

ANNUAL REPORT 2025



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INTRODUCTION

NIGEL WOOD

OBE

CHAIR



Although 2025 thankfully heralded plenty of much-needed modernisation in the way we operate and govern, it would be remiss to start these notes without a nod to the correcting of an historical wrong that had long created frustration for the sport.

In this year, we finally saw a rugby league player receive a Knighthood for the first time in its 130-year existence with the iconic Billy Boston having the honour bestowed upon him.

The image of Sir Billy's beaming smile when knighted by King Charles at Buckingham Palace in June spoke a thousand words. And how encouraging to see his investiture is not a one-off with Kevin Sinfield also since rightly confirmed as Rugby League's next knight.

Off-the-field in 2025 there was a great deal of change in the governing body. And there had to be.

With clubs increasingly perturbed by the direction the sport was heading – both financially and strategically – it was almost inevitable matters would come to a head.

The previous board stood down in April but the RFL was able to utilise the talents and expertise of various other directors to help navigate the governing body through some critical months.

It proved a delicate balance but the interim board, all working without pay, skilfully ensured the sport arrived at the place it needed to be and, crucially, in line with The Code for Sports Governance and under strong examination from Sport England.

It was an important and invaluable transition which was pivotal in manoeuvring the sport into a position where it can truly flourish and deliver on its obvious potential. Thankfully, I can now report that we have a fully compliant independent board of talented and dedicated directors.

Amid all the upheaval and uncertainty, the interim board was able to turn an inherited budgeted loss of almost £300k into a small profit – further evidence that the right steps were taken to make those difficult but necessary alterations at board level.

In addition, RL Commercial, of which the RFL are a 50% shareholder, distributed a further £1.4m of surplus into the professional game, while the sizeable and significant Club Led Strategic Review allowed the sport to enact a number of important changes and recommendations to augment further.

The positive results of this have already been seen in some quarters but will also be a longer, lasting legacy for Rugby League.

Merging the Championship and League 1 was one immediate result as was increasing the size of Super League from a dozen clubs to 14. York Knights and Toulouse Olympique were invited into the competition following a detailed and independent application process chaired by Lord Jonathan Caine and joined Bradford Bulls who replaced Salford Red Devils via IMG grading.

It is encouraging to see all three clubs, at the time of writing, more than holding their own among the elite and each has brought something new to Super League, literally in the case of York as they experience the top-flight for the first time in the summer era.

On the field in 2025, it was clear Hull KR were the story.

Rugby league has a history of being a rich storyteller, none more so than in the case of the Robins who, after 40 years without a major trophy, remarkably won three in the space of just five months when claiming the Challenge Cup, League Leaders' Shield and Grand Final glory.

York enjoyed similar success at Championship level, holding aloft the 1895 Cup at Wembley before securing the League Leaders' Shield although they fell at the last hurdle when succumbing to Toulouse in the Grand Final.

Fans up and down and across the country eagerly-anticipated the return of the Ashes after an absence of 22 years and that was evidenced with some brilliant attendances at Wembley, Everton's Hill Dickinson Stadium and AMT Headingley.

Unfortunately, the world champions once more demonstrated their killer touch to dominate the series but there is renewed optimism that under incoming head coach Brian McDermott, the Men's side can compete more consistently at the 2026 World Cup.

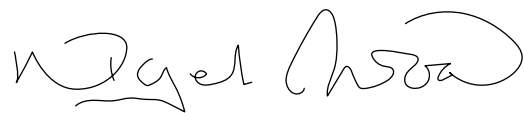
Wigan Warriors dominated the Women's game in 2025 under the expert eye of

former Great Britain international Denis Betts while Halifax Panthers wrestled the Wheelchair Super League from the grasp of Leeds Rhinos, gaining revenge for their Grand Final loss the previous year.

With 2025 being the penultimate year of the current broadcast deal there is plenty of important work ahead to claw back some of the ground the sport has lost financially in recent years.

That said, as the NRL and other investors' continued interest in our game clearly portrays, the sport here is now in a healthy position and has the potential to really make its mark and secure a bright and prosperous future.

We will work continually and with every endeavour to achieve that.



ON FIELD

REPORT



REVIEW OF 2025

Just as 2024 was the year of Wigan Warriors, who won all four major trophies, so 2025 was undoubtedly Hull KR's time.

The Robins had not won a major piece of silverware in 40 years. Yet, they went on to lift three in just five memorable months.

With chief executive Paul Lakin expertly leading them forward off the pitch and head coach Willie Peters masterminding their on-field exploits, the Robins were a force to be reckoned with.

In June, they won the Betfred Challenge Cup for only the second time in their history, the first occasion being the famous 1980 success over city rivals Hull. They followed up with the League Leaders' Shield in September before navigating their way to a maiden Grand Final, defeating Wigan Warriors at Old Trafford to become league champions for the first time since 1985.

At the start of the year, the World Club Challenge, which would have been between Wigan and NRL premiers Penrith Panthers, didn't happen due to logistical reasons.

Although Wigan were keen for a repeat of the fixture they had triumphed in in 2024, their Australian opponents could not commit to the usual February date due to their travel plans around the 2025 NRL season launch in Las Vegas. The 2025 season ended with new NRL champions, Brisbane Broncos, inspired by dazzling full-back Reece Walsh, coming from ten points behind at half-time to defeat Melbourne Storm and end their 19-year long title drought.

It also marked the end of Penrith's remarkable four-year reign as champions. At Wembley, Hull KR defeated Warrington Wolves in the Challenge Cup final and in dramatic circumstances.

Wolves led heading into the 78th minute but Tom Davies' try, coolly converted by reigning Man of Steel Mikey Lewis, delivered an 8-6 victory and sent long-suffering Robins fans ecstatic.

It signalled more Wembley heartache for Sam Burgess' Warrington side who had also lost the previous year's final to Wigan. Wolves scrum-half Marc Sneyd had, for the most part, bossed the game with his kicking, becoming only the second player – Sean Long being the other – to win the Lance Todd Trophy as player of the match for a third time.

Ultimately, though, it was in vain as KR took the first step in securing their trio of trophies.

Wembley's Finals Day began with the Steven Mullaney Memorial Match – the national Year 7 Boys' final of the RFL's inspiresport Champion Schools competition.

Rainford High won after a record-breaking 40-0 victory over Sirius Academy West from Hull, which saw them win their own treble having already secured both the St Helens Schools Rugby League Year 7 Cup and the North West Schools Rugby League Year 7 Trophy.

Marking the 50th anniversary of the competition, the Year 7's record victory included seven tries and saw the talented team receive their trophy from members of the Mullaney family after an emphatic 80 minutes of play.

Next, Wigan Warriors made history as they lifted the 2025 Betfred Women's Challenge Cup trophy in what was both their first final appearance and maiden Wembley outing. They confidently beat holders and fierce rivals St Helens 42-6.

York Knights also tasted glory in the AB Sundecks 1895 Cup courtesy of captain Liam Harris' extra-time drop goal in a 5-4 victory over Featherstone Rovers.

Half-back Harris also claimed the Ray French Award as player of the match in the first-ever tryless 1895 Cup final.

It was the start of a decorated few months for York, who went on to win the Championship League Leaders' Shield on the back of a 20-game winning run and also earn promotion to Super League for the first time. The only negative for Mark Applegarth's entertaining side was losing the Championship Grand Final 10-8 to Toulouse Olympique in October.

York scored two tries but the French side's Joe Shorrocks booted five penalties to see them crowned champions at LNER Community Stadium.

With Super League expanded from 12 to 14 clubs for 2026, Toulouse were also elevated back to the elite. Bradford Bulls were the third club to take a place having finished tenth in the process – above both Castleford Tigers and Huddersfield Giants - and essentially replacing Salford Red Devils whose financial issues had crippled them and saw them finish 15th.

It is the first time since 2014 that three-time World Club champions Bradford were back in Super League.

Carl Foster's North Wales Crusaders claimed the League 1 title after leading the competition for most of the season. Halifax Panthers completed a clean sweep of the domestic honours in the 2025 Wheelchair Rugby League season by holding off a determined London Roosters challenge in the Betfred Wheelchair Super League Grand Final in Manchester. They had already beaten the same opponents in the Wheelchair Challenge Cup final.

