and based on well researched and clearly interpreted data, we will bring forward changes to the game to ensure the safety and welfare of participants.



**Tony Sutton**  
RFL Chief Executive Officer

# 2022 IN NUMBERS

**92,386** - active participants

**41,609** - core community participants

**5,354** - women and girl participants in the core community

**33.9m** - terrestrial views on the BBC and Channel 4 (including RLWC2021)

**7.5m** - terrestrial views on the BBC and Channel 4 (excluding RLWC2021)

**2.9m** - terrestrial views on Channel 4

**11m** - subscription views on Sky Sports and Premier Sports

**0.9m** - subscription views on Premier Sports

**1,158,210** - average match audience for men's Betfred Challenge Cup final (peak 1.5m, audience share 15.6 per cent)

**12.7m** - cumulative audience for the Betfred Super League in 2022 (Channel 4 and Sky Sports)

**163,103** - Betfred Super League average match audience (Channel 4 and Sky Sports). This was the highest ever

**671,450** - cumulative views on Premier Sports for the Championship

**9.8m**  
subscription views on  
**sky sports**

# 2022 IN NUMBERS

93  
million

**149k** - views on Our League

**250k** - views on The Sportsman

**1.3m** - views within one day on BBC Red Button and iPlayer (Challenge Cup and RLWC2021)

**1 million** - engagements and 15 million videos

**2.5 million** - attendance at professional Rugby League games (Including RLWC 2021)

**2** - percentage increase in attendance at Magic Weekend vs 2021

**9.3** - percentage increase on average Betfred League 1 attendance since 2019

**24** - percentage decrease on average Betfred Championship attendance since 2019

**12** - percentage increase in contactable customers, over 44,000 more than in 2021

**5,888** - attendance at Women's Challenge Cup final, the highest on record

**45** - percentage increase in view for the Promotion Final on the Sportsman (10,178 v 6,998)

**473,606** - RLWC2021 attendance, the highest attendance for a Rugby League World Cup

**32** - RLWC2021 teams from 20 nations, the most participants for a World Cup

**1.3m** - unique match audience across Women's Rugby League World Cup 2021

**45m** - cumulative match audience across RLWC2021

impressions across  
RFL social media channels



# REVIEW

OF 2022



A year that began with a fiery Betfred Super League opener between St Helens and Catalans Dragons in early February ended nine months later in Manchester with the climax of RLWC2021, as England's dramatic Friday night victory over France in the wheelchair competition was followed by more comfortable wins for Australia's Jillaroos and Kangaroos, over New Zealand and Samoa, respectively.

That provides some idea of the wide variety of rugby league spread across 2022, taking in major stadiums such as Elland Road for a record-breaking Betfred Women's Challenge Cup final, and the superb Tottenham Hotspur Stadium for Wigan's victory over Huddersfield Giants – while the three major domestic women's honours were spread around three different clubs.

In addition to Matt Peet's Warriors, the big winners in the men's game were St Helens, who secured a record-breaking fourth consecutive Super League title by beating Leeds Rhinos 24-12 in the Grand Final. It was the fifth time Saints had met the Rhinos in the title decider – and the first time Saints had won, providing extra satisfaction for all at the club, including Kristian Woolf, the coach who had already confirmed a return to Australia with the Dolphins for their first season in the NRL.

Jonny Lomax won the Harry Sunderland Trophy for a typically-influential performance, underlining what a loss he would be when he withdrew from England's World Cup squad because of injury. The win secured a tenth title for Saints and took them two ahead of Leeds as the most successful team of the Super League era.

Leeds had seemed unlikely Grand Finalists for much of the season but the appointment of Rohan Smith as head coach, following in the footsteps of his uncle, Tony who had won two Super League titles with the Rhinos, led to a stirring run of form in late summer and into autumn. After squeezing into the top six at the expense of Castleford Tigers, they claimed notable away wins at Catalans Dragons and Wigan to earn their Old Trafford place.

Saints had finished top of the table for the third time in five years – although the first time since 2019 – but were given a real fright by Salford Red Devils in a controversial semi-final before securing their Old Trafford place with a 19-12 win. Salford's performance was all the more impressive considering the absence of Brodie Croft, the Australian half-back whose consistent brilliance earned him the Steve Prescott MBE



Man of Steel award. Croft was ruled out under concussion protocols after being injured in Salford's play-off win at Huddersfield the previous weekend.

At the other end of the table, Toulouse Olympique had their moments in their first Super League season, but five wins was not enough to prevent them from being cut adrift.

Arguably the greatest surprise of the season was the fact that the team immediately above Toulouse were Warrington Wolves, as the optimism following the appointment of Daryl Powell as coach quickly gave way to realism that his rebuilding job would not yield instant results.

Leigh Centurions stormed to the Betfred Championship title to ensure they would take Toulouse's place in Super League. However there would be no Centurions in the top division in 2023 as shortly after their Grand Final win over a Batley Bulldogs team that had achieved far more than generally expected under Craig Lingard's canny coaching, Leigh were rebranded as the Leopards.

The Cougars of Keighley were equally dominant in earning promotion to the Championship as Betfred League 1 champions, while Swinton Lions beat Doncaster in the Play-Off Final to secure the second promotion place – with Dewsbury Rams and Workington Town slipping in the reverse direction.

Of the two new names in League 1, Midlands Hurricanes finished eighth with six wins out of 20 in their first season after rebranding, while a single win at West Wales Raiders was enough for Cornwall RLFC to avoid the wooden spoon – with West Wales confirming their withdrawal from the competition in December.

Highlights of the early rounds of the Betfred Challenge Cup included the Royal Navy reaching the fourth round for the first time in their history, and a tight second round win against the British Army in Aldershot.

Leigh and Featherstone Rovers both underlined the quality in the Championship with highly creditable defeats at Hull KR and Catalans Dragons, respectively, in the sixth round. They were also to meet in the final of the AB Sundecks 1895 Cup, the knockout competition for non-Super League teams. The game was played at Tottenham before the Wigan-Huddersfield Challenge Cup final and Leigh became the third winners, following on from Sheffield Eagles in 2019 and Featherstone in 2021.

Papua New Guinea hooker Edwin Ipape won the Ray French Award as Player of the Match.

The 121st Challenge Cup final broke new ground at Tottenham, and the teams produced a compelling spectacle in front of a crowd of 51,628. Huddersfield were on course for a seventh Cup triumph and a first since 1953 when they led 14-12 courtesy of a 58th-minute try by Jermaine McGillvary, but Wigan broke their hearts when Harry Smith laid on a try for Liam Marshall with less than four minutes remaining.

That result meant Wigan extended their record number of Cup wins to 20, ending an unusually long wait of nine years since their last triumph, while Huddersfield's Australian forward Chris McQueen had the consolation of winning the Lance Todd Trophy.

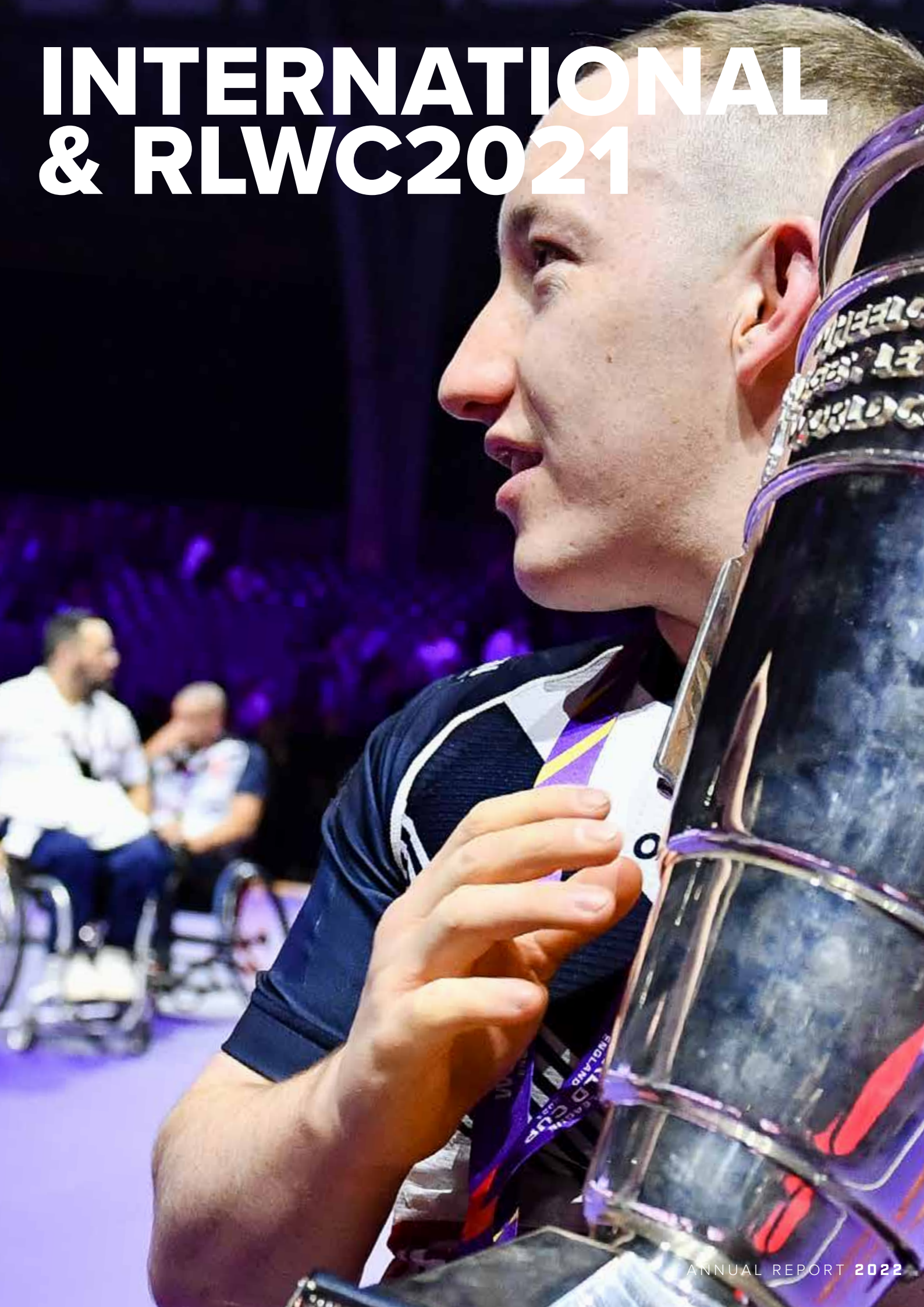
St Helens had won the Betfred Women's Challenge Cup final at Elland Road three weeks earlier, with the crowd of 5,888 for the first match of a triple-header also including the men's semi-finals setting a new record for a women's match in the UK. Zoe Hornby scored a storming try to give Leeds the early lead, and was named player of the match, but Saints surged back to win 18-8, Jodie Cunningham scoring a fine individual try before lifting the trophy for the second consecutive year.

However, Saints were unable to repeat the dominance that earned them a double in 2022, with York confirming their arrival as a major force by winning the League Leaders' Shield, and Leeds gaining revenge for their Cup final defeat by beating St Helens in the BWSL semi-final – then defeating York 12-6 in St Helens to claim their second BWSL title in three years thanks to two tries by Caitlin Beevers.

The Rhinos also retained the Betfred Wheelchair Challenge Cup, beating Catalans Dragons 48-34 in a thrilling final in Hull to deny the French club a fairytale finish to their first appearance in the competition.

Leeds were denied a second consecutive League and Cup double by Halifax Panthers, with Rob Hawkins scoring five tries in a 52-48 victory in Manchester. Hawkins and his England team-mates were on the cusp of the most memorable few weeks of their sporting lives.

# INTERNATIONAL & RLWC2021



**All three England teams prepared for RLWC2021 with mid-season internationals.**

England men claimed a satisfying 18-4 win against a Combined Nations All Stars team coached by Ellery Hanley, reversing the result of the fixture when it was played in 2021 at the same Warrington venue.

England women played two Tests in the space of a week, beating Wales 32-6 at Pandy Park and France 36-10 at The Halliwell Jones Stadium in the first part of a double-header.

England wheelchair beat France 62-48 in Manchester, an entertaining match which nevertheless had the feel of a slightly phony war as the French were missing a number of key players who would surely return for the World Cup.

The men were the only team to play an official warm-up, and it set the tone for a sparkling month as nine different players scored tries in a 50-0 demolition of Fiji at the Salford Stadium.