Denis Betts' all-conquering Wigan side completed their own clean sweep by finishing top in the Women's Super League and then coming from behind to win the Grand Final 16-12 against St Helens in front of a record crowd of 5,018 at Brick Community Stadium.

Wigan's Eva Hunter also claimed the Woman of Steel award as the competition's best player with Leeds Rhinos' Jake Connor taking the Steve Prescott MBE Man of Steel after a fine debut season with the Headingley club.

He didn't make Shaun Wane's England squad, though, as they suffered a disappointing 3-0 ABK Beer Ashes series whitewash at home to Australia. In the first series against the Kangaroos since 2003, England competed hard in all three contests but were ultimately undone. They lost 26-6 at Wembley before the second Test was played in front of a sell-out crowd of 52,106 at a new venue for rugby league – Everton's Hill-Dickinson Stadium. Wane's side featured in front of another capacity crowd of 19,500 for the third Test at Headingley but suffered a 30-8 loss.

England Women lost 90-4 against Australia in an historic fixture in Las Vegas but returned home and defeated Wales 62-0 in Neath in August.

The England Wheelchair men brought some much needed success, with an unbeaten tour Down Under, setting up their preparations nicely for their World Cup defence in 2026.

RFL

STAFF FOCUS



Barry Pollin joined the Rugby Football League as a Safeguarding Officer in February 2022.

He is now the National Safeguarding Manager, the focal point for safeguarding and ensuring policy and best practices are adhered to throughout the game.

In short, he is responsible for supervising the safeguarding case management process and acts as first point of contact for all issues around matter and processes referrals into the RFL for other statutory agencies.

Having worked for 33 years as a police officer - including time served as a Chief Inspector with the Foreign Office on several tours of Kosovo and Iraq - and chaired British Wrestling for an interim period of two years, Barry has a wealth of previous career experience that can support his current role within the governing body.

The RFL is fully committed to safeguarding the welfare of children and adults at risk in the sport and Barry accepts the responsibility.

The 62-year-old explained: "The role is vital and I appreciate being around other professional people, particularly members of the Safeguarding Case Management Group, from whom I have learnt new skills.

"In addition, I like being challenged and problem-solving: the sport can throw up some tricky issues."

Barry added: "A solid foundation in police work has been useful in many ways and there are transferable skills, for example, the ability to prioritise tasks, handle large workflows, protect confidential information, deliver difficult messages and communicate effectively whilst taking ownership of complex investigations."

The Safeguarding team deal with Local Authority Designated Officers (LADO), Children's Services and the police daily.

Having to explain the RFL's position and affirmative actions taken to protect participants is a matter of course and decisions must be capable of withstanding scrutiny.

The work of the department should dovetail into procedures adopted by other statutory partners to ensure successful prosecutions and good outcomes whilst ensuring the process is fair to injured parties and subjects of concern alike.

Barry added: "But, in truth, I do think I've got the best job.

"Because, in essence, it's all about protecting children and others from harm; the job satisfaction is immense."

For more than a decade, the RFL has worked closely with the Child Protection in Sport Unit (now NSPCC Sport) to develop a culture where safeguarding children and adults at risk is central to the delivery of the sport.

The sport is audited annually, and the labours of Barry and his team have met their highest standard. But what of that rich and varied life before jumping on board with Rugby League's governing body?

When prompted Barry, who hails from Carrickfergus in Northern Ireland, said:

"It's great to be involved in Rugby League - although I didn't play it. I was the openside flanker for the police Rugby Union team so I think I have an appreciation of the resilience required just to get through a game. I came in through the door having worked as the Chief Operating Officer (COO) for British Wrestling, steering the organisation through a full Olympic cycle during Covid and prior to Tokyo 2021, and have never looked back since."

Barry continued: "The journey, I feel, has been a natural progression from policing into sports coaching and governance.

“I’ve grafted to obtain a 1st Dan black belt in judo and won Irish national titles in Olympic Freestyle wrestling, coached Northern Ireland’s Olympic Freestyle wrestling team for the XXI Commonwealth Games at Gold Coast in Australia and given back to both sports.

“Hence, I believe I can understand our community coaches and the performance end of the business.”

In conclusion, Barry added: “Ideally, you do need to come in with some policing or child protection background so you can be confident when dealing with partners - including our own Operational Rules Tribunals – and understanding their procedures.

“Having a sense for what information they require will ensure there’s no wasting of valuable time and discussion can remain relevant and on track.”



TALENT & PERFORMANCE



In 2025, England Senior Men's squad welcomed Australia to these shores for a first Ashes series in 22 years.

With the sold-out signs up at Everton's Hill Dickinson Stadium for the second Test and, also, for the third Test at AMT Headingley Stadium, there was plenty of optimism for the visit of the world champions.

A record-breaking crowd of 60,812 - the biggest ever attendance for an Ashes international in the UK – also watched on at Wembley Stadium for the opener.

England gave a debut to Leigh Leopards forward Owen Trout during that Ashes first Test, a reward for his excellent form in Super League, while Gold Coast Titans' AJ Brimson, born in Brisbane but with an English mother, made his bow in the second.

Kallum Watkins and Alex Walmsley both returned to the fold after long spells away from the international scene. Similarly, Hull KR winger Joe Burgess – who scored two tries in Hull KR's Grand Final win - was called up having not featured with his country since 2015, making his comeback in the third Test.

None, however, could prevent a series-whitewash against the Kangaroos. Despite a valiant effort on the day, Australia remained too strong to overcome in 2025. The Leeds Test also marked the final match in charge for head coach Shaun Wane who had led the England side since 2020.

England Women faced off against world champions Australia Jillaroos for the first time since 2017 at the impressive Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas in March.

Whilst both sides have made significant strides since the 2017 World Cup, a resounding 90-4 English defeat provided clear evidence that, despite England's development, the power of the NRLW remains crucial. A thorough review was undertaken throughout the first

half of the year producing a series of recommendations to ensure future England teams are better equipped to compete with the leading southern hemisphere teams.

It was better news for Stuart Barrow's side in August with a dominant 62-0 win over Wales in Neath. The squad included five further DiSE graduates who excelled through the performance pathway and appeared for the England senior team. Eva Hunter, Grace Banks, Jenna Foubister, Molly Jones (all Wigan Warriors) and Ruby Bruce (Leeds Rhinos) were the latest players to make their progression to the pinnacle of the pathway. Their selections were a result of strong performances for their clubs in the Betfred Women's Super League and the Women's Origin fixture.

The Australian rivalry was to dominate the international calendar for the rest of the year, including with England Wheelchair Senior RL team.

Joe Coyd scored a match-winning try with just two minutes remaining to complete a 2-0 Ashes series victory for England on the Gold Coast, but only after a compelling challenge from Australia which confirms them as genuine contenders for the 2026 Wheelchair Rugby League World Cup in their home country.

Innovation remains an integral part of our talent pathways. The first male Player and Coach Education Festival (PaCE) took place at the end of November with more than 450 Academy Players and staff attending the two-day event at Leeds Beckett University.

We have already made strides in developing our Wheelchair RL pathways with opportunities for youth and juniors and women-only spaces. Building out of the female pathways continues apace with a doubling of the number of fixtures played at Women's Super League U19 level and introduction of the Pathway to Performance pathway for U15/U16 players.

COMMUNITY

RUGBY LEAGUE



The Community Game continued to play a central role in delivering Rugby League's vision of being more than a sport during 2025. Through participation opportunities delivered in clubs and competitions, engagement within educational settings and programmes designed to create positive social impact, Rugby League continued to support individuals and communities across England.

The Community Strategy and Vision 2030 is delivered through three interconnected areas: Community Rugby League, Education and Player Pathways, and Social Impact. Together, these areas create opportunities for people to participate, develop and thrive through Rugby League, while supporting the long-term sustainability and growth of the sport.

During 2025, Community Rugby League participation increased by 1% in core community settings, volunteer numbers grew to more than 6,200 active volunteers, and significant progress was made in strengthening participation pathways and expanding social impact programmes. The year also saw the establishment of the National Community Rugby League (NCRL) and the registration of the RFL Community Trust, both of which represent important milestones in the continued development of the Community Game.

While overall participation trends remain positive, challenges remain within parts of the Open Age game. Declining participation in some areas, volunteer capacity pressures and inconsistencies in competition structures highlighted the need for long-term reform to ensure the sustainability of Community Rugby League for future generations.

Throughout the year, the game continued to invest in participation growth, player welfare, volunteer development and club sustainability, whilst also undertaking the most significant review of Community Rugby League governance in more than two decades.

PARTICIPATION AND GROWTH

Community Rugby League continued to provide participation opportunities across Primary, Junior, Youth, Open Age, Masters, Social and Inclusive Rugby League.

Growth in younger age groups reflected the success of targeted programmes designed to attract and retain players. The national Primary Rugby League Festival brought together more than 350 young players from across the country. These initiatives continue to strengthen development pathways and support lifelong involvement in the sport.

Growth was also evident across emerging and non-traditional formats of the game. Social Rugby League participation increased to 14,792 participants, demonstrating the growing demand for flexible and recreational opportunities to engage with Rugby League. Wheelchair Rugby League continued to expand its competition structure, while Physical Disability Rugby League participation increased by 7% and Learning Disability Rugby League achieved record registration levels.

Girls' Rugby League continued its positive trajectory, supported by the expansion of playing opportunities, dedicated development programmes and greater visibility of female pathways.

Together, these developments are helping Rugby League reach new audiences and create more inclusive opportunities to participate in the sport.

SUPPORTING CLUBS AND VOLUNTEERS

Community clubs remain at the heart of Rugby League and continue to play a critical role in sustaining participation and delivering positive experiences.

Volunteering continued to grow during 2025, with 6,213 active volunteers supporting Rugby League across England,

representing a 3.5% increase on the previous year. Since 2022, volunteer participation has increased by 1,270 individuals, demonstrating the commitment and passion of those who give their time to support the game.

The Development Team continued to work alongside clubs, leagues and volunteers to strengthen governance, improve sustainability and support long-term growth. Investment in volunteer development, education, safeguarding and digital tools helped clubs build capacity and improve the experience for participants and volunteers alike.

NATIONAL COMMUNITY RUGBY LEAGUE

A significant milestone for the community game during 2025 was the establishment of the National Community Rugby League (NCRL).

The creation of the NCRL was driven by a recognition that, whilst participation remained stable overall, structural challenges within parts of the game required a more coordinated and sustainable approach. Developed through consultation with clubs, leagues and volunteers, the NCRL brings together Open Age and Youth & Junior Rugby League within a single national framework.

Representing the most significant reform of Community Rugby League governance in more than 20 years, the NCRL has been designed to improve consistency, strengthen accountability, reduce administrative burden and create clearer pathways for participants.

The new structure will provide stronger foundations for future growth and ensure Community Rugby League remains fit for purpose in an increasingly challenging operating environment.

EDUCATION AND PLAYER PATHWAYS

Education Rugby League continued to play a vital role in introducing young people to the sport and strengthening pathways into Community Rugby League. Through activity delivered across schools, colleges and universities, thousands of young people were provided with opportunities to engage with Rugby League in both participation and competition settings.

Champion Schools remained one of the sport's flagship programmes, providing structured competition opportunities and strengthening links between education settings and local community clubs. Alongside this, the Inspired by 9s programme continued to introduce new participants to Rugby League through a flexible and accessible format designed to engage schools and young people who may not traditionally access the sport.

The college and university game continued to evolve throughout 2025. Competition structures were reviewed and enhanced to improve participant experience and create more meaningful playing opportunities, while growth in girls' college Rugby League reflected the increasing demand for female playing opportunities across the education pathway.

Education Rugby League remains a critical component of the Community Strategy and Vision 2030, helping to attract new participants, support player development and create sustainable pathways into lifelong involvement in Rugby League.

Representative Rugby League also continued to provide aspirational opportunities for players. More than 900 nominations were received for the England Community Lions programme, with 125 players selected to represent England across a range of age groups. The Lions Development Programme engaged more than 4,000 players during the year, providing additional development

opportunities and helping to strengthen the connection between community and representative Rugby League.

Rugby League continues to demonstrate its ability to create positive social impact within communities across England, using the power of sport to improve lives, strengthen communities and create opportunities for people who may otherwise face barriers to participation and personal development.

A significant milestone was achieved during 2025 with the formal registration of the RFL Community Trust, creating a dedicated charitable vehicle to support the delivery of Rugby League's social impact ambitions. Working alongside a network of club foundations and community organisations, the Trust will play a central role in delivering the sport's vision of being more than a sport.

The Community Wellbeing Hub programme also continued to grow, reaching nine accredited hubs across the country, with a further network of developing hubs working towards accreditation. These hubs support clubs to deliver wider community outcomes, including improvements in physical and mental wellbeing, social connection and community resilience.

Throughout 2025, Rugby League continued to deliver a range of impactful programmes focused on education, employability, inclusion and wellbeing. Programmes such as Inspiring Futures, Tackle Our Life and We're On The Same Team used Rugby League as a vehicle to support young people, develop life skills and create positive social outcomes. The Inspiring Futures programme alone engaged more than 1,200 young people across more than 100 school sites through targeted mentoring and personal development activity.

The sport also strengthened its social impact network through new partnerships with organisations including the Department for Work and Pensions,

Parkinson's UK and Humber and North Yorkshire UNITED, helping to expand Rugby League's reach and influence across a range of social priorities.

Through these partnerships and programmes, Rugby League continues to create meaningful impact beyond the playing field. Since 2022, more than £1 million of additional funding has been secured to support social impact activity across the sport, enabling Rugby League organisations to deliver positive outcomes within communities and contribute to healthier, more connected and more resilient places.

LOOKING AHEAD

The achievements of 2025 demonstrate the strength and resilience of the Community Game and the vital role Rugby League continues to play within communities across England.

Through Community Rugby League, thousands of players, coaches, match officials and volunteers have continued to sustain and grow the sport within clubs and competitions.

Through Education and Player Pathways, more young people than ever have been introduced to Rugby League and provided with opportunities to develop and progress within the game. Through Social Impact, Rugby League has continued to make a meaningful difference beyond the playing field, supporting healthier, stronger and more connected communities.

Whilst challenges remain, particularly in relation to participation trends within parts of the Open Age game and the ongoing pressures faced by clubs and volunteers, 2025 has seen significant progress in creating stronger foundations for the future. The establishment of the National Community Rugby League (NCRL), the registration of the RFL Community Trust and continued investment in facilities, workforce development and participant experiences

provide a platform for sustainable growth in the years ahead.

As the sport continues to deliver against the Community Strategy and Vision 2030, the focus remains clear: to strengthen Community Rugby League, broaden opportunities to participate, develop the next generation of players and volunteers, and maximise the positive impact Rugby League has within communities.

None of this would be possible without the commitment and dedication of the thousands of volunteers, coaches, match officials, players, parents, clubs, leagues, foundations and partners who give their time to support the game. Their contribution ensures Rugby League remains more than a sport and continues to enrich the lives of people and communities across England.



MATCH OFFICIALS



Phil Bentham remained Head of Match Officials for the 2025 season – Julian King and Andy Smith were full time coaches within the department supported by Bob Connolly, Gareth Hower, James Child, Matt Thomsason and Ian Smith who all held part time positions as support coaches who reviewed the performance of the match officials in each Super League Game.

Andy Smith was the Manager and lead coach for touch judging for all levels of the professional game

Julian King was the Manager for the Championship and League one referees

Following a long and illustrious on field career, Ben Thaler stepped off the field to become the Full Time Recruitment and Development Manager for the department, tasked with improving the numbers of people taking up the whistle and creating a pathway in which the best performers are given the chance to progress and ensuring the best coaching and feedback is given. Ben is supported by Bob Connolly in his role as the Talent ID Manager and gives more focused coaching to those individuals who he believes will come through the programme quicker to elite level.

The department also had a restructure within the S&C and medical roles with Chris Melling and Hayley Price putting together a detailed S&C programme for the elite match officials in addition to their other roles within the England Programme.

Marcus Griffiths heads up the programme for Women and Girls officiating pathway and in 2025 was supported by Tara Jones MBE in an ambassadorial capacity

RECRUITMENT & DEVELOPMENT

Ben Thaler headed up the Recruitment and development strategy and put a focus on recruitment of players at the Scholarship age bracket who are already within a Super League club to present the opportunity of staying in the game for those

not fortunate enough to gain a contract with a professional club. The Geographical spread of the community game in the South can sometimes present issues in terms of Match Official recruitment, this has been addressed with increased courses and presence in this area as a focus.