Nobody expected England to beat that victory margin in the World Cup opener against a high-pedigree Samoa team at Newcastle's St James' Park, so there was a combination of delight and disbelief after Elliott Whitehead and the outstanding Dom Young each scored two tries in a 60-6 demolition, in front of a 43,000 crowd.

That set the pattern for further comfortable wins on consecutive Saturday afternoons against France in Bolton, the World Cup newcomers Greece in Sheffield, and Papua New Guinea in the quarter-final in Wigan – an occasion which also included England women's second group match against Canada, and was attended by the RFL's Patron, HRH the Princess of Wales.

England women beat the plucky Canadians 54-4 after winning their opener against Brazil 72-4 in front of a crowd of 8,621 on a Tuesday afternoon at Headingley, beating the record for a women's game in the UK set earlier in the year at Elland Road.

They completed their group campaign with a 42-4 win against Papua New Guinea back at Headingley, the St Helens winger Leah Burke scoring a spectacular hat-trick of tries each created by precise kicks by Leeds half-back Courtney Winfield-Hill.

With England's wheelchair team also surging to their semi-final with group wins against Australia, Spain and Ireland at the Copper Box in London's Olympic Park, the three England

teams had a perfect 10 from 10 record going into the penultimate weekend of the tournament.

But the men then suffered a cruel and agonising semi-final defeat by Samoa at the Emirates, and although the wheelchair team secured their final place the following day by beating Wales in Sheffield, the women went down 20-6 to New Zealand in their semi-final in front of another landmark crowd of more than 7,000 at York's LNER Community Stadium.

That left Tom Coyd's wheelchair team, who had already captured the imagination of a huge new audience through the BBC's coverage of their first four fixtures, flying the home flag on finals weekend in Manchester. What followed will be remembered by all who were in attendance that Friday night at a packed Manchester Central, as Tom Halliwell's late try secured a 28-24 victory – and England regained the World Cup for the first time since 2008.



# SOCIAL IMPACT OF RLWC2021



The significant social impact delivered off the pitch by RLWC2021 was recognised by UK Sport as setting the standard for future sporting events.

The report, commissioned by RLWC2021 and delivered by The Sports Consultancy and Substance, found that RLWC2021 and its social impact programmes “demonstrated meaningful impacts for those that watched, engaged, attended and took part.” Because of the geographic footprint, and impact of the tournament’s social impact programmes, 96 per cent of the public believe that hosting RLWC2021 benefited the North of England.

Led by £30m of investment, the tournament achieved its ambition of making a positive difference in communities, in grassroots rugby league clubs, and in the lives of people living across the country, especially in the most deprived areas of England.

RLWC2021’s social impact programme focused on six key strands:

- Creating strong communities through new community hubs, new social connections, increased civic pride and increased volunteering;
- Growing the game through increased participation and interest in rugby league;
- Stimulating physical activity and health;
- Improving mental wellbeing and increased awareness of mental fitness;
- Developing people through new skills and knowledge;
- Boosting the economy, particularly in more deprived areas and creating more financially sustainable community clubs and more commercial interest in rugby league.

In particular, the report highlighted the positive impact that RLWC2021 had on community cohesion and how social impact programmes “brought communities together, broke down barriers, changed perceptions and gave people something to be proud of.”

As a trailblazing, purpose-driven tournament that put making a positive impact on people at its heart, RLWC2021 was truly pioneering in its approach to social impact. By focusing on delivering social impact prior to and during the event, rather than as a post-event legacy, 300 mental fitness workshops were delivered by Rugby League Cares to 11,922 young people, volunteers were already working with community rugby league clubs before the tournament got underway, with the majority of facility improvement projects completed before the first kick of a ball – with the platform of the tournament itself

then also used to maximise engagement with communities and deliver tangible social impact.

#### **Highlights of the social impact programme include:**

- £26.4m of investment into communities across the country through the CreatedBy Grants Programme, delivered in partnership with the RFL, DCMS, Sport England and The National Lottery, including 31 large-scale grants and 248 small-scale grants. Of these, 52 per cent of the capital grants were awarded to the top 30 per cent most deprived areas, with 60 per cent of total investment directed towards the top 30 per cent most deprived communities;
- Three volunteer programmes engaged more than 1,300 people in volunteering opportunities, including an accessible volunteer programme for volunteers with mental, physical and learning disabilities through a partnership with Community Integrated Care. This programme supported volunteers with mental, physical and learning disabilities and gave people valuable opportunities to learn new skills, with 95 per cent of inclusive volunteers saying that their experience has made them want to seek out paid work or other volunteering opportunities;
- A multi-disciplinary Cultural Festival attended by over 370,000 people in total, delivered in conjunction with Arts Council England, city partners and delivered by Pinwheel including touring public art, poetry and a programme of engagement projects rolled out across 33 Library Services;
- 56 per cent of the general public, including TV viewers, felt inspired to do more physical activity as a result of RLWC2021. As the most inclusive rugby league tournament ever, the social impact programme improved accessibility to physical activity, with more than 80 per cent of clubs in receipt of large grant recipients saying that the new and improved facilities will improve access for disabled people and women and girls;
- Staging men’s, women’s and wheelchair tournaments concurrently put women and people with mental and physical disability centre stage, with 85 per cent of spectators feeling that RLWC2021 contributed to social inclusion by staging the three tournaments simultaneously;
- Innovative programmes to create and support more inclusive and healthy environments, including becoming the first major sporting tournament to launch a mental fitness charter and a mental fitness programme. In partnership with Movember and Rugby League Cares, 11,922 workshops

were delivered to young people, parents, players and volunteers to support the development of mental fitness awareness;

- Collaboration with local and international organisations including Movember, Community Integrated Care, Assura and UNICEF UK, enabling RLWC2021 to reach a far wider and more diverse audience than otherwise would have been possible.

Dame Katherine Grainger, Chair of UK Sport, said: “Rugby League World Cup 2021 is a shining example of the power that hosting major sporting events in this country has to change people’s lives for the better. It was a privilege for us to be part of this event and to work with this fantastic team.

“The pioneering approach to social impact – embedding social impact into the tournament’s DNA and focusing on impact before and during the tournament, not just afterwards - is something that we hope to see across other sporting events as we create the greatest decade of extraordinary sporting moments.

“As we build on the legacy of Rugby League World Cup 2021, we will continue to support and celebrate the role of sport to power positive change on and off the field of play.”





# ENGLAND &EPU



From the start of 2022, the excitement of the forthcoming RLWC2021 quickly gained momentum for all the staff and players.

To field three England teams simultaneously on home soil was regarded as a privilege and provided 92 players, coaches and support staff with an excellent experience of a home World Cup.

With the support of the England Performance Unit (and the wider sport), the three teams had valuable training and playing opportunities together punctuated throughout the 2022 season.

The three teams all enjoyed mid-season internationals. England men scored a well-earned victory over the Ellery Hanley-coached All Stars whilst England wheelchair avenged their 2021 defeat by France. England women played two mid-season matches against Wales and France and ran out winners in both. Yet again, there was live TV broadcast or streaming for all these matches, which helped raise the profile of the England teams leading into RLWC2021.

## **RLWC2021**

### **England men**

The tournament could not have got off to a better start with a sensational performance on opening day in Newcastle at St James' Park against Samoa. Whilst England were confident of the win, no one envisaged the 60-6 scoreline.

This was followed by straight-forward group match wins against France and Greece and a quarter-final victory over Papua New Guinea. England headed confidently into the semi-final at Emirates Stadium versus Samoa but were to be denied by a golden point drop-goal from opponents who had made huge strides since their group stage defeat.

What did the men's team learn from learn from RLWC2021? A key strategic driver for the EPU was to put the three England teams in the best possible position to win their respective tournaments.

Where the men's team were concerned, they fell short of expectations of reaching the final. However, we did see the emergence of players such as Dominic Young, Herbie Farnworth and Victor Radley. Matthew Lees, Mikolaj Olędzki and Kai Pearce-Paul have all graduated from the England Knights programme, illustrating that there is a pipeline of talent that will service England teams in the future. George Williams, Tom Burgess and Victor Radley were all named in the Team of the Tournament.

Since Shaun Wane was appointed coach, there was one official Test match in that time and very limited opportunity for the coaches to work regularly with the current cohort of players. This is far from optimal when preparing for the demands of a six-week World Cup tournament.

The ability to play regular Test matches against other Top Five Nations will have huge performance and commercial benefits for the sport. Also, the squad was hit by injury withdrawals to seven players who would arguably have been included in the final 24.

Whilst England lost in the semi-final, given the injuries sustained pre-tournament, the limited recent experience of international rugby and the minimal advance preparation, the coaching staff got a good performance out of what was available.

### **England women**

Throughout 2022, England women were afforded a high level of contact time with the programme. This included both training sessions and playing opportunities.

England opened the tournament against Brazil in front of a record crowd at Headingley and this was followed by playing Canada at Wigan. This was a momentous occasion for the squad when they got to have a private meeting with RFL Patron, HRH the Princess of Wales.

The women topped their group with victory over Papua New Guinea which took them to a semi-final against New Zealand at York.

Unfortunately, that is where the England's World Cup journey ended when a physically dominant New Zealand team came out on top.

On reflection, the women should be proud of their World Cup campaign. Not only did they show an unwavering commitment to the programme, their attitude, application and general demeanour was impeccable. They had a hugely positive influence on all those around them: this was also evident in the TV documentary 'Women of Steel,' which told the story of their journey into the tournament.

This crop of players and staff have been trailblazers for the women's game, helping attract new fans, media and broadcast interest. RLWC provided the springboard to do this.

To improve further as we move into the next cycle, the ability to play more regular matches against Australia and New Zealand is a necessity. Longer term, the standard of the domestic competition will improve due to the emergence

of a talent pathway at younger age groups, thus producing more competitive teams.

Vicky Molyneux, Vicky Whitfield, Tara Stanley and Courtney Winfield-Hill were all named in the Team of the Tournament.

This is an opportune moment to thank Craig Richards for his service as England women's head coach from 2018-2022. During his tenure, Craig led the team in 11 internationals, including the ground-breaking tour of Papua New Guinea in 2019 and the World Cup of Nines in the same year. Craig instilled a more professional approach to the programme, with players rising to the challenge and thriving in the environment.

### **England wheelchair**

The wheelchair team also benefited from a large amount of contact time in the build-up to the tournament. Regular training days and a highly competitive (and psychologically important) win against France in the mid-season international provided ideal preparation for the RLWC2021. Commitment of players and staff was a strong feature of this programme before, during and after the competition.

Being crowned world champions was richly deserved for this team. Throughout the tournament, they captured the imagination of the nation (helped by live TV exposure) and provided world-class sporting entertainment. Being world champions also allowed the team to promote rugby league and shine the spotlight on their win in many other ways; by appearing on The Last leg (Channel 4), closing the London Stock Exchange, attending a Speakers House event for disability awareness month, UK Coaching awards 2022, SPOTY, 2022, Royal Carol Service at Westminster Abbey and the Patron's reception at Hampton Court.

Of note, Joe Coyd, Jack Brown and Seb Bechara were all named in the Team of the Tournament with Bechara being named Golden Boot winner as the world's best player.

To make the wheelchair programme even better, more regular competition against France is a priority to maintain that high level of play between the world's two top-ranked nations.

At the end of the tournament, James Simpson retired from playing and has subsequently taken up a coaching role at Leeds Rhinos. James's contribution to Wheelchair RL and rugby league in general should not be underestimated. His courage in the face of adversity has been an inspiration to us all and exemplifies what is so good about the

game. He was a fantastic world cup ambassador and worked selflessly to raise the profile of the tournament whilst also concentrating on being an England player.

### **TALENT PATHWAYS**

Behind the senior performance programmes there is a thriving talent pathway. With support from Sport England, we can provide access to the talent pathway for a wide range of young people to make progress to the higher echelons of England programmes regardless of their circumstance or background.

**England Knights men** – For players considered two to four years away from being a senior international, the Knights enjoyed an extended camp which gave players the look and feel of the senior England environment. They played two matches against Scotland and France B, winning both.

**Under-18s men Academy** – There were no international playing opportunities in 2022. However, over 50 players and 14 staff members were able to access the three-match Lancashire versus Yorkshire series.

**England Knights women** – A first in 2022, the Women's Knights programme provided opportunity in the same vein as the Men's Knights. Having the Knights shows the connectivity between age-banded rugby league and the Senior England Team. The Knights were narrowly beaten by the Cook Islands in their one fixture.

**Girls Diploma in Sporting Excellence (DISE)** – Now an established part of the female pathway, this programme caters for 30 girls per cohort age 17 and 18. Since the inception of the programme in 2019, 35 players have gone on to Women's Super League and in 2022, Kiera Bennett was the first DISE graduate to earn a full England cap.

### **Girls Regional Talent Hubs**

– A total of 144 15- and 16-year-old girls participated in the four-week programme across the country, ending in a playing festival hosted by Wakefield Trinity. Of the under-16s, 28 players were selected to the DISE programme and 26 are in the under-19s programmes of Women's Super League clubs.

### **SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

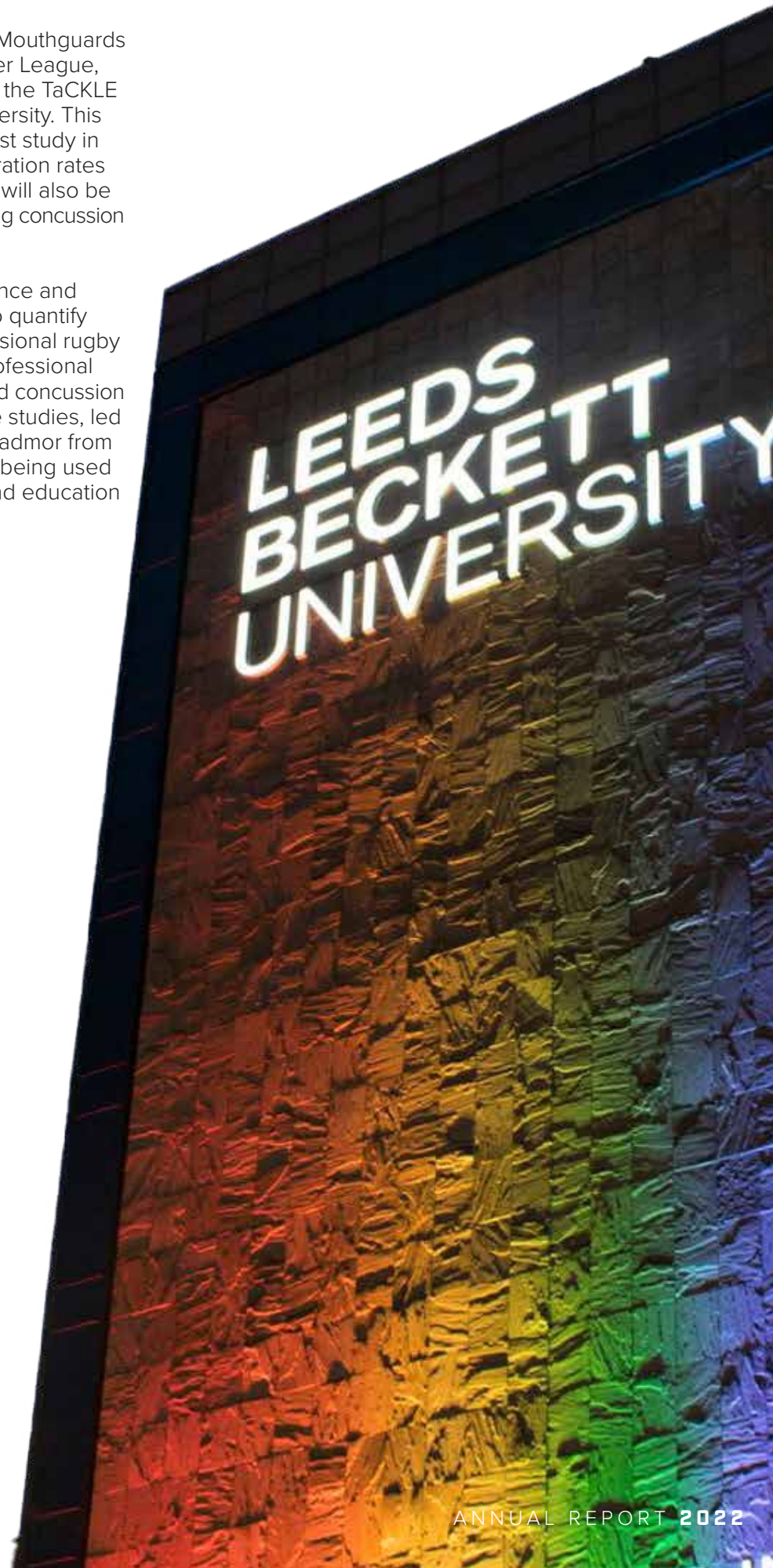
During 2022, the EPU Performance, Science, and Medical staff undertook numerous studies relating to concussion and sub-concussion in rugby league.

Concussion and sub-concussion are a priority for all sports. The teams at the RFL and Leeds Beckett University, in collaboration with the University of Bath, undertook the largest study to date, quantifying concussion rates in rugby

league. This study is now the benchmark for future studies when reducing concussion in sport.

The team rolled out Instrumented Mouthguards across the men and women's Super League, and the Academy teams as part of the TaCKLE project, led by Leeds Beckett University. This three-year project will be the largest study in the world quantifying head acceleration rates in rugby. The findings of this study will also be used to inform future studies, reducing concussion and head acceleration in sport.

Finally, the EPU Performance, Science and Medical staff, undertook surveys to quantify the contact requirements in professional rugby league, and surveys across the professional and community game to understand concussion reporting rates and barriers. These studies, led by Prof Ben Jones and Dr Daniel Tadmor from Leeds Beckett University, are now being used to inform contact load guidance and education content across rugby league.



# COMMUNITY

## RUGBY LEAGUE



The sport did not bounce back as strongly as the 2022 mid-year participant reporting figures suggested it would, particularly at male open age.

There was however, continued accelerated growth in the number of women and girls playing rugby league in 2022. Once again, growth was driven by the continued expansion and broadcast of women's Super League and increased regional activity underpinned by the expansion of the girls' Futures Hubs and the piloting of new girls' 7-11 programme. Our inclusive rugby league playing offers of learning disability, physical disability and wheelchair RL also continued to see significant growth.

We continue to monitor and adapt our playing offers to ensure they are fit for purpose post-pandemic. This includes analysis of data and introduction of new programmes designed to address retention and transition challenges, particularly between male youth and open age. We continued to make progress in establishing Player Development League ethos and principles within existing junior leagues via the Lions Development Programme. Culture change and improvements in touchline environments remain a priority.

There was on-field success for the England Community Lions with the Under-19's success at the European Championships and PDRL team winning the inaugural PDRL World Cup.

Maintaining strong relationships with professional club foundations remains fundamental to our ability to deliver growth across all settings.

There was also a cautious return to activity following the pandemic across education settings. Over 4,500 participants took part in localised Nines activity targeting schools new to rugby league, including a new tournament for girls' Years 7 and 8.

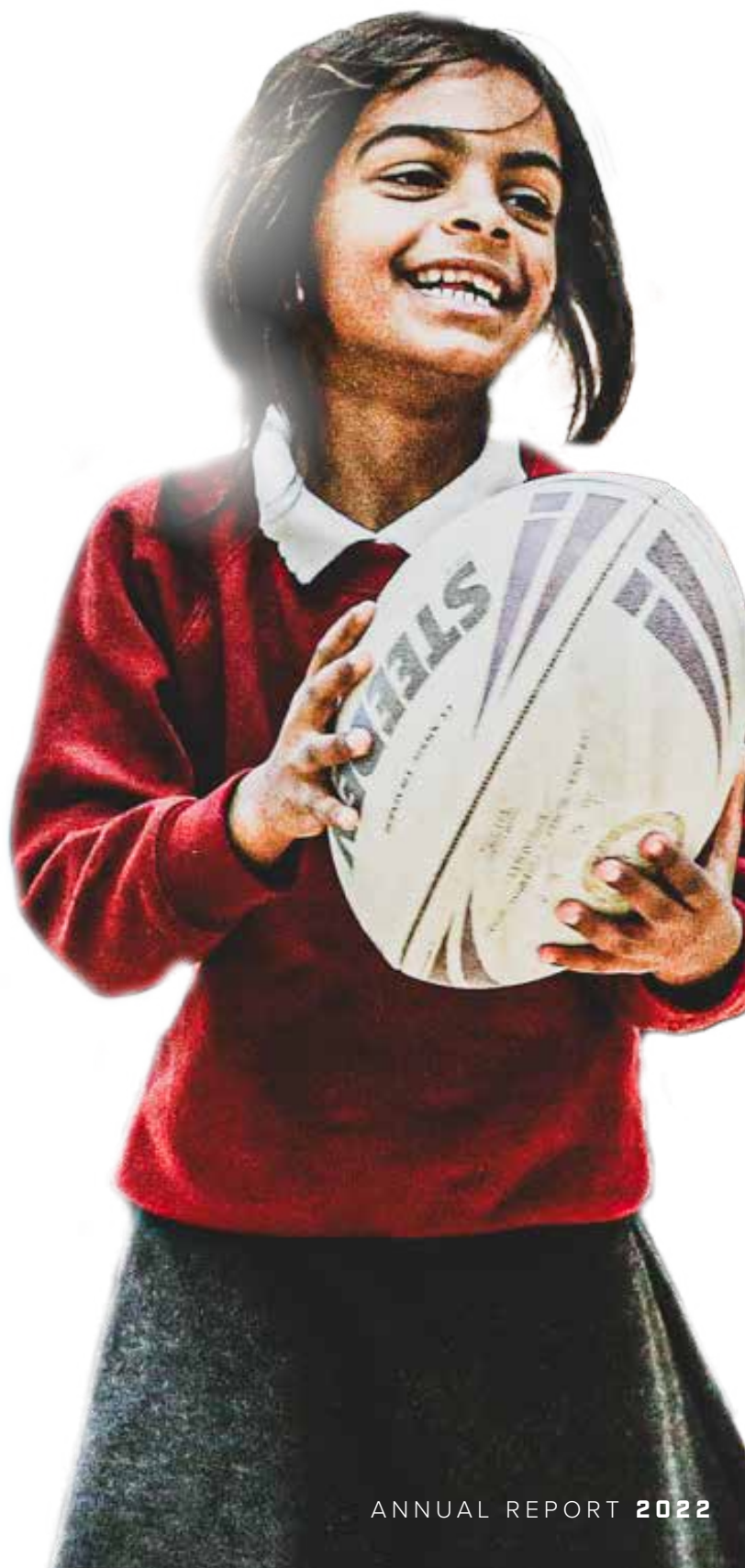
We continue to recognise the importance of a partnership approach and strong ongoing partnerships continue with Community Integrated Care, Street Games, Access Sport and Try Tag Rugby. Our positive relationship with Try Tag Rugby continued to encourage more participants to try social versions of the sport.

As part of the wider social impact work designed to build stronger communities, we piloted five community wellbeing hubs as part of a project to recognise the role rugby league clubs play at the heart of their communities. We also secured and administered five significant

grant-funding schemes, delivering substantial investment into the community game.

Work also continued to support community clubs achieve good governance. In terms of making the community game more sustainable we successfully launched our new participant membership scheme 'Our League Active.'

Development of the new RFL Facilities Strategy is underway and will be finalised in the latter part of 2023.



# MATCH OFFICIALS



### **Recruitment and retention**

There were 366 newly-qualified match officials in 2022. The department delivered these courses through both in-person and online courses. There was an increase in course attendance in developing areas such as the Midlands, South-West and London.

Throughout the year, there were over 500 active match officials. These officials service the whole of the sport with regular support and guidance from the respective Referee Societies.

In September 2022, the British Rugby League Referees Club was launched. The purpose of this is to bring together match officials from all forms and levels of the sport.

### **Women and Girls Development Programme**

The Women and Girls Development Programme was launched in September at an event that also took in the Women's Super League Grand Final at St Helens, with an initial membership of 65 female match officials. The purpose of this programme is to raise the profile of match officiating for women and girls and to create a female officiating pathway.

### **Head cameras**

The National Conference League kindly trialled head cameras worn by match officials in their leagues. The aim of the trial was to see if the presence of cameras would improve player and touchline behaviour. The findings of the trials showed that the incidence of abuse towards match officials reduced (in NCL) and match officials reported that they felt it made a positive difference to the atmosphere of a match day and player and coach behaviour. Furthermore, the NCL had the ability to review the head camera footage for disciplinary purposes.

As a result of the successful trial, 200 head cameras have been distributed to RL referee societies across the country for roll out in 2023. This was made possible through the 'Enjoy the Game' campaign.