Another focus has been placed on each referee at Grade 2/3 level being reviewed in each NCL (Pre National Leagues) and Scholarship/Academy level. This relies on a volunteer base of assessors who are co-ordinated by Ben Thaler.

The overall numbers of Registered Match Officials remained roughly the same as in 2024 but with the age demographic reducing rapidly. Registered officials cover games weekly in Professional, community, Women and Girls, Wheelchair, PDRL, and LDRL levels of the game. Keeping pace with the rate of development of the sport can sometimes prove challenging, particularly the geographical spread – the appointment of Ben Thaler as the Recruitment and development manager has ensured we have a robust plan in place to continue to meet demand.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

2025 saw 26 registered Female match officials at all levels on the game – this was an increase on 2024

22 officials Identified as something other than White – British on registration forms at the start of the 2025 season.

Naz Kahn became the first British South Asian match official to officiate within the professional game when he was appointed to touch judge Swinton Lions vs Newcastle Thunder – He was then appointed to touch judge the Reserves Grand Final between Leeds Rhinos and Warrington Wolves at Headingley



NOTABLE DOMESTIC APPOINTMENTS

Tara Jones MBE joined the full-time refereeing group in Jan 2025 becoming the 9th Current Full Time Match Official and the first Female ever to join the group.

Liam Moore Refereed the Betfred Men's Challenge Cup Final between Hull KR and Warrington Wolves

Aaron Moore Refereed the Betfred Women's Challenge Cup Final between Wigan Warriors and St Helens

Becky Whitely and **Matt Ball** Refereed the Betfred Wheelchair Challenge Cup Final between Halifax Panthers and Catalan Dragons

Liam Rush Refereed the AB Sundecks 1895 Cup Final Between Featherstone Rovers and York Knights

Liam Moore refereed the Betfred Super League Grand Final Between Hull KR and Wigan Warriors

Tara Jones MBE refereed the Betfred Women's Super League Grand Final between Wigan Warriors and St Helens

Becky Whitely and **Dave Butler** Refereed the Betfred Wheelchair Super League Grand Final Between Halifax Panthers and London Roosters

Tom Grant Refereed the Championship Grand Final between York Knights and Toulouse Olympique X111

Carl Hughes refereed the Academy Grand Final between Warrington Wolves and Leeds Rhinos

Milo McKelvey Refereed the Reserves Grand Final between Leeds Rhinos and Warrington Wolves

Cameron Worsley and **Matty Lynn** both made their Super League Refereeing debuts in 2025

NOTABLE INTERNATIONAL APPOINTMENTS

Liam Moore refereed the first Ashes test between England and Australia at Wembley Stadium

Aaron Moore Refereed the World Cup Qualifier between France and Jamaica in Albi



HEADLINE STATISTICS

PARTICIPATION

Total participation increased by 2.9% from 2024 to 2025. Consistent with the trend over the previous three years, this growth was driven by rising numbers in primary, youth and junior age groups across both genders. Overall participation surpassed 100,000 for the first time since 2019.

The youth category in particular saw strong growth of over 6%, including a 6.6% increase in boys and a 4.9% increase in girls. Significant gains continue to be seen within girls' participation. RFL programmes such as Rugbees and Futures have played a key role in this acceleration, supporting growth of 16.5% in primary girls, alongside increases in both junior (5.1%) and youth girls (4.9%).

Men's open age participation remains the primary area of concern, with numbers declining between 2022 and 2025. This trend is not unique to Rugby League and reflects broader societal challenges. The RFL continues to address barriers to transitioning players from youth into open age and to improve retention.

Inclusion programmes experienced strong growth in 2025, increasing by 10.9% compared to 2024. Progress was recorded across all strands, with particularly notable increases in Learning Disability Rugby League (13.7%) and Wheelchair Rugby League (12.9%). Physical Disability Rugby League also continued to grow steadily, rising by 2.2%.

The education sector remains the second largest contributor to overall participation. Compared with the end of 2024, participant numbers across schools, colleges and universities increased by 4.2% over the year.

Social Rugby League also saw continued progress, with participation rising from 14,607 to 14,792 in 2025. This growth was primarily driven by sustained increases in both Masters (3%) and Touch (17.5%)

formats. Try Tag Rugby, as a key partner, made a significant contribution to this total, accounting for 10,980 players.

VIEWING

14.9 million Live Match Audience Across Sky Sports & BBC

Across Betfred Super League, Betfred Challenge Cup, 1895 Cup, Betfred Women's Super League, Wheelchair Super League and England Internationals.

MEN'S BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE

- The regular season average match audience across Sky Sports and BBC was up 50% year-on-year compared to 2024 (72,373 v 108,481), the overall season (after Grand Final) was up +47.3%.
- Wigan Warriors vs Warrington Wolves clash in Las Vegas delivered the second-highest peak audience ever for a regular season Super League game on Sky Sports — and the highest outside the COVID era. The match also delivered best-ever figures for a Super League match in Australia through Foxtel and Kayo Sports.
- The Betfred Grand Final recorded its highest-ever audience share (3.23%, since records began in 2006) and the second-highest average audience (465,137), behind only the 2019 Final.
- This season's top four matches (by average audience) all rank among the ten most-watched regular-season Super League broadcasts since 2015.

MEN'S BETFRED CHALLENGE CUP FINAL

- Achieved the highest audience share for any domestic Rugby League (excludes Internationals) broadcast in the UK since 2022, with 12.9% of the total TV audience.
- Recorded the highest average and peak match audiences for a Challenge Cup game since 2022, with a peak of 1.3 million viewers

- The Final saw strong growth, with average viewership up 32% year-on-year and peak audiences rising 9%.

WOMEN'S BETFRED CHALLENGE CUP FINAL

- Delivered the second-highest average and peak audiences on record for a Women's Challenge Cup match, with a peak of 371,600 viewers.

INTERNATIONALS

- The ABK Ashes series received the highest cumulative match audience for an England Series (2,398,886) since the 2018 Baskerville Shield – outside a World Cup.
- The first Test of the ABK Ashes Series saw the highest audience share (14.15%) on record for an International Rugby League game outside of a World Cup.
- The second Test of the ABK Ashes Series saw the fifth-highest average match audience (886,933) & peak audience (1,061,090) on record for an International Rugby League game – outside a World Cup & 4 Nations.

ATTENDANCE

2.5 million Total 2025 Attendance

Across Betfred Super League, Betfred Championship and League 1, Betfred Challenge Cup, 1895 Cup, Betfred Women's Super League and England Internationals.

MEN'S BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE

- Record-breaking 2025 Betfred Super League attendance, with 1.6m recorded, the highest ever for a 12-team Super League.
- The 2025 whole season average attendance of 10,473 was the highest average attendance we have on record (since 1996).
- Six clubs saw a growth in average attendance compared to 2024.
- Magic Weekend 2025 saw the highest attendance since 2018 (64,156), Sunday

saw the highest attendance on record (32,862).

- Highest recorded Grand Final attendance since 2017, with 68,853 spectators.

MEN'S CHAMPIONSHIP

- The 2025 regular season average attendance (2,003) was the fourth-highest since 2015.
- Seven clubs recorded growth in average attendance compared to 2024.

MEN'S LEAGUE 1

- League One saw an increase in average attendance since 2024 (800 v 763).
- Four clubs saw a growth in average attendance compared to 2024.

WOMEN'S BETFRED SUPER LEAGUE

- The 2025 Grand Final delivered a record attendance of 5,018.

MEN'S BETFRED CHALLENGE CUP

- The Final recorded the second-highest attendance since 2017 (63,278).
- Attendance was up 11% compared to 2023 (64,845 vs. 58,213).

WOMEN'S CHALLENGE CUP

- 8,810 spectators at Wembley for the Women's Challenge Cup Final, the second-highest attendance on record.

INTERNATIONALS

- Highest England series attendance since 1994 Ashes Series (140k)
- Cumulative attendance for the 2025 ABK Ashes Series reached 132,418, an 87% increase over the 2003 series (70,892)
- The opening Test at Wembley drew the third-highest England attendance ever, and the highest outside a World Cup. (60,812)

RFL STAFF

FOCUS



Kelly Barrett first became involved in rugby league central governance around 30 years ago - thinking she was actually applying for a role with Huddersfield Giants.