### **Professional game**

Michael Smaill refereed his first Super League fixture in 2022. Other notable domestic achievements were James Child (Challenge Cup final), Liam Moore (Super League Grand Final and 1895 Cup Final), Liam Rush (Women's Challenge Cup), Michael Smaill (Women's Grand Final) and Chris Kendall (Million Pound Game).

### **International game**

2022 provided some excellent international officiating experiences for the RFL's officials and coaches. In the mid-season international fixtures, Jack Smith refereed the England vs All Stars fixture and Liam Moore travelled to France for their match against Wales.

Steve Ganson was appointed by the IRL as Match Officials Manager for RLWC2021. All the RFL match officials, administration and coaching staff were involved in delivering this important function. Steve and his team thrived on the challenge of ensuring that the three tournaments were well served with high-quality officiating.

There was a strong contingent of RFL full-time and part-time staff involved across all three tournaments. This provided excellent experience for all, not only in the delivery of the tournament but also being able to learn and improve from operating alongside match officials and coaches from other countries.

RFL staff and part-time match officials who participated in RLWC2021 – Steve Ganson (Head of Match Officials) Dave Elliott, Julian King (coaches), Mike Smaill (Business Manager and referee), Ryan Cox (wheelchair tournament co-ordinator), Ben Thaler, Liam Moore, Chris Kendall, Robert Hicks, James Vella, Liam Rush, Tom Grant, Jack Smith, James Child, Aaron Moore, Marcus Griffiths, Warren Turley, Dean Bowmer, Neil Horton (match officials).

David Butler, Matthew Ball, Kim Abel, Grant Jackson, Ollie Cruickshank (wheelchair match officials).

Notable appointments during the tournament were Liam Moore (referee, England vs Papua New Guinea, quarter-final), Chris Kendall (referee Australia vs Lebanon quarter-final, video referee Aus vs NZ semi-final and Australia vs Samoa final), Warren Turley and Jack Smith (touch judges, men's final), Ollie Cruickshank (lead referee, wheelchair final), David Butler (in-goal judge, wheelchair final).

### **Retiring colleagues**

The department bade farewell to two of its longest-serving match officials in 2022 with Robert Hicks and James Child both calling time on successful careers. Robert retired to concentrate on his role with the governing body as Director of Operations and Legal and Company Secretary, while James chose to focus on his career as a chartered surveyor.



**Robert Hicks** began refereeing in 1996. He was appointed to the Elite Panel in 2006. Over his career he refereed over 500 first grade games (over 1,000 first grade games in all roles touch judge, video referee) with 305 matches as referee at Super League.

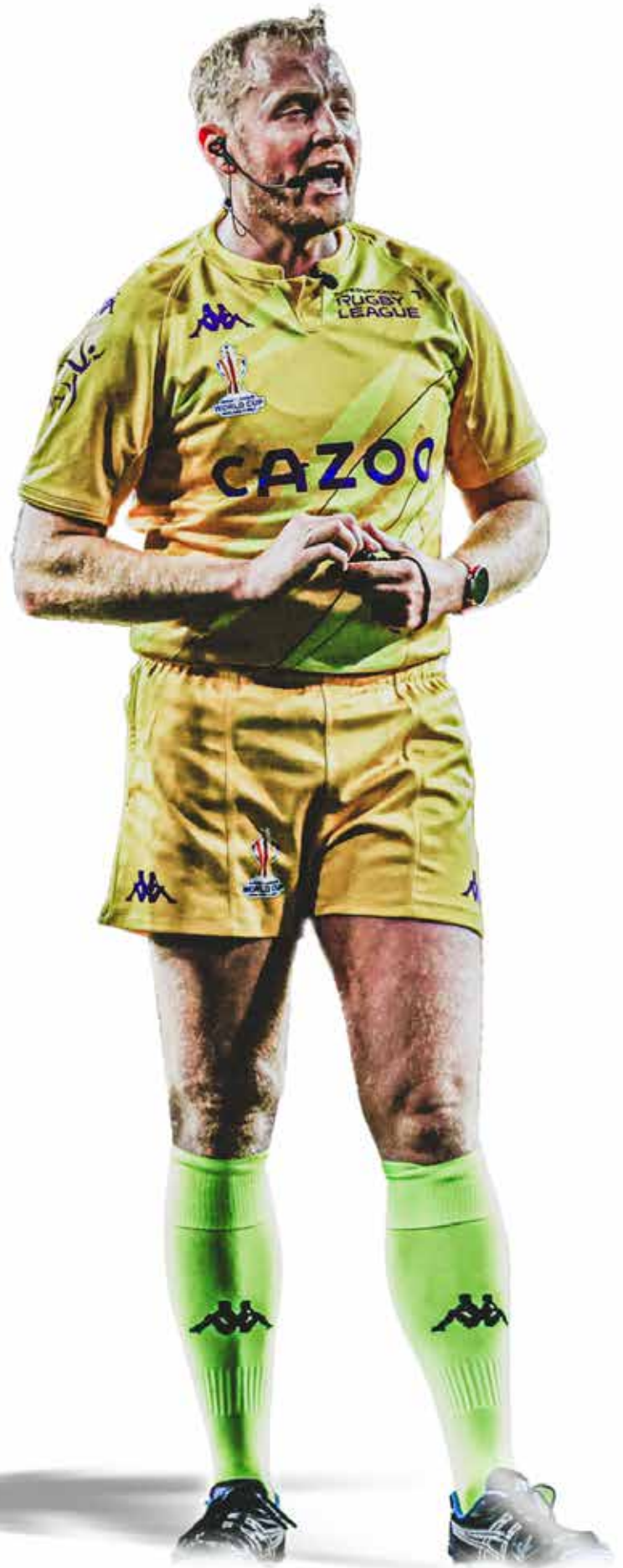
Robert was in the middle for two Challenge Cup finals (2018, 2019), two Super League Grand Finals (2016, 2018) and two World Club Challenges (2017, 2019);

Internationally, Robert took charge of 15 internationals and officiated at three World Cups (2013, 2017, 2021).

**James Child** enjoyed a successful career as a match official, both as a touch-judge and a referee. He joined the RFL's panel of senior referees in 2010 in a part-time capacity and successfully managed his career as a surveyor with officiating at the highest level.

Prior to joining the senior panel, James had already refereed in Super League in 2009 and acted as a touch-judge at three Challenge Cup finals (2006, 2007, 2008) and the 2008 World Cup final at Suncorp Stadium, Brisbane.

He officiated in 333 Super League fixtures, including refereeing the 2017 Grand Final, and was referee in the 2022 Challenge Cup final at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium. In total, James was a touch judge in five Challenge Cup finals, eight Grand Finals, seven World Club Challenges and two World Cup finals.



# HEADLINE STATISTICS



## Viewing

2022's opening Super League round broadcast for the first time across both Channel 4 and Sky Sports saw over 1,046,200 cumulative views across four games, the third highest for a single round on record. The second round also had cumulative views of 968,200 over four games. Leeds Rhinos vs Warrington Wolves, the first round tie and first game broadcast on Channel 4, had an average match audience of 564,700 and peaked at 755,100.

The Magic Weekend cumulative match audience was 697,860, a 25 per cent increase on 2021 and the highest audience for Magic Weekend.

The Super League Grand Final had an average match audience of 418,600, up 11 per cent on 2021. The play-offs were covered on both Sky Sports and Channel 4 and cumulated in a total audience of 1,389,450, the second highest play-off audience on record.

The Challenge Cup final average match audience was 1,158,210 and peaked at 1,519,400, with an audience share of 15.6 per cent.

The Challenge Cup sixth round tie, Whitehaven vs St Helens was broadcast on The Sportsman and had 57,464 views.

The Challenge Cup first round tie, Orrell St James vs British Army was broadcast on BBC iPlayer and the Red Button and had 34,052 views.

The first Championship fixture on Premier Sports, York City Knights vs Featherstone Rovers, had an average match audience of 51,000. The second fixture, Featherstone Rovers vs Leigh Centurions was watched by the highest Championship audience on Premier Sports for the season (85,550 with a peak of 97,200).

The Summer Bash cumulative match audience on Premier Sports was 130,040.

The Championship Grand Final average match audience on Premier Sports was 19,350, and peaked at 27,400.

Cornwall RLFC's first game broadcast on Our League in Round 2 away to North Wales Crusaders had 3,747 views on Our League. The League 1 Grand Final on the Sportsman had 10,178 views.

Women's Super League play-offs were broadcast on Sky Sports: York City Knights vs Wigan

Warriors (5,530 average match audience), St Helens vs Leeds Rhinos (11,410 average match audience) and the final York vs Leeds (average match audience 9,270).

England vs Samoa in the opening group stage of RLWC2021 had an average match audience of 1,316,430 with a peak audience of 1,808,700. The England vs Samoa RLWC2021 semi-final had an average match audience of 1,547,310 and peaked at 2,578,700, with an audience share of 21.17 per cent.

England women vs New Zealand women in the RLWC2021 semi-final had an average match audience of 991,170, and peaked at 1,277,700.

England wheelchair vs France wheelchair RLWC2021 final had an average match audience of 639,830 and peaked at 1,303,600.

The RLWC2021 men's warm-up fixture, England vs Fiji was broadcast on Our League and had 30,319 views.

The Scotland v England Knights RLWC 2021 warm-up game was broadcast on the Sportsman and received 21,071 views on the Sportsman.

## Attendances

Magic Weekend attendance was 62,154, a two per cent increase on 2021)

Super League Grand Final attendance was 60,783 (up 35 per cent on 2021)

Challenge Cup final attendance was 51,628  
Summer Bash Attendance was 10,763  
Championship Grand Final attendance was 7,233

The League 1 Grand Final attendance was 1,086  
The Women's Challenge Cup final, St Helens vs Leeds Rhinos, was watched by 5,888

The Women's Super League Grand Final attendance was 2,151

The total attendance at the three RLWC2021 tournaments was 473,606.

# OUR LEAGUE & OUR LEAGUE ACTIVE



## Our League

Our League is Rugby League's dedicated membership platform which continues to provide an integral digital presence for the sport.

In the autumn of 2022, the Our League app was taken over to become the official app of RLWC2021. This gave the tournaments an app that had already been downloaded by over 200,000 rugby league fans, ran a fully tested match centre, and allowed members to vote in polls and play predictors. In return, this gave the RFL a significant increase in new Our League members, a wider reaching audience beyond the United Kingdom, and all-time high level of engagement.

2022 saw an uplift of almost 44,000 new members on Our League, finishing at 247,000 in total. The year saw a record-breaking number of unique users at 158,000, 4.38m sessions and an average of 34 sessions per user, an increase from 30 in 2021.

Members continued to engage with gamification elements of Our League with a total of 40,500 unique predictor players throughout 2022, while 34,000 people participated in polls and there was a total of 57,000 unique live stream viewers, with the cumulative total reaching 300,000. Our League recorded £170,000 in revenue in 2022 through ticketing, merchandise and livestreaming.

The Our League app will broadcast several live Betfred Super League fixtures in 2023, beginning with March's Round 4 fixture between Hull FC and Salford Red Devils. Our League will continue to broadcast the Betfred Championship with coverage of its showcase Summer Bash event, the Betfred women's and wheelchair Super Leagues building on the legacy left by RLWC2021, and it will continue to service the community game with live coverage of competitions such as the National Conference League.

**OURLEAGUE**

## Our League Active

Our League Active was launched in 2022 and is rugby league's very own participant membership scheme. Following a game-wide consultation with key stakeholders, including Sport England, the RFL designed OLA to promote the development and sustainability of the community game.

Membership enabled the RFL to have surety of funding and help plan a longer-term vision for the community game. It will also enable us to support the clubs and leagues even more, ensuring they get the things they need to continue to grow the sport in the way we all want to do.

The first year was a success, ensuring that the RFL was able to reinvest funds into the growth and maintenance of the core functions required by participants to ensure rugby league was safe, secure, well-regulated and run. These funds were reinvested into the grassroots to cover services such as safeguarding, match official, coach education and insurance for participants.

Whilst fees were charged for participants, in agreement with the wider community game, no fees were charged to several volunteer sectors, including coaches and match officials.

OLA members receive several benefits alongside their membership including discounted tickets to major rugby league events, offers with commercial partners such as Oxen, Steeden, OPRO and Impact Performance, whilst also being able to rack up Rewards4 points for appearing for their community club as well as interacting with the Our League app.

Members – and community clubs – are also entered into monthly prize draws to win money-can't-buy prizes such as coaching sessions with professional coaches. As membership develops and grows, it is our intention to further deepen the relationship between our participants and the sport by ensuring a closer relationship and improved and enhanced benefits.

**OURLEAGUE**  
**ACTIVE**  
SUPPORTING COMMUNITY RUGBY LEAGUE

# OPERATIONS REPORT & SAFEGUARDING



## Safeguarding

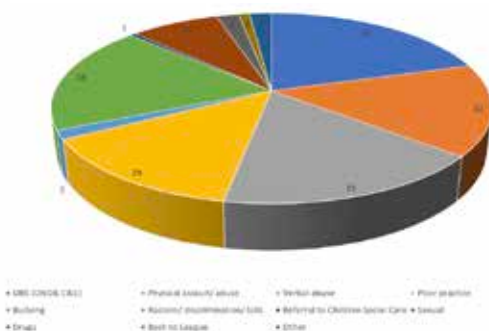
Ensuring the sport remains committed to the welfare and protection of its participants, especially children and adults at risk, remains a key priority for rugby league. As has been seen from the recent high-profile reviews into other sports, getting the culture and governance of the sport at all levels right is critical to ensure that participants can play and participate in a safe and supportive environment.

As part of improving the environment and culture, the RFL agreed with all playing leagues to centrally handle match official and adult behaviour at junior and youth level from 2022 and to invest in the Enjoy the Game campaign.

This, together with improved reporting mechanisms and an increase in the understanding of Safeguarding as a concept resulted in the Case Management Group recording its highest case load on record during 2022.

The breakdown of cases is set out below:

SAFEGUARDING CASES BY CATEGORY 2022 NUMBER OF CASES



The annual Safeguarding Conference in 2022 took place in January. It was held at the Totally Wicked Stadium in St Helens and was run “hybrid,” resulting in an increase in the attendance figures with 75 people attending in person and a peak of 87 online.

The conference was opened by Ralph Rimmer and two keynote speakers, Sandy Lindsay and Clare Balding. Learning throughout the day included a ‘Know your players’ workshop from Rugby League Cares and a session on Contextual Safeguarding from the Child Protection in Sport Unit.

The Annual CPSU Audit was completed in the summer with the RFL again meeting the highest level of result with a standard of “met.” This audit assesses the governing body against 10 standards including policy and procedures

for responding to concerns. The CPSU stated that the RFL continues to show best practice in this area.

## 2022 in NUMBERS

1,654 people completed safeguarding education courses (SPC and TTL) with 112 courses carried out in person

18 per cent of all safeguarding cases related to unacceptable language/behaviour

## Integrity Report 2022

The UKAD Assurance Framework is the primary mechanism through which NGBs demonstrate to UKAD their compliance with the UK’s National Anti-Doping Policy. The Assurance Framework outlines a number of mandatory requirements and provides NGBs with clear instructions on how they can meet them. The RFL were able to demonstrate its compliance with the framework.

In respect of gambling-related activity, there is no over-arching body ensuring compliance with standards. However, the RFL has an equivalent implementation plan for this area.

In 2022, the RFL continued to ensure it complied with its implementation plans.

## 2022 in NUMBERS

100 per cent of professional players and athlete support personnel completed education on anti-doping and gambling policies.

617 samples collected for testing by UKAD.

Concussion research projects, including Instrumented Mouthguard Project

The Mouthguard Project commenced in 2021 with the support of every Super League club, partnered with Leeds Beckett University (LBU) to start the TaCKLE Project. In 2022, a lot of the groundwork was undertaken to get these projects ready to be delivered out to the game in 2023.

The RFL and LBU, led by Prof Ben Jones and his team at LBU work collaboratively with World Rugby, the RFU and Premiership Rugby on concussion research. Following on from the validity study in 2022, the 2023 season has seen players within the professional game (men’s and women’s Super League, Reserves and Academy competitions) wearing the mouthguards for contact training and fixtures, with the data now available from the mouthguards from players who wear the devices on big forces and smaller ones alike. The roll out into the Community Game commences in 2024, with both the male and

female game represented across open age and age grade participants. Compliance across the game is of a decent standard.

This study is particularly important for other research projects to assist with reading Head Acceleration Events (HAEs) and brain scans. Tom Grundy (University of Manchester) is leading a brain scanning project with Academy participants, where participants are invited to attend a scan following a concussion occurring. They are scanned pre-season to provide a baseline image for the scan. Where an instrumented mouthguard is worn – the data from the impact helps to feed into the big picture. This project has seen an over-subscription of participants, which has been a positive.

2023 has seen a law trial for six weeks in the Academy competition – based around changes to the game which can reduce concussion. The two laws are:

- Kick off from the 40-metre line (rather than halfway);
- Tackle height reduced to armpit and below.

The two laws were selected following consultation with stakeholders in the game such as players, coaches and match officials. The two laws were deemed either the most likely to reduce concussions and/or the most feasible to deliver. The mouthguard data from this trial will be invaluable to assist in whether a change to tackle leads to a change in HAEs.

In the Women's Super League, a different approach using coaching interventions, rather than changing laws, has been taken. This also commenced in 2023 following consultation with stakeholders in the women's game and is delivered to all teams within Women's Super League 1 and 2.

A further project has commenced based around participants who have suffered a diagnosed concussion, and what happens in the days leading up to that concussion and the days following. This study is dependent on individual players engaging in the study, which is not mandated.

In 2022, surveys were issued to participants in the professional and community game to better understand issues with concussion from stakeholders. The gathered information has been insightful and mirrors studies in the NRL.

The injury audit in the Super League, Academy and Reserve competitions continued throughout 2022, again lead by LBU.





# COMMERCIAL



Despite RLWC2021 being postponed by a year, England Rugby League still recorded its highest-ever sponsorship income in 2022.

Commercial partners wholly bought into the inclusive ethos of partnering with the three England teams playing in RLWC2021 - men's, women's and wheelchair.

This was led by Betfred extending their extensive long-term support of the sport to become principal partners of all three England teams.

Ronseal, also established partners of both England and the RFL through their support of match officials, remained on the back of the kits – which had a new look, with a switch to navy from red, a design which was developed in partnership with Oxen, and delivered record sales for an England shirt before and during the tournament.

New partnerships were struck in 2022 with Selco Builders Warehouse (builders' merchants), Reign Total Body Fuel (performance energy drink) and Sportsbreaks.com (sports travel).

Digital content continued to be a prime focus for brands partnering with rugby league.

Reign Total Body Fuel produced a docuseries profiling three England players from the men's, women's and wheelchair squads - John Bateman, Amy Hardcastle and James Simpson MBE.

The series looked at their career progression and how they have overcome huge adversity to reach the top of their sport. The content received strong numbers with over 1m views and a reach of over 9m on social media.



# INCLUSION & DIVERSITY



## **Tackle It: Rugby League versus Discrimination**

The RFL continued to work in partnership with Rugby League Cares, Super League Europe, clubs and RLWC2021 to achieve progress against Tackle It in 2022, a year which culminated in the delivery of the biggest and most inclusive Rugby League World Cup in the sport's history.

Tackle It sets out to make rugby league a truly inclusive sport by tackling discrimination and breaking down any barriers to involvement. The action plan represents a plan by the game, for the game – the result of listening and learning from the experiences of those who play, support or work in rugby league.

There are four strategic goals.

- To widen the reach and impact of rugby league;
- To diversify rugby league's talent pool and workforce;
- To improve the culture of rugby league;
- To clarify processes, instill confidence in - and encourage - the reporting of discrimination, and ensure appropriate sanctions are in place.

Delivery of Tackle It is supported by the RFL Inclusion Lead who is responsible for providing strategic advice and guidance, and the RFL Inclusion Board (a formal sub-committee of the RFL Board) that oversees progress against the action plan.

The decision taken at the start of the 2022 season to continue the 13 Seconds period to reflect on tackling discrimination within Rugby League prior to each game was well received and observed at rugby league grounds during the season. This saw it adopted by RLWC2021 during the tournament.

The success of RLWC2021's delivery of the 13 Seconds with a centralised message and clarity about what was being championed will be built upon within 2023 as clubs are being encouraged to designate a home fixture as an inclusion fixture under the campaign banner of RL Together. Inclusion fixtures will give clubs the opportunity to showcase their work within their local community and be a platform for expanding their connections and supporter base.

With the support of Sport England, the RFL launched a project with Inclusive Boards to encourage professional clubs to improve their diversity within the boardroom. It will allow clubs to ensure they better represent the community within which they are based. Ten clubs agreed to be part of the project: Barrow

Raiders, Halifax Panthers, Huddersfield Giants, Hunslet, Midlands Hurricanes, Salford Red Devils, Sheffield Eagles, Swinton Lions, Wakefield Trinity, and Widnes Vikings. Upon conclusion, there will be measurable outcomes that directly contribute to Tackle It in 2023. In addition, all clubs will be provided with a toolkit that can be used when recruiting in the future.

Nujum Sports were appointed as advisors to Rugby League on Muslim inclusion, having established working relationships with London Broncos, Wakefield Trinity, Warrington Wolves and Midlands Hurricanes. The partnership saw Nujum Sports provide Ramadan packs to Muslim rugby league players and training to the RFL and clubs on Ramadan and Islamophobia, including delivering at the RFL Disciplinary Conference.

Education is a key focus area within Tackle It. Professional players and coaches are required to complete annual mandatory equality, diversity and inclusion modules. Hive Learning inclusion modules were added to OuRLearning Zone in 2022 to support additional learning, including for club officials.

There was one on-field charge for unacceptable language and behaviour during the 2022 season in the professional game: this incident and the language used was referenced within the 2023 player education. This approach – using previous season incidents – is being used to develop the knowledge and confidence of the whole ORT function to ensure that appropriate sanctions are in place.

Policy reviews took place relating to gender participation and the misconduct sanctioning framework that saw an inclusion of mandatory education for first time offenders, whilst seeking alternative restorative justice type sanctions were considered when victims felt this would be a better way to tackle matters. The RFL Gender Participation Policy was approved by the RFL Board in June 2023 following widespread consultation and after having considered the available scientific evidence available.

The RFL works with broadcasters to achieve representation in media coverage and 2022 saw additional broadcast partners in the shape of Channel 4 and Premier Sports, with PDRL player Adam Hills, former internationals Danika Priim and Leon Pryce, and current international Jodie Cunningham among the presenters. Representation was also a theme of the RL Hall of Fame with 2022 inductees including the first women to be inducted: Brenda Dobek, Lisa

McIntosh and Sally Milburn. Lisa was the first black woman inductee.

Firsts were also achieved in Parliament. In anticipation of Sir Lindsay Hoyle succeeding Clare Balding as RFL President at the turn of the year, the RFL worked with the Speaker of the House of Commons and the Speaker's Office to put rugby league at the forefront of historic events to mark Black History Month and Disability History Month for the first time in Speaker's House. This relationship will continue in 2023 with collaboration planned for Women's History Month and South Asian History Month.

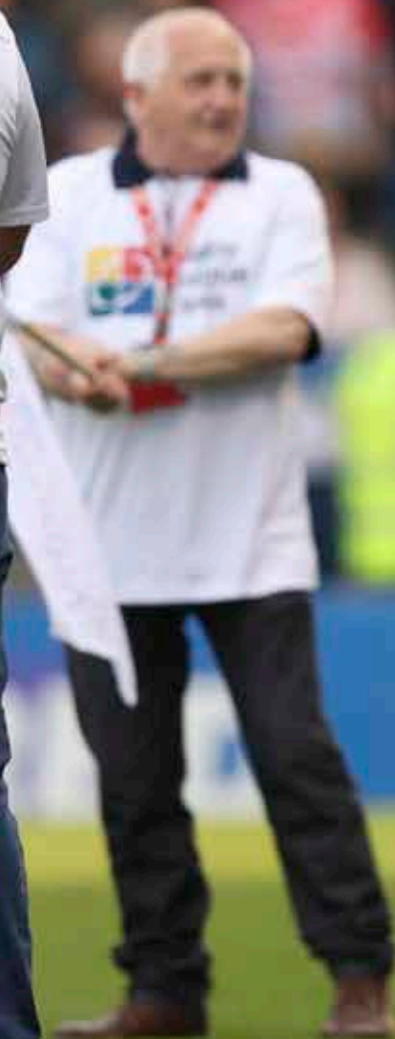
Officiating history was made at RLWC2021 with Kasey Badger becoming the first woman to referee a men's World Cup game when she took charge of Tonga versus Wales at St Helens. This landmark achievement was swiftly followed by Belinda Sharpe, who became the second and the first to referee an England men's game at international level.