In fact, it was a British Amateur Rugby League Association advert she'd answered to – and it proved a Sliding Doors moment.

Kelly explained: "I was only 17 and almost straight out of school in Halifax.

"I did about nine months in the sixth form and then replied to an advert in the Huddersfield Examiner about a rugby league job.

"I just thought it was for the Giants. But it was actually with BARLA, who were based in Huddersfield.

"I got it – and I've never looked back."

That was in 1995 and in the 30 years since, Kelly has completed a myriad of roles for both BARLA and the Rugby Football League.

She is currently the RFL's Head of Delivery Community Game Competitions, which is close to her heart given she started out heavily involved in the amateur game.

Kelly was there to see when BARLA unified with the RFL in 2004 and has experience across both aspects of the sport.

"I was National Volunteer Manager, Head of Operations, Rugby League Services Manager and Community Game Manager," she recalled.

"I've had many roles working in both the professional and community game, working under some very, very good people - which has always helped – who have encouraged and supported me.

"There was Maurice Oldroyd and Ian Cooper back at the start with BARLA but then people like Niel Wood, Gary Tasker,

Julia Lee and Karen Moorhouse plus Marc Lovering and Rob Hicks.

"There's too many to mention, really. In terms of my favourite role, that's a hard question to answer.

"But I am enjoying being Head of Delivery Community Game Competitions.

"It's been an exciting time in 2025 especially, with the creation of the National Community Rugby League (NCRL), creating a national framework for community rugby league.

"Men's open age, Women, Youth, Junior and primary rugby league are all now brought under the RFL's governance structure.

"It makes it easier to access, safer, brings more organisation while making it less complex for clubs and volunteers."

Kelly, who lives in Huddersfield, first gained her love for rugby league through her late father Glyn Horsfall.

She recalled: "I watched Halifax growing up – as I was a season ticket holder at Thrum Hall.

"My dad got me into the sport. He used to coach and play rugby league and pushed me to get involved, too.

"We used to regularly watch Halifax together and obviously I'm still heavily involved in rugby league now.

"I've seen plenty of changes over the years. One of the biggest has been how much closer the professional and community game have become.

"As well as my role with the RFL, I've also served on the Community Board for a number of years, helping shape the strategic direction of the community game.

“Some people still think we don’t care about the community game, but we absolutely do. It’s not all about the professional game. We do care and we do listen, and that’s something that has changed enormously over the years.

“People have also questioned the influence women have within the RFL, but that hasn’t been my experience. I’ve always felt supported and encouraged throughout my career”

“In terms of what I like most about this work, I’m passionate about the fact that we’re the sport’s governing body and the obligations and responsibilities that brings.

“The governance is what I enjoy most. That’s important: safeguarding, behaviours and RESPECT, making sure we’re encouraging and attracting the next generation of people to get involved.

“Ultimately, it’s about creating an environment where people want to be involved in rugby league and encouraging the next generation of players, volunteers and administrators to be part of the sport.”

EQUALITY

DIVERSION & INCLUSION



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion has never been higher on the RFL's agenda than in the most immediate past.

Huge strides have been made in two key areas of Rugby League in the continued growth of Women and Girls activity as well as the reform and stabilisation of the Inclusion RL Disability spaces.

All these audiences continue to benefit from elevated competition spaces, greater infrastructure and standards throughout leading to significant incremental growth in participation as two significant highlights. Building on progress reported in previous years, 2025 marked the proposed culmination of the Tackle-It plan as outlined in 2020.

As such The RFL led a review of progress against the targets outlined in the Tackle-It plan engaging with all department leads and reviewing actions to date.

Highlights against these targets include:

- Surpassing target in participants from ethnically diverse backgrounds
- 30% of all RFL employees are female
- Bespoke education was delivered to professional players, coaches and match officials.
- Promotion of ED&I information continues at all major events bringing a spotlight to inclusivity
- A robust reporting system to tackle discriminatory behaviour is also now in place and in use

Looking ahead to 2026, after a period of uncertainty and the departure of the serving ED&I Lead, the RFL has recommitted to continuing the fight against discrimination for all protected characteristics.

By appointing an ED&I lead within the current serving Board, we have further strengthened the sport's commitment to inciting change within the game and ensuring Rugby League is a place for all.

The Inclusion Board continues to operate and support all matters in this space and serves as an independent function.

Internally, in lieu of a direct lead in the space, an internal working group has been set up to ensure progress continues and actions are taken to keep up the positive momentum. Targets will be refreshed over the year and monitored by the working group as a new ED&I plan is put into place for the years ahead.

The RFL's commitment to making the sport a welcoming, safe space for all people is unwavering with the progress made to date plus an eye to the future where we aim to ensure Rugby League can best serve all our communities most effectively.

SAFEGUARDING



The RFL believes there is a duty on every member to create an environment where safeguarding best practice is engrained in the day-to-day delivery of the sport and participants can feel safe.

This was set out in the RFL's Safeguarding Policy 2025:

Duty of Care

Every person, club, league, or other organisation in Rugby League has a legal duty of care to ensure the safety and welfare of any child involved in Rugby League or related activities, to safeguard them and protect them from foreseeable forms of harm.

The Safeguarding Department is committed to ensuring that children can participate in rugby in a safe and supportive environment; we respect the rights, choices, and independence of adults at risk while taking appropriate action to protect them from harm.

Safeguarding remains a core strategic priority for the sport and requires ongoing vigilance, commitment and continuous improvement.

The profile of safeguarding cases changed significantly between 2024 and 2025; while emotional abuse represented the highest-volume category in 2024, physical assault including child on child assaults emerged as the most common safeguarding concern in 2025.

Criminal allegations relating to assault and sexual concerns increased, with safeguarding cases involving alleged sexual offences doubling compared to the previous year.

Sexual safeguarding cases increased from 13 in 2024 to 26 in 2025, however, the data should be interpreted with caution; an increase in case numbers does not necessarily indicate a rise in incidents and may instead reflect improved awareness,

reporting mechanisms and confidence in the safeguarding process.

As a consequence of a small adjustment to the acceptable safeguarding thresholds as they relate to historic criminal convictions, the Safeguarding Department saw a 23% reduction in the need to conduct in-depth risk assessments although they still remain one of the most prevalent types of safeguarding activity and processing DBS applications continues to represent a substantial proportion of the overall workload.

The Safeguarding Department introduced a "triage system" targeting cases that can be dealt with by other partners such as League Discipline Panels.

Despite a reduction in overall case numbers, the Safeguarding Department continued to manage predominantly high-risk cases often requiring specialist input. These matters demanded focused oversight from the Safeguarding Case Management Group, which now meets monthly to review and progress its business.

Other statutory partners including the police, Children's Services and Local Authority Designated Officers require accurate and timely information to assist with their decision making and at Allegation Management Meeting, the RFL is often regarded as the employer for voluntary community coaches and volunteers.

In Autumn 2025, the NSPCC's Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) undertook its annual audit of the sport's safeguarding governance and culture. The audit outcome was highly positive, confirming that the RFL continues to maintain the highest safeguarding standards. The assessment specifically noted:

"Really strong compliance in place but also backed up with actions if clubs are not compliant. Positive work."

This independent recognition reflects the organisation's continued commitment to effective safeguarding practice and robust governance. The RFL is regarded as an example of best practice within the sport community, demonstrating that high standards can be achieved and poor behaviours effectively addressed, despite the limited resources available to the organisation.

Integrity

The RFL confirmed the adoption of the UK Anti-Doping Rules, which are contained within the 2025 Operational Rules and thereby ensure that UK Anti-Doping Rules are binding upon relevant individuals involved in Rugby League.

Additionally, the RFL ensures that any relevant contracts in place with players and individuals involved in the sport contain an agreement to be bound by the relevant Anti-Doping Rules and Betting Code of Conduct, in addition to a commitment from all relevant participants to cooperate with any relevant anti-doping and/or betting investigation and subsequent proceedings. Integrity education continued across the sport in 2025, both in anti-doping and betting. Anti-doping and betting education is mandatory to relevant individuals in the sport, with a provision for stand down in the RFL Operational Rules if such mandatory education has not been completed by a certain date.