In 2023, key areas for development include launching and delivering RL Together, reviewing and refreshing the membership of the RFL Inclusion Board, and reviewing and refreshing the Tackle It action plan itself to reflect the current position and ensure that in 2023 and beyond, it continues to be able to effectively deliver meaningful and sustainable progress against its strategic goals. This long-term equality, inclusion and diversity plan will help shape the sport for the future and help shape the Sport England Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. This includes working with the newly created RL Commercial to widen the reach and impact of rugby league.

Tackle It: Rugby League versus Discrimination is available [here](#).



# RUGBY LEAGUE CHARITIES



## **Rugby league charities**

2022 proved to be one of the most successful periods years in the charities' history, although it was a year of two halves.

The Covid-19 pandemic was ultimately burning out and life would return to near normality towards the end of the year. However, whilst the pandemic was in retreat, a new war in Europe would emerge and the resultant effects on the economy - rising inflation and a cost-of-living crisis – had a significant impact on the sport and its communities.

It was Covid-19 that made the biggest impact at the start of the year. Uncertainty towards the end of 2021 caused by a new variant and the prospect of more restrictions forced the governing body and the RL Benevolent Fund to take the tough decision to cancel the RFL President's Ball in January. The health risks to attendees, and the financial consequences of a late cancellation made running the event impossible.

The postponed RLWC2021 was delivered at the end of the year and proved to be tremendous showcase for the sport. Its defining achievement was that it brought together the whole sport in celebration of what was the most inclusive international sports tournament ever hosted. The charities played their part like never before, providing both a protective and proactive programme of wellbeing and welfare education to every competing player, alongside our more traditional role of crisis interventions and support for a small number of overseas players.

The focus on a prevention would become the defining characteristic of the charity's work across all programmes throughout 2022.

### **Player wellbeing and welfare**

The year was an affirming one for the player wellbeing and welfare programme. Now in its fourth year since taking RL Cares assumed responsibility from the RFL, the focus remained on enabling the sport's players to lead flourishing lives both on and off the field.

Successfully delivering this outcome remained challenging post-pandemic and in the face of the economic downturn. The number of players seeking support from the charity for mental illness or who were in crisis remained stubbornly high: however, analysis of the data highlighted a shift in those making use of the facilities. Full-time player numbers stabilised, which was encouraging, but this was countered by increases across a much broader constituency

including women, wheelchair and the community game, as well as from administrators at clubs, the RFL and Super League.

The charity completed its restructure and move away from Sporting Chance with the appointment of Dave Kirk as the game's first full-time psychotherapist. Dave's appointment enabled the charity to expand support without significant increases in costs, and assistance was provided to every individual who sought help.

There were a small number of serious incidents in the year which proved to be challenging for the wellbeing and welfare team, although the response from the charity ultimately provided much valued support and made a difference to the families involved.

In light of the ongoing challenges faced by the sport, RL Cares working alongside the RFL launched a review of wellbeing and welfare provision. A working group representative of the sport was formed to lead on the review: this included Head of RL Cares Chris Rostron; the charity's Director of Wellbeing and Welfare Steve McCormack; Robert Hicks, RFL Director of Operations and Legal and Company Secretary; Ian Blease, Director of Rugby and Operations at Salford Red Devils; and Kris Radlinski, Chief Executive of Wigan Warriors.

The review made an in-depth appraisal of the sport's wellbeing and welfare provision. It considered best practice from other sports, examined the costs of welfare and the various options on structure and delivery mechanisms. As part of the process, an audit of provision was undertaken with all full-time clubs. The audit provided a benchmark on the sport's current provision against its welfare policy, as well as identifying areas of high-quality delivery and improvement.

The result of the review and audit highlighted significant areas of improvement for the sport, with the priorities in 2023 focused on every full-time club becoming compliant with the welfare policy. Senior leaders in clubs and the RFL backed the recommendations of the review and the charity established comprehensive structures to ensure that clubs' welfare provision could quickly become compliant with the sport's policies and operational rules. Significant skills gaps were identified amongst the majority of the club player welfare managers and a new partnership was established with Manchester UCEN which would see a rolling programme of continuous professional development for the sport's welfare personnel. This focus on the development of people will

be a defining feature of the charity's wellbeing and welfare programme in the future.

To complement increasing standards in clubs and across the sport, RL Cares created a new role within its wellbeing and welfare team and appointed Steve Hardisty as Wellbeing and Special Projects Manager. The role supports the sport's welfare staff to lead a more salutogenic approach to wellbeing provision, one that is more focused on health and not disease (mental ill health).

Transition and successful retirements remained an important focus for RL Cares. Considerable work was undertaken by Transition Manager Francis Stephenson to develop an online Rugby League Player Portal. Funded and developed by the charity, the facility is a 'one-stop shop' for players seeking good quality, up-to-date information related to their wellbeing, welfare and life outside Rugby League. Feedback from across the sport has been exceptional.

Awareness and recognition of the charity increased amongst the playing community and within the senior leadership at clubs throughout the year. The sport's anonymous survey of player highlighted that 92 per cent valued player welfare provision.

The wellbeing and welfare teams' year concluded with them becoming embedded within the three England teams participating in RLWC2021. Each squad benefited from the support of Steve McCormack, Steve Hardisty and Francis Stephenson in the build up to, and during the tournament. This was the first time the England performance teams had access to full-time provision in this way.

In conclusion, the year was ultimately about establishing clear standards and the creation of new structures, facilities and services reflective of the sport's needs. These positive developments enabled the charity to form strong working relationships with stakeholders, to focus on the continuous development of the people responsible for wellbeing and welfare provision, and as a result drive continued improvement to provision and outcomes for those involved with the professional game.

## Community

2022 was another year of expansion and growth for the charity's community programmes. The community team expanded with a series of new appointments designed to enable the team to deliver an enormously challenging programme of work linked to the ongoing partnership with Movember and RLWC2021.

New opportunities emerged with the NHS and a small number of new commercial partners.

A new project was initiated with support from Movember designed to support the development of Offload within the construction industry.

The focus of employing current and former professional players remained key, with the appointments of:

- Bob Beswick (ex-Wigan, Leigh, Toronto and Ireland).
- Damian Gibson (ex-Leeds, Halifax)
- Cory Ashton (Sheffield Eagles)
- Amy Hardcastle (Leeds and England).

Amy would feature prominently for England in RLWC2021 at the end of 2022. The charity took the step of supporting Amy's on-field career by providing paid leave throughout the year to support her preparations and time in tournament.

The community programmes continued to deliver outstanding results for communities and the charity's partners throughout the year.

## Ahead of the Game

Following a hugely successful partnership with Movember for RLWC2021, RL Cares was appointed the UK implementation partner for the globally renowned 'Ahead of the Game' programme. The role for RL Cares also involved the growth of the programme across sport throughout the UK.

Since the completion of the RLWC201, the project - which supported over 11,000 children and young people - has continued to support over 10,000 under-12s to under-18s and enabled them to protect their mental fitness, and 'help a team-mate' who is struggling. Support is also available to parents and coaches.

## Fundraising and events

After the early cancellation of the President's Ball, the fundraising, events and communications team still managed to achieve their best year yet, delivering two outstanding events, the Empire State 500 challenge and a historic RL Hall of Fame induction dinner later in the year.

The fundraising target for the Empire State 500, a 550-mile off-road bike ride from Niagara Falls to Central Park in the heart of New York city, was smashed with over £45,000 raised during the week-long challenge. The ride was the charity's most technically demanding and complicated event in terms of planning,



organisation and delivery. Despite the logistical challenges, the charity's team, led by Catherine Maddy, John Ledger and Tracey Barr delivered the biggest and best fundraiser for RL Cares to date.

The charity was grateful for the outstanding support received from riders and sponsors including Adrian Morley, Nathan McAvoy, Kevin Walton (Managing Director of the event's title sponsors UK Red Security), Neville Smith (former Sky Sports producer and MD of In Touch Productions) and James Elston (MD of Boiler Central).

The culmination of the year, saw the charity join forces with the RFL, Women in Rugby League and Wigan Council to host a very

special RL Hall of Fame induction ceremony and celebration dinner. Organised to take place during RLWC2021, RL Cares had the honour and privilege of organising the historic inaugural inductions of the RL Hall of Fame's first ever female inductees Sally Milburn, Lisa McIntosh and Brenda Dobek. Four players were also inducted into the men's Hall of Fame - Adrian Morley, Clive Sullivan, Andy Farrell and David Watkins.

Over 350 guests packed into The Edge, Wigan to witness the inductions and show their respect to the sport's greatest ever players.



### **The Rugby League Benevolent Fund**

The Rugby League Benevolent Fund continued its support for seriously injured Rugby League players and their families throughout 2022.

Pastoral and social and welfare care remain at the heart of the Fund's activities. The Fund's network support is vital in contributing to the

group's well-being. Immediate assistance is always given to those specifically injured, but thankfully were no major injuries during the year.

Trips to Magic Weekend, the BetFred Challenge Cup Final and the Super League Grand Final are now fixed in the social calendar. The Fund assists all those individuals involved in the game - professional, community, youth, women and wheelchair.

A lifelong support for those with catastrophic injuries is the continuing core for the charity's work.

### **Scaling What Works**

Our partnership with Movember continued to expand with the provision of additional funding for the RL Cares Offload programme. The funding is enabling the charity to work alongside the construction industry. The aim is for the programme to support thousands of employees within the sector to lead more positive, healthy and successful lives.

The construction sector is particularly affected by mental ill health, recording the highest number of male suicides against any other industry. RL Cares is proud to work alongside the construction sector and open up new opportunities for the sport.

### **Offload**

Offload has supported thousands of adults across the sport's communities, providing workshops and support to enable people to improve their mental fitness, resilience and wellbeing.

Offload continues to work in partnership with club foundations and businesses within the sport's communities.

Examples of where the programme is currently running include SSE, Howorth Air Technology, Aspire CBS, West Yorkshire Fire Service, Slater Heelis, and most recently, Kellogg's.

Outcomes include:

- 99.68 per cent of participants have a better understanding of their health and wellbeing needs;
- 98.72 per cent of participants have better coping strategies;
- 95.19 per cent of participants have a stronger support network meaning they feel less lonely and isolated;
- 94.87 per cent of participants are more likely to speak to their family/friends about their mental health;
- 80.77 per cent of participants are more likely to access their GP or mental health service to discuss their mental health;
- 88.46 per cent of participants have an increased motivation to improve their education, training and/or employment situation.

### **RL Cares for the NHS**

RL Cares for the NHS is currently working with over 20,000 NHS employees in the North West. After unprecedented challenges during the pandemic, NHS employees have struggled significantly with their mental fitness and wellbeing. RL Cares is being funded by the NHS to support staff wellbeing through one-to-one support, mentoring and group education workshops. In the last 12 months we have supported over 9,000 NHS employees, in departments including A&E, Urgent Care, Paediatrics, Oncology and many more. NHS staff have reported feeling more valued, supported and able to care for themselves.

### **Heritage**

Following the disappointment of the 'George Hotel', the charity reviewed its position in relation to the National Rugby League Museum project. New interest was expressed and the trustees agreed to undertake a comprehensive feasibility study into these opportunities. This in-depth appraisal will enable the sport to make an informed decision about the future of the project and its viability in the short and medium term.

# GOVERNANCE



PREMIER  
LEAGUE  
RUGBY  
FOOTBALL  
LEAGUE



ENGLAND  
RUGBY  
LEAGUE

## Overview

The RFL has continued to seek to ensure that the principles of good governance are embedded in all aspects of its work.

A detailed Governance Statement reporting on the RFL's governance arrangements and performance during 2022 is published on the RFL website.

The key governance changes and matters for the RFL during 2022 were:

- Agreement was reached between the RFL and Super League (Europe) Limited for the realignment of the governance of the Sport. As part of this:
  - a new company 'RL Commercial Limited' was established to exploit all the commercial rights in the sport;
  - a new RL Commercial Board was appointed;
  - all applicable staff transferred from SLE and the RFL to RL Commercial.
- IMG became the sport's strategic partner
- Sir Lindsay Hoyle was appointed as President for 2023.
- Sue Taylor was appointed as Vice President from July 2022 to the RL Council meeting in December 2023.
- Chris Brindley and Chris Hurst stepped down from their roles as Non-Executive Directors of the RFL. In their place, Dr Cherrie Daley was appointed as a Non-Executive Director of the RFL with an initial term running to the Council meeting in summer 2025.
- Sandy Lindsay was re-elected as a Non-Executive Director for the period to the RL Council meeting in summer 2025.
- Ralph Rimmer and Karen Moorhouse ceased to be Executive Directors of the RFL on December 31 2022.
- A number of governance projects were implemented across the sport, including in relation to club board diversity and environmental sustainability.