The online courses are shared with clubs in late autumn to allow clubs time to factor these into their pre-season plans. The education programme also encompasses the Community Game and there has been a renewed focus on ensuring that community players, all of whom are bound by the RFL's Anti-Doping Rules and the Betting and Related Activity Code of Conduct, are aware of their obligations and uphold the principles of Clean Sport.

The RFL makes available several integrity materials and resources to clubs to

distribute to players and club members, supported by information published on the RFL's website and its social media channels. Delivery of key messages at appropriate forums, such as annual conferences, also takes place.

Anti-Doping

In 2025, clubs were required to book their players onto an anti-doping course, which is compulsory for men's first team, women's first team and, where relevant, Reserves and Academy teams. Both the online course and the face-to-face training provide information on prohibited substances, Therapeutic Use Exemptions (TUEs), and checking supplements and medication. Head and assistant coaches at all men's Super League, Championship and League 1 clubs were instructed to attend a UKAD-hosted education session in person.

The RFL continues to review its UKAD-accredited Educators to ensure that the best possible delivery of education is administered across the sport. As part of its commitment to the education of players and staff, the RFL issued communications and relevant updates to both the Community Game and professional game to ensure that players have access to relevant information, rules and processes pertaining to integrity.

Communications throughout 2025 included the 2025 World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Prohibited List. This was shared with club Doctors and Athlete Support Personnel (ASP) via email and added to the 2025 Medical Standards. Information was also circulated on the process for applying for a Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE), and reminders on the due diligence required around supplement use and the taking of medications.

UK Anti-Doping (UKAD) is the body responsible for ensuring sports bodies in the UK are compliant with the World Anti-Doping Code through implementation and management of the UK's National

Anti-Doping Policy. The National Anti-Doping Policy seeks to facilitate an environment which provides for an even playing field for players and athletes to compete; preserves and upholds the ethics and morals of sport; and safeguards players' physical and mental wellbeing.

This process is managed by UKAD and the RFL through a programme of education, testing and investigation/prosecution of rule violations, in accordance with the RFL's policies and procedures around anti-doping.

The RFL carries out regular monitoring in terms of its compliance with the UKAD Assurance Framework requirements, each of which is derived from the NGB responsibilities set out in Section 4 of the National Anti-Doping Policy. 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 mandatory requirements and provides NGBs with clear instructions on how they can meet them. The RFL submitted the required Assurance Framework documents in which were approved meeting UKAD standards and demonstrating its compliance with the framework.

In accordance with the Assurance Framework, the RFL also has a relevant mechanism via the Operational Rules through which players can confirm their retirement from the sport, and relevant updates and reminders on the process are circulated throughout the year.

Testing

Testing is carried out by UKAD across the entire game and a budget for testing is agreed between the RFL and UKAD at the start of the year. UKAD carries out a combination of in- and out-of-competition tests and, whilst the majority are urine

samples, blood sampling has also taken place in the past couple of years.

UKAD determines which players are tested. The RFL contributes to the funding of this testing, whilst some is carried out as public interest testing. The breakdown of tests carried out is detailed below.

All professional clubs must provide whereabouts information in relation to their training schedules to allow UKAD to conduct out-of-competition testing. In addition, a number of players are part of a Domestic Testing Pool. This requires those players to provide whereabouts information so that UKAD can conduct out-of-competition testing more effectively, including at a player's home address.

The 2025 Anti-Doping testing figures for Rugby League:

	Quarter 4 Jan- March 2025	Quarter 1 April-June 2025	Quarter 2 – July – September 2025	Quarter 3 October – December 2025
In competition	8	45	44	23
Out competition	118	124	116	99
Total	126	169	160	122

Whilst testing is a crucial element of the Anti-Doping programme, the RFL also works in conjunction with UKAD using intelligence to ensure that resources are focused in key areas and where particular concerns are identified. Intelligence-sharing supports the RFL and UKAD in developing effective testing and investigation strategies.

The RFL and UKAD have a data sharing agreement in place which ensures the effective transfer of data and information between the two organisations and provides appropriate legal protections and safeguards. The RFL passes any intelligence in relation to any anti-doping complaints or concerns to UKAD; it is obliged to do so pursuant to the National Anti-Doping Policy.

UKAD also has a confidential hotline which allows anyone to report concerns direct

to them. The “Protect Your Sport” platform serves as an integral tool to protect and uphold Clean Sport and makes it easy for anyone to report concerns directly to UKAD.

In 2025, there were 3 Anti-Doping Rule Violation (ADRV) in Rugby League, with 1 player currently banned from the sport for ADRV. Noticeably compared to 2024’s report there was 1 ADRV yet 10 players were banned from the sport demonstrating a 90% decrease.



RESPECT



Introduction

The RESPECT Campaign remains a cornerstone of Rugby League's commitment to creating a positive, safe and inclusive environment across all levels of the game. As a game-wide initiative spanning the community game through to Super League, RESPECT promotes positive behaviours, challenges anti-social and discriminatory conduct, and reinforces the standards expected of everyone involved in Rugby League.

Throughout 2025, the campaign continued to build on the progress achieved in previous years, with a particular focus on supporting match officials, improving behaviours across the community game and embedding a culture where respect is everyone's responsibility. The campaign is underpinned by clear Codes of Conduct and educational resources that support players, coaches, volunteers, parents, spectators and match officials in creating positive environments for all participants.

Match Official Respect

Protecting and supporting match officials remains one of the highest priorities of the RESPECT Campaign. Match officials are essential to the sustainability of Rugby League and ensuring they feel safe, valued and respected is critical to both recruitment and retention across the game.

The data from 2025 demonstrates significant progress in reducing incidents of abuse towards match officials.

- Total match official abuse cases reduced from 294 in 2022 to 106 in 2025, representing a 64% reduction over three years.
- Match official abuse cases reduced from 155 in 2024 to 106 in 2025, a 31.6% reduction year-on-year.
- Match official abuse represented 21% of all disciplinary cases in 2025, down from 30% in 2024.

- Of the 106 incidents recorded in 2025:
 - 71 related to players
 - 26 related to volunteers
 - 9 related to spectators

These improvements reflect the positive impact of continued education, stronger behavioural expectations and consistent disciplinary action where standards have not been met. However, Rugby League recognises that there is still more to do and will continue to prioritise initiatives that support and protect match officials at every level of the game.

Touchline, Coach and Player Behaviour in the Community Game

Creating positive playing environments remains fundamental to ensuring participants enjoy a safe, welcoming and enjoyable experience within Rugby League.

In 2025, the number of behaviour-related incidents remained stable at 498 cases, maintaining the significant progress achieved over recent years.

- 498 behaviour-related incidents were recorded in 2025.
- This is unchanged from 2024, demonstrating sustained improvement.
- Compared to 1,010 incidents in 2021, this represents a 50.7% reduction over four years.

While the rate of improvement has slowed compared to previous years, maintaining these lower levels of incidents demonstrates that positive cultural change is becoming embedded across the community game. Clubs, leagues, volunteers and participants continue to play a crucial role in reinforcing the values of respect, inclusion and accountability.

The ongoing focus will be on sustaining these improvements through education, early intervention and continued promotion of positive behaviours on and off the field.

Crowd Behaviour at Professional Clubs

The RESPECT Campaign has continued to support professional clubs in creating safe, inclusive and family-friendly matchday environments. Through clear behavioural expectations, consistent messaging and strong collaboration between clubs and the RFL, the professional game continues to demonstrate high standards of conduct amongst supporters.

In 2025, only five incidents relating to crowd behaviour were recorded across the professional game.

- Five incidents were recorded during 2025, compared to 15 in 2024 - a 67% reduction.
- Two of the five incidents related to Unacceptable Language, Abuse and Behaviour (ULAB).
- The remaining incidents were isolated occurrences and do not indicate any emerging trend.

The data demonstrates that the vast majority of supporters continue to contribute positively to the matchday experience. These figures represent a significant achievement and reinforce Rugby League's reputation as a welcoming, inclusive and family-orientated sport.

Unacceptable Language, Abuse and Behaviour (ULAB)

To support the wider RESPECT objectives, Rugby League continues to take firm action where standards of behaviour fall below expectations. In 2025, a total of 29 ULAB cases resulted in sanctions across the professional and community game:

- Professional Individuals -
2 cases resulting in sanctions
- Professional Crowd -
1 case resulting in sanctions
- Community Individuals -
24 cases resulting in sanctions
- Community Crowd -
2 cases resulting in sanctions

These outcomes reinforce Rugby League's commitment to addressing unacceptable behaviour consistently and transparently, ensuring that all participants and spectators understand the standards expected across the sport.