## Board and meetings

The Non-Executive Directors of the RFL during 2022 were Simon Johnson (Chair), Chris Brindley (Senior Independent Director (until resignation in July 2022)), Chris Hurst (resigned July 2022), Sandy Lindsay (Senior Independent Director from July 2022), Rimla Akhtar and Cherrie Daley (appointed November 2022) and the Executive Directors were Ralph Rimmer and Karen Moorhouse.

During 2022 there were seven formal board meetings. There was 100 per cent attendance at these meetings by all directors. In addition, there was a significant number of board meetings held virtually and further decisions made in

writing. The number reflected the realignment of the sport's governance with the creation of RL Commercial and the decision to bring on board the internationally renowned sport and entertainment agency IMG.

The sub-committees of the board (being Audit and Risk; Remuneration Committee; Nominations Committee; the Laws Committee; the Whole Game Board, Community Board, Inclusion Board and Clinical Advisory Group) met as required throughout the year.

## Working with stakeholders

As outlined in its strategy, in seeking to achieve its objectives, the RFL works in partnership with all its stakeholders including Super League (Europe) Limited, RL Cares, the RFL Facilities Trust, professional clubs and community game leagues and clubs.

The RFL is the governing body for the whole sport – all clubs, all players and other participants.

The key activity that was completed in 2022 was the sport's realignment between the RFL and Super League (Europe) that saw all the sports commercial assets assigned to a new commercial entity that will drive growth in revenue for the sport.

## Role of RFL

As the governing body of Rugby League, during 2022, the RFL governed, developed, promoted and grew the sport. This included:

- **Governance:** Regulatory and operational matters concerning the entire sport including: the appointment of match officials, player registrations and the enforcement of the salary cap, facility standards, safeguarding, medical standards and on-field and off-field disciplinary matters.
- **Participation:** Working with foundations and other partners, developing and growing grassroots rugby league in clubs and educational settings. Inclusive playing offers ranged from primary school age opportunities to youth, open age, Touch, Tag, Disability RL (physical disability and learning disability), Masters and Wheelchair RL.
- **Professional competitions:** The operation of and marketing, promotion and presentation of the Challenge Cup, the 1895 Cup, the Championship, League 1 and Women's Super League. SLE was responsible for the marketing, promotion and presentation of the Super League competition. The RFL provided several core services to SLE in relation to the operation of the Super League. SLE paid a fee to the RFL towards its costs and as a

- solidarity payment towards the operation of the other professional league competitions.
- **Representative teams:** The operation of the England Performance Unit made up of the England men's senior, Knights, women's senior, wheelchair, Academy and youth teams. This was particularly challenging in a World Cup year with three teams participating at the same time and saw the men and women reach the semi-final, whilst the Wheelchair team were crowned world champions
- **World cup 2022:** Working closely with Rugby League World Cup 2021 Limited (the wholly-owned subsidiary company running the World Cup in 2022) to ensure that the benefits and legacy of hosting the World Cup benefit the whole of the sport. As part of the delivery, many colleagues and staff from the RFL worked on the tournament to make it a huge success for the sport to build on.



# FINANCIAL REVIEW & ACCOUNTS



## Summary and results

The consolidated accounts for the RFL show a loss before tax of £1,022k for the year ended December 31, 2022 (2021: Profit £1,008k). The RFL maintained an aggregate positive cash balance throughout the year.

At December 31, 2022, this aggregate balance was £7,879k (2021: £15,485k).

## Principal risks and uncertainties

The Board and Executive team had budgeted to make a profit in 2022 (£394k) in order to continue the financial turnaround from the previous three years, and to build reserves for future to bolster the Group's ability to absorb potential budget shocks in the coming years. Despite strict cost control and management of spend by the Executive, the Group has been faced with another challenging year. This can be broken down into the following key areas:

**Insurance** – the RFL provides game-wide insurance cover with the most significant cost arising in the sport's Employers' and Public Liability policy. This particular policy provides cover for concussion-related injuries and there was concern from the underwriter of the policy around some of the claim activity in other contact sports. The underwriter made the difficult decision to withdraw cover at renewal in July 2022. After an intensive piece of work by the RFL's insurance broker, Bartlett's, an alternative insurer was found. This has resulted in a significant premium increase which was not budgeted.

**Events** – In 2022 the RFL staged a number of central events, the Challenge Cup final being the most notable. Ticketing revenues were below expectations in 2022 which has had an impact on the budget. This was mitigated to some extent by strict cost control and the varying nature of some of the key costs of staging this event. A significant cost was also absorbed to stage the mid-season international at Warrington which gave the England Men's and Women's teams a chance to perform ahead of the RLWC2021 tournament held in autumn.

**Restructuring** – As part of the planned re-alignment of the sport, the RFL has been through a re-organisation of its management structure and, crucially, the recruitment of a new Chief Executive. Tony Sutton was appointed Interim Chief Executive on January 1 2023, and following an extensive external market recruitment process he was appointed permanent Chief Executive on March 13 2023. There were some one-off restructuring costs accounted for in 2022. The ultimate outcome of this restructuring is a smaller Executive Team in 2023, at a lower cost than in prior years.



**Rugby League World Cup 2021** – Having been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic in 2021, RLWC2021 took place in autumn 2022. The restrictions to travel and spectators at events had meant that it was very difficult to host the tournament in 2021. This decision was made by the RLWC2021 in conjunction with the RFL Board but was somewhat forced by the withdrawal of the Australian and New Zealand teams due to their concerns over travel and quarantine restrictions. This meant that postponement of the tournament was not until summer 2021 and RLWC2021 rightly refunded a substantial number of tickets which had already been purchased. Other revenue streams were also impacted in 2021 and did not recover in 2022 when the tournament was rescheduled. Clearly, while RLWC2021 was rationalised during the latter part of 2021, there was certainly a cost to keeping the tournament functional during this period and retaining key member of the management team and staff.

### Detailed analysis of trading

It is important to note that these statements are consolidated and incorporate the results of Rugby League World Cup 2021 Limited and RFL Investments 2020 Limited, both wholly-owned subsidiaries of RFL (Governing Body) Limited. The reader should take this into account when reviewing year-on-year results in all areas. The postponed Rugby League World Cup 2021 took place in 2022 and the large majority of the event revenues and costs are recognised in these financial statements. RFL Investments 2020 Limited is the vehicle for the administration of the Sport Survival Fund and its Balance Sheet reflects the long-term liability in relation to the loans made to eligible entities in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

The accounts of both these subsidiaries are reported in full and filed at Companies House. Year-on-year turnover has increased by 70 per cent from £24,764k to £42,152k, which can be attributed in the main to the impact of RLWC2021 in autumn 2022. Bearing in mind, the impact of RLWC2021, sponsorship income also saw some recovery, increasing from £1,668k to £5,744k.

Government funding from Sport England rose from £8,351k in 2021 to £11,030k in 2022 - an increase of 32 per cent, mainly due to grants received by Rugby League World Cup 2021 Limited for delivery of the Tournament in 2022.

New BBC and Sky broadcast contracts also commenced in 2022. Overall broadcast income decreased from £9,434k in 2021 to £7,839k in 2022. This represents a decrease of 17 per cent.

Within the RFL accounts, the cost of sales heading is broken down into two sections: the first is the external, third party costs of making the sale, and the second is the cost of sales that are internal to the RFL's stakeholders such as payments directly made to clubs. External cost of sales increased from £5,800k in 2021 to £32,247k in 2022. This increase is attributable to the increase in match costs and event staging costs relating to RLWC2021.

Grant-funded activities expenditure has increased from £3,125k in 2021 to £4,842k in 2022, reflecting the level of programme activity delivered in 2022, and its associated income.

Payments to and on behalf of clubs is made up of the cost of sales element of £274k (2021: £1,204k) and a further amount of £5,004k (2021: £7,153k) shown below Gross Profit on the Profit and Loss Account, which in 2022 brought the total payable to and on behalf of clubs to £5,278k (2021: £8,356k). This relates in the main to the reduction in distributions to Championship and League 1 Clubs as a result of the reduced broadcast revenues into the sport in 2022 when compared to 2021.

In 2022, Operating Costs increased to £15,283k from £10,055k in 2021. This is due to the classification of grant-funded expenditure in RLWC2021 Limited as operating costs as the tournament took place during the year.

Group Staff Costs significantly increased from £6,847k in 2021 to £7,599k in 2022. This is due to the impact of Covid-19 in 2021 and the postponement of RLWC2021, as well as an increase in staff costs relating to the staging of RLWC2021 in 2022.

Director remuneration increased from £455k in 2021 to £787k in 2022. It should be noted that this total includes a provision of £245k for the compensation for loss of office for the former Chief Executive Officer and Chief Regulatory Officer.

Costs of the Non-Executive Board have decreased slightly due to reductions and timing of Non-Executive Directors movements in 2022. These costs have since reduced further in 2023.

Interest receivable by the RFL in 2022 was £367k (2021: £169k). The increase in 2022 is driven by amounts due to RFLI 2020 Limited in respect of interest repayments from clubs who received support from the Sport Survival Fund. This is repayable to DCMS after the balance sheet date.



# RFL (GOVERNING BODY) LIMITED

## GROUP STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Notes	2022 £	2021 £
<b>Turnover</b>	<b>3</b>	42,152,041	24,764,054
Cost of sales	<b>4</b>	(32,247,010)	(5,800,170)
Cost of sales payable to or on behalf of clubs	<b>5</b>	(273,750)	(1,203,500)
<b>Total cost of sales</b>		<u>(32,520,760)</u>	<u>(7,003,670)</u>
<b>Gross profit</b>		9,631,281	17,760,384
Payments to or on behalf of clubs and other member organisations	<b>5</b>	(5,004,132)	(7,152,509)
Operating costs		<u>(15,282,694)</u>	<u>(10,054,721)</u>
<b>Total administrative costs</b>		(20,286,826)	(17,207,230)
Other operating income		9,663,065	75,614
Exceptional item	<b>6</b>	-	380,000
<b>Operating (loss)/profit</b>	<b>7</b>	<u>(992,480)</u>	<u>1,008,768</u>
Interest receivable and similar income	<b>11</b>	367,003	169,115
Interest payable and similar expenses	<b>12</b>	<u>(396,855)</u>	<u>(169,745)</u>
<b>(Loss)/profit before taxation</b>		(1,022,332)	1,008,138
Tax on (loss)/profit	<b>13</b>	35,788	50,861
<b>(Loss)/profit for the financial year</b>		<u><u>(986,544)</u></u>	<u><u>1,058,999</u></u>

# RFL (GOVERNING BODY) LIMITED

## GROUP BALANCE SHEET

AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Notes	2022		2021	
		£	£	£	£
<b>Fixed assets</b>					
Tangible assets	14		663,610		446,594
Investment properties	15		750,000		750,000
Investments	16		50		-
			<u>1,413,660</u>		<u>1,196,594</u>
<b>Current assets</b>					
Debtors falling due after more than one year	17	17,309,118		18,960,864	
Debtors falling due within one year	17	12,629,234		6,340,707	
Cash at bank and in hand		7,879,388		15,485,041	
		<u>37,817,740</u>		<u>40,786,612</u>	
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	18	<u>(17,629,203)</u>		<u>(19,740,361)</u>	
<b>Net current assets</b>			<u>20,188,537</u>		<u>21,046,251</u>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>			<u>21,602,197</u>		<u>22,242,845</u>
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>	19		<u>(21,620,489)</u>		<u>(21,274,593)</u>
<b>Net (liabilities)/assets</b>			<u>(18,292)</u>		<u>968,252</u>
<b>Capital and reserves</b>					
Revaluation reserve	23		118,993		118,993
Profit and loss reserves	23		(137,285)		849,259
<b>Total equity</b>			<u>(18,292)</u>		<u>968,252</u>

The financial statements were approved by the board of directors and authorised for issue on ..... and are signed on its behalf by:

.....  
Mr S H Johnson  
Director

# RFL (GOVERNING BODY) LIMITED

## COMPANY BALANCE SHEET

AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Notes	2022 £	£	2021 £	£
<b>Fixed assets</b>					
Tangible assets	14		340,000		340,000
Investment properties	15		750,000		750,000
Investments	16		389,911		389,861
			<u>1,479,911</u>		<u>1,479,861</u>
<b>Current assets</b>					
Debtors	17	1,841,905		1,831,300	
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	18	<u>(50)</u>		<u>-</u>	
<b>Net current assets</b>			<u>1,841,855</u>		<u>1,831,300</u>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>			<u>3,321,766</u>		<u>3,311,161</u>
<b>Provisions for liabilities</b>	21		<u>(22,609)</u>		<u>(22,609)</u>
<b>Net assets</b>			<u><u>3,299,157</u></u>		<u><u>3,288,552</u></u>
<b>Capital and reserves</b>					
Revaluation reserve	23		118,993		118,993
Accumulated surplus/(deficit)	23		<u>3,180,164</u>		<u>3,169,559</u>
<b>Total equity</b>			<u><u>3,299,157</u></u>		<u><u>3,288,552</u></u>

As permitted by s408 Companies Act 2006, the company has not presented its own profit and loss account and related notes. The company's profit for the year was £10,605 (2021 - £523,533 profit).