The number of ULAB cases resulting in sanctions remains low relative to overall participation across both the professional and community game

Key Messages of the RESPECT Campaign

The key messages of the RESPECT Campaign continue to resonate across the sport:

- **Respect means treating others as you wish to be treated.**
- **Players and coaches:** Respect officials, opponents and the game.
- **Match officials:** Act with integrity and respect all participants.
- **Parents and spectators:** Support players and officials with positive behaviour.
- **Zero tolerance for misconduct:** Breaches of the sport's Codes of Conduct will result in appropriate sanctions.
- **Zero tolerance for ULAB —**
Unacceptable Language, Abuse and Behaviour will result in sanctions.

Looking Ahead

The RESPECT Campaign will continue to build on the progress achieved to date by strengthening education, promoting positive behaviours and supporting everyone involved in Rugby League to create environments where participants feel safe, welcome and valued. The campaign will also continue to prioritise early intervention and education to reduce ULAB cases further and support positive behaviours across all environments.

The collective efforts of clubs, leagues, volunteers, participants and supporters will be key to ensuring that RESPECT isn't just part of our game, **it is the game.**

SOCIAL IMPACT



RFL Community Trust/ RFL Development Team

A key milestone for Rugby League's social impact ambitions was achieved in February 2025 when the **RFL Community Trust** was officially registered with the Charity Commission.

The RFL Community Trust is a charitable vehicle dedicated to furthering the sport's social impact goals. It works in partnership with the Governing Body and Rugby League Charitable Foundations, connected through OuRLeague Life, the sport's social impact brand, which works across multiple sectors with influential partners to support significant social change through Rugby League.

A total of 25 Foundations have now met the Minimum Standards required to partner with the RFL Community Trust. They are eager to be part of future consortium programmes, showcasing the power of the sport and creating positive impact in communities.

One integral part of the year in this area was the **Week of Social Impact 2025** which was a week-long campaign in which the RFL and the RFL Community Trust joined charitable Foundations in spotlighting the valuable work taking place in communities and celebrating what has been achieved to date.

The 2025 campaign focused on "Building a Better Future" and featured authentic storytelling content centred on the Rugby League family, highlighting communities and opportunities within the sport that extend beyond the 80 minutes.

It was more than just a series of events: it, essentially, became a call to action, and a reminder that each of us has a role to play in fostering a community that cares, supports and uplifts one another.

Whether a lifelong fan or new to the sport, the Week of Social Impact - which began

on Monday 20 October 2025 – served as an opportunity to understand the profound and undeniable impact Rugby League has on peoples' lives.

The RFL hosted a raft of activations around the social impact mission during the week including local primary and secondary schools bidding farewell to England players in Wigan ahead of their first Ashes Test against the Kangaroos and a community volunteering day at Rochdale Mayfield ARLFC.

A Week of Social Impact 2025 highlights booklet was scheduled for release at the end of January 2026.

This showcases some of the impressive numbers involved: in 2025, there was more than 6,000 volunteers and almost 100,000 participants of social impact projects. In terms of **RFL Social Impact Programmes**, the network of accredited Community Wellbeing Hubs continues to grow, with Thatto Heath Crusaders ARLFC launching in 2025 and becoming the tenth accredited hub.

A further 31 community clubs are part of the hub network and are working towards accreditation.

We continue to work with more than a dozen partners to deliver social impact across a diverse range of sectors, including the Department for Work and Pensions, the Youth Endowment Fund, Parkinson's UK, Community Integrated Care and Access Sport.

These partnerships have enabled us to generate £173,227 of additional income through our continued Youth Endowment Fund partnership to deliver Inspiring Futures.

Since 2022, we have attained more than £8.8m to invest into community facilities and generated £1,006,623 of additional income for the wider sport to deliver social impact at the heart of our communities.

WEEK OF SOCIAL IMPACT 2025 ROUND-UP

The 2025 Week of Social Impact saw more communities impacted than ever before from welcoming new partners to increasing the volunteer's landscape. Also, highlighting over **£8 million** of investment funding raised for community facilities and over **£1 million** generated for social impact projects.

This does not mean our work ends here! We will continue to strive towards our mission of having a positive social impact on our communities and building a better future!



This can include 3G pitch investment, small scale grass pitch improvements via the Grass Pitch Maintenance Fund, clubhouse/pavilion redevelopment and expansion to cater for growth plus floodlighting and various other investments.

Finally, we were pleased to announce Wigan Warriors Community Trust as the RFL 2025 Foundation of the Year, with Leigh Community Trust and Castleford Tigers Foundation named as runners-up.

The award was presented at half-time during the Men's Betfred Super League Grand Final to recognise the outstanding achievements of Wigan Warriors Community Trust.

Rugby League Cares

The year 2025 was one of significant progress and change for Rugby League Cares.

Existing relationships with major funders, notably the RFL, RL Commercial, Movember and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), were consolidated, and the charity's pioneering work in welfare and wellbeing across Rugby League and beyond continued to earn recognition. However, the overwhelming majority of the charity's work remains focused on Rugby League, working with the network of Player Welfare Managers at clubs to deliver a range of education, career development and other support – while the Rugby League Benevolent Fund, the charity from which RL Cares developed, marked its 20th year by continuing to support seriously injured players and their families.

In terms of Player Care, a significant new development in 2025 was the funding of an additional staff member qualified at Level 3 at each Super League club to support the Player Care Manager.

The Dual Career programme continued to develop, with 70% of players across the men's Super League engaged by the end

of Q3 – delivering a wide range of benefits including career security after retirement, financial stability, improved employability and a broader social network.

All Super League clubs delivered financial wellbeing education to their players provided by RL Cares, and a career coach was available to all clubs.

Therapeutic services were again offered to all stakeholders in the sport with the value underlined as more than 160 individuals received support from the RLC clinical team.

Steered by Steve McCormack, Director of Wellbeing and Welfare for RL Cares, the sport's welfare policy again measured all clubs' performance to ensure their compliance, and provided support and advice in the pursuit of Gold Standard provision, with regular liaison with club CEOs.

Wellbeing support was again provided to all England teams through the year and RL Cares also maintained its support of former players, led by Past Players Co-ordinator Colin Maskill. The pioneering partnership with Dementia UK continued, enabled by the Brain Health Fund, offering free clinic appointments with a dementia specialist Admiral Nurse for current and former professional Rugby League players.

The Brain Health Fund also supported a bio-marker study to help research blood markers for brain health and concussion in players - another vital resource to the playing community and their families.

There were significant changes behind the scenes in the Benevolent Fund, notably the retirement of Steve Ball MBE who had been the charity's first and only General Manager – offering support and guidance to dozens of players and their families during unthinkably challenging times.

He was succeeded by Francis Stephenson who has driven the renaming of the

Benevolent Fund as the Seriously Injured Players Fund to provide greater clarity. RL Cares also continues to work with Lizzie Jones on the heart screening and defibrillator programmes that have been developed in memory of her late husband, Danny.

The year ended in sad fashion with the death on December 31 of Luke Bryan, who had been supported by the Benevolent Fund in partnership with the Steve Prescott Foundation since suffering a serious spinal injury playing for Haydock Under-18s in 1996.

The Fund and also the Brain Health Fund remained the focus for Rugby League Cares' fund-raising efforts through 2025, which included a return to the USA for the annual charity bike ride – From DC to NYC – with the presence of playing legends such as Adrian Morley and Paul Sculthorpe generating a substantial increase in donations.

The relationship with Movember which had developed around the last Rugby League World Cup in 2021-22, alongside the demonstrable impact of Offload in communities, opened up an opportunity for direct collaboration with the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) on a project aimed at supporting isolated young men and boys and a positive report on its impact was due to be published in the summer of 2026.

There was further evidence of the impact the Ahead of the Game programme has made when it was nominated for a new Wellness in Sport category at the annual Sport Industry Awards in Battersea Park – with RL Cares attending the awards alongside Hull KR, who had been nominated in the Team of the Year category.

GOVERNANCE



Governance Code

The Rugby Football League is committed to good corporate governance and throughout 2025 continued to seek to ensure that the principles of good governance were embedded in all aspects of its work. In 2025 the RFL worked with Sport England on a Governance Action Plan (GAP).