The financial statements were approved by the board of directors and authorised for issue on ..... and are signed on its behalf by:

.....  
Mr S H Johnson  
Director

Company Registration No. 05835638

# RFL (GOVERNING BODY) LIMITED

## GROUP STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Share capital	Revaluation reserve	Profit and loss reserves	Total
	£	£	£	£
<b>Balance at 1 January 2021</b>	-	565,219	(655,966)	(90,747)
<b>Year ended 31 December 2021:</b>				
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year	-	-	1,058,999	1,058,999
Transfers	-	(446,226)	446,226	-
<b>Balance at 31 December 2021</b>	-	118,993	849,259	968,252
<b>Year ended 31 December 2022:</b>				
Loss and total comprehensive income for the year	-	-	(986,544)	(986,544)
<b>Balance at 31 December 2022</b>	-	118,993	(137,285)	(18,292)

# RFL (GOVERNING BODY) LIMITED

## COMPANY STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

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	Revaluation reserve £	Accumulated surplus £	Total £
<b>Balance at 1 January 2021</b>	565,219	2,199,800	2,765,019
<b>Year ended 31 December 2021:</b>			
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year	-	523,533	523,533
Transfers	(446,226)	446,226	-
<b>Balance at 31 December 2021</b>	118,993	3,169,559	3,288,552
<b>Year ended 31 December 2022:</b>			
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year	-	10,605	10,605
<b>Balance at 31 December 2022</b>	118,993	3,180,164	3,299,157

# RFL (GOVERNING BODY) LIMITED

## GROUP STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2022

	Notes	2022 £	£	2021 £	£
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>					
Cash absorbed by operations	29	(7,908,967)		(5,821,085)	
Income taxes refunded		-		159,061	
<b>Net cash outflow from operating activities</b>		<b>(7,908,967)</b>		<b>(5,662,024)</b>	
<b>Investing activities</b>					
Purchase of tangible fixed assets		(300,098)		(31,108)	
Proceeds on disposal of tangible fixed assets		1,628		1,655,524	
Purchase of joint ventures		(50)		-	
Interest received		27,334		7,525	
<b>Net cash (used in)/generated from investing activities</b>		<b>(271,186)</b>		<b>1,631,941</b>	
<b>Financing activities</b>					
Proceeds from borrowings		1,196,596		8,881,095	
Repayment of borrowings		(622,081)		-	
<b>Net cash generated from financing activities</b>		<b>574,515</b>		<b>8,881,095</b>	
<b>Net (decrease)/increase in cash and cash equivalents</b>		<b>(7,605,638)</b>		<b>4,851,012</b>	
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of year		15,485,026		10,634,014	
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at end of year</b>		<b>7,879,388</b>		<b>15,485,026</b>	
<b>Relating to:</b>					
Cash at bank and in hand		7,879,388		15,485,041	
Bank overdrafts included in creditors payable within one year		-		(15)	

# RFL PRESIDENTS & BOARD



## **PRESIDENT SIR LINDSAY HOYLE**

Sir Lindsay Hoyle, the Speaker of the House of Commons and MP for Chorley, is the 31st President of the Rugby Football League. He succeeded Clare Balding OBE on 22 December 2022 after she had held the position over a two-year tenure which began in July 2020. On his appointment, Sir Lindsay said: “I have been a rugby league fan all my life – I think it’s an absolutely fantastic sport – so it is a real honour to be asked to be RFL President. Since my father introduced me to the game, I have loved the fast pace, high collision nature of rugby league, but also its vital role in bringing communities together and developing upcoming talent.”

## VICE PRESIDENT SUE TAYLOR

In July 2022 the BARLA chair Sue Taylor succeeded the former Hull KR chief executive Mike Smith as Vice-President of the Rugby Football League, joining RFL President Clare Balding OBE as one half of the first all-female duo in these honorary roles.

Sue is Rugby League through-and-through. She hails from the birthplace of the sport and has been a loyal servant to the community game for longer than she cares to remember. In fact, it was through Rugby League, and specifically the Underbank club, that Sue met her husband John. It was the start of a lifelong love affair...with rugby league! She even became Underbank secretary for a time, performed similar roles at St Joseph's and at Paddock, and in 1989 helped set up the Newsome Magpies club – now known as Newsome Panthers.

Sue's dedication to the Huddersfield Amateur League saw her become treasurer and secretary, with the Pennine League also benefitting from her business acumen and experience.

In 2013 Sue became the first female Chair of BARLA and brings to the Vice-President's role a strong and passionate voice for the community game. Among her priorities for 2022/23, Sue aims to promote 'respect' and 'enjoy the game', help grow participation numbers and increase the number of match officials – without whom there would be no game.

Due in part to the Covid-enforced delay to RLWC2021, Sue's tenure will be 18 months rather than the usual 12.





## DEPUTY VICE PRESIDENT MIKE SMITH

Sue Taylor's predecessor, Mike Smith, took up the post of Deputy Vice President – a role which allowed him to bring a wealth of experience to RLWC2021 during the second half of 2022.

A lifelong Hull KR supporter, Mike was the club's chief executive for more than a decade, leading change and development club both on and off the field. As RFL Vice President from 2020-22, his tenure coincided with the most challenging period in the sport's history – the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mike brought to the RFL Vice President's role a deep knowledge of the community game from his previous roles with Skirlaugh and championed the community game throughout his tenure. He represented the RFL at countless civic engagements at all levels of the game – from community club celebrations to Challenge Cup finals – and was a tremendous asset to RLWC2021.



## BOARD SIMON JOHNSON

Simon Johnson, previously the RFL's Senior Non-Executive Director having joined the Board in July 2014, became the Chair of the RFL in October 2019. Alongside his appointment, two additional Non-Executive Directors were added to the Board. Simon runs a Consultancy business advising clients in the sport and leisure industries and charitable third sector. He spent 7 years as Chief Executive of the Jewish Leadership Council. Before that, he had a 20-year career that saw him operate at the highest levels of the sports and media industries. After a period as the senior lawyer at the Premier League, Simon's career in sport saw him spend four years as Director of Corporate Affairs at The Football Association, followed by a role as COO of England's Bid to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup. He started his career as a lawyer, spending 10 years with ITV, the majority as Director of Rights and Business Affairs. Away from sport, Simon lives in London with his wife and three children. He is an active participant in community and charitable institutions.



**BOARD**  
**DR RIMLA AKHTAR OBE**

Dr Rimla Akhtar OBE has over 18 years' experience in the sports industry across the UK, Middle East and Asia, after a successful career in the City at leading global professional services firm Pricewaterhouse Coopers. In 2014, she became the first Muslim and Asian woman on the FA Council in addition to her role on the Inclusion Advisory Board at the FA, and in 2015 she was awarded an MBE for her contribution to equality and diversity in sport. She holds a portfolio of additional strategic and boardroom roles, including as an Independent Director of the Sports Ground Safety Authority, Council member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland and Independent Director of Bettys and Taylors Group. She was ranked 14th in the 2018 Forbes global list of the most powerful women in sport. She founded the leading global sport development consultancy, RimJhim Consulting; she was Chair of the Muslim Women's Sport Foundation until December 2018; and co-founded the global Muslim Women in Sport Network.



**BOARD**  
**SANDY LINDSAY MBE**

Sandy Lindsay MBE is Chair of Tangerine, the specialist creative communications agency she founded in Manchester in 2002 and which she put into Employee Ownership in 2017. In 2015 she was awarded the MBE for services to business and young people, and in the same year she was named North West Director of the Year by the Institute of Directors (and Highly Commended in the same awards nationally). That followed the launch in 2013 of The Juice Academy, the UK's first industry-led social media apprenticeship which has created jobs for more than 400 young people in the North West and across the UK. In 2020 she co-founded a third business: Vine Insights, which helps brands understand their audiences online. A champion of social mobility, Sandy chairs the Skills Group for the North West Business Leadership Team and is on the Business Leadership Council of Teach First. She is Vice Chair of the charity Forever Manchester and a Non-Executive Director of Flock and Northcoders. She was re-elected for a second three-year term at the 2022 Annual General Meeting, thereby becoming the senior Non-Executive Director. Sandy is also the RFL Board's Safeguarding Champion.



## BOARD TONY SUTTON

Tony Sutton was appointed as Chief Executive Officer following the departure of Ralph Rimmer in December 2022. Previously, Tony had been the RFL's Chief Operating Officer since January 2019, having joined the governing body as Director of Finance and Facilities in February 2017. His previous roles include Group Finance Director and Chief Operating Officer of Hull College Group, a large Further Education College group with sites across Yorkshire, and prior to that 13 years with Hull FC during a period in which Hull moved from the Boulevard to the then newly-built KC Stadium as well as make their first Super League Grand Final appearance in 2006, following a memorable Powergen Challenge Cup win in Cardiff in 2005.



## BOARD ROBERT HICKS

Robert Hicks was appointed Company Secretary in January 2023. He has worked in Rugby League within the Legal and Operations Department since February 2011, becoming the Director of Operations and Legal in October 2021. He has overall responsibility for the administration and regulatory framework across all sectors of the sport, including player welfare and safeguarding. Robert is a former International match official having officiated at three World Cups. He has refereed two Challenge Cup Finals, two Grand Finals, two World Club Challenges and numerous international matches whilst taking charge of over 500 first team matches including over 300 in Super League. A qualified lawyer, Robert was admitted to the Roll in February 2008 (having previously been called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn in July 2004). He previously worked in private practice before joining the RFL where he was responsible for the drafting of the sport's first set of Operational Rules for Tiers 4-6 as well as being the lead legal person on the 2013 World Cup. Robert has been actively involved in the sport for most of his life, including in several volunteer roles within the community game at Saddleworth Rangers and latterly at Batley Boys.



## BOARD DR CHERRIE DALEY

Dr Cherrie Daley is a chartered psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society (AFBPsS), with almost two decades of experience in high performance sport. Having worked across a wide variety of elite sports settings in both practitioner and leadership roles, Cherrie has a strong appreciation for the challenges involved. Cherrie was a technical lead for the English Institute of Sport (EIS) supporting Olympic and Paralympic athletes, coaches, and practitioners during both the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic/Paralympic cycles. From 2014 until 2022 Cherrie held several positions for City Football Group (CFG) serving latterly as a director, overseeing central performance support services (including coaching, human performance, sports medicine and applied research) for 10 clubs across the world. Cherrie has made contributions to the fields of leadership, sport psychology, youth development and athlete well-being, and is currently engaged in consultancy projects and advisory roles across both sport and corporate contexts, specialising in strategic, organisation and leadership development. Cherrie has been appointed the welfare and safety Lead for the Board in January 2023.



**BOARD**  
**ED MALLABURN**

Ed Mallaburn is IMG Media's Head of Sport, and sits on both the RFL and RL Commercial Boards as part of IMG's 12-year strategic partnership with rugby league.





## BOARD

### JAMIE JONES-BUCHANAN

Jamie Jones-Buchanan sits on the RFL Board as a Board Observer attending meetings, supporting discussions, and assisting in succession planning. Jones-Buchanan also currently holds the new position of Director of Culture, Diversity and Inclusivity at Betfred Super League side Leeds Rhinos. He enjoyed an glittering professional playing career featuring as an integral part of the Rhinos' 'Golden Generation' which oversaw the club's most successful period between 2004 and 2017, playing in seven Super League Grand Finals as well as lifting the League Leaders' Shield, Betfred Challenge Cup and the World Club Challenge on numerous occasions. In 2022, he was awarded an MBE in the New Year's Honours for services to rugby league and the community of Leeds.