The key governance changes and matters for the RFL during 2025 were:

- Resignation of four RFL Board members January – March 2025.
- Co-opted Board put in place from March 2025.

Board and Meetings

During 2025, the Non-Executive Directors of the RFL were:

- Simon Johnson (Chair) (resigned in the year)
- Sandy Lindsay MBE (resigned in the year)
- Cherrie Daley (resigned in the year)
- Julia Newton (resigned in the year)
- Dermot Power (appointed in the year)
- Emma Rosewarne MBE (appointed in the year)
- Joanna Coates (appointed in the year)
- Lord Jonathan Caine (appointed in the year)
- Abi Ekoku (appointed in the year, served until October 2025 when he became Interim CEO)

During 2025, the Executive Directors of the RFL were:

- Nigel Wood (appointed in the year) OBE
- Martin Coyd (appointed in the year) OBE
- Robert Graham (appointed in the year)
- Tony Sutton (resigned in the year)

- Abi Ekoku (from October 2025 as Interim CEO)

During 2025 the Company Secretary was Andrew Mitchell of Pinsent Masons (appointed in the year). The Board also had two observers, Ed Mallaburn and Joanne Drapier (appointed in the year).

Tony Sutton was the Chief Executive Officer until October 2025. When he resigned, Abi Ekoku resigned his position as a Non-Executive Director to take up the executive role of Interim Chief Executive Officer.

There were eight formal Board meetings during 2025. There was 98 per cent attendance at these meetings by directors. In addition, there was a number of Board meetings held virtually, and further decisions made in writing.

The sub-committees of the Board – Audit & Risk Committee; Remuneration Committee; Nominations Committee; Laws Committee; Community Board; Inclusion Board; Clinical Advisory Group; and Brain Health Sub-Committee met as required throughout the year.

RL Commercial Limited

RL Commercial holds and is responsible for exploiting all commercial rights across the Sport.

The shares in RL Commercial are held equally by the RFL and SLE. The Board of RL Commercial is responsible for overseeing the revenue generation within RL Commercial. In 2025 the Board of RL Commercial comprised:

- A Chair jointly appointed by the RFL and SLE;
- Two directors appointed by the RFL;
- Two directors appointed by SLE;
- An independent director;
- An observer appointed by IMG.

The RFL and SLE worked collaboratively in relation to the appointment of the Board to

ensure it had an appropriate range of skills and experience.

During 2025, the Non-Executive Directors of RL Commercial were:

- Frank Slevin (Chair) (resigned in the year)
- Simon Johnson (resigned in the year)
- Anna Chanduvi (resigned in the year)
- Peter Hutton
- Eamonn McManus
- Paul Lakin
- Nigel Wood OBE (appointed in the year)
- Joanna Coates (appointed in the year)

Ed Mallaburn was a Board observer, Michelle Maple was the Company Secretary (appointed in the year), and the Managing Director of RL Commercial was Rhodri Jones.

Role of the RFL

As the governing body of Rugby League, during 2025 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 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 the Challenge Cup, the 1895 Cup, the Championship, League 1, and Men's and Women's Super League. The RFL provided several core services to RL Commercial in relation to the operation of the professional

pyramid as set out within the realignment agreements.

Representative Teams

England Men's Senior
England Women's Senior
England Wheelchair



FINANCIAL REVIEW AND ACCOUNTS

RFL (Governing Body) Limited
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income
For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

	Note	2025 £	2024 £
Turnover	4	13,743,613	13,515,639
Cost of sales	5	(2,881,637)	(3,538,763)
Gross profit		10,861,976	9,976,876
Payments to or on behalf of clubs and other member organisations	6	(5,533,984)	(5,724,466)
Administrative expenses		(5,466,362)	(4,849,585)
Operating loss	7	(138,370)	(597,175)
Interest receivable and similar income	11	573,340	482,498
Interest payable and similar expenses	12	(430,875)	(393,491)
Profit/(loss) before taxation		4,095	(508,168)
Tax on profit/(loss)	13	56	262
Profit/(loss) for the financial year		4,151	(507,906)

There was no other comprehensive income for 2025 (2024:£NIL).

The notes on pages 25 to 46 form part of these financial statements.

RFL (Governing Body) Limited
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)
Registered number: 05835638

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position

As at 31 December 2025

	Note	2025 £	2024 £
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	14	517,640	555,513
Investments	15	50	50
Investment property	16	-	251,000
		<u>517,690</u>	<u>806,563</u>
Current assets			
Debtors	17	17,412,604	18,293,516
Cash at bank and in hand	18	4,419,079	6,117,666
		<u>21,831,683</u>	<u>24,411,182</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	19	(6,916,037)	(8,763,622)
Net current assets		<u>14,915,646</u>	<u>15,647,560</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>15,433,336</u>	<u>16,454,123</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year	20	(16,466,704)	(17,491,642)
Net liabilities		<u>(1,033,368)</u>	<u>(1,037,519)</u>
Capital and reserves			
Revaluation reserve	23	118,993	118,993
Profit and loss account	23	(1,152,361)	(1,156,512)
		<u>(1,033,368)</u>	<u>(1,037,519)</u>

The financial statements were approved and authorised for issue by the board and were signed on its behalf on

Mr N J Wood
Director

The notes on pages 25 to 46 form part of these financial statements.

RFL (Governing Body) Limited
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)
Registered number: 05835638

Company Statement of Financial Position

As at 31 December 2025

	Note	2025 £	2024 £
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	14	340,000	340,000
Investments	15	389,912	389,912
Investment Property	16	-	251,000
		<u>729,912</u>	<u>980,912</u>
Current assets			
Debtors	17	1,657,503	1,422,332
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	19	(51)	(51)
Net current assets		<u>1,657,452</u>	<u>1,422,281</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>2,387,364</u>	<u>2,403,193</u>
Provisions for liabilities			
Deferred taxation	22	(22,609)	(22,609)
Net assets		<u><u>2,364,755</u></u>	<u><u>2,380,584</u></u>
Capital and reserves			
Revaluation reserve	23	118,993	118,993
Profit and loss account brought forward		2,261,591	2,477,754
Loss for the year		(15,829)	(216,163)
Profit and loss account carried forward	23	2,245,762	2,261,591
		<u><u>2,364,755</u></u>	<u><u>2,380,584</u></u>

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

Mr N J Wood
Senior Executive Director

Date:

The notes on pages 25 to 46 form part of these financial statements.

RFL (Governing Body) Limited
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Consolidated Statement of Changes in Equity
For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

	Revaluation reserve £	Profit and loss account £	Total equity £
At 1 January 2025	118,993	(1,156,512)	(1,037,519)
Comprehensive income for the year			
Profit for the year	-	4,151	4,151
Total comprehensive income for the year	-	4,151	4,151
At 31 December 2025	118,993	(1,152,361)	(1,033,368)

Consolidated Statement of Changes in Equity
For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

	Revaluation reserve £	Profit and loss account £	Total equity £
At 1 January 2024	118,993	(648,606)	(529,613)
Comprehensive income for the year			
Loss for the year	-	(507,906)	(507,906)
Total comprehensive income for the year	-	(507,906)	(507,906)
At 31 December 2024	118,993	(1,156,512)	(1,037,519)

The notes on pages 25 to 46 form part of these financial statements.

RFL (Governing Body) Limited
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Company Statement of Changes in Equity
For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

	Revaluation reserve £	Profit and loss account £	Total equity £
At 1 January 2025	118,993	2,261,591	2,380,584
Comprehensive income for the year			
Loss for the year	-	(15,829)	(15,829)
	-	(15,829)	(15,829)
Total comprehensive income for the year			
	118,993	2,245,762	2,364,755
At 31 December 2025			

Company Statement of Changes in Equity
For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

	Revaluation reserve £	Profit and loss account £	Total equity £
At 1 January 2024	118,993	2,477,754	2,596,747
Comprehensive income for the year			
Loss for the year	-	(216,163)	(216,163)
	-	(216,163)	(216,163)
Total comprehensive income for the year			
	118,993	2,261,591	2,380,584
At 31 December 2024			

The notes on pages 25 to 46 form part of these financial statements.

RFL (Governing Body) Limited
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income
For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

	Note	2025 £	2024 £
Turnover	4	13,743,613	13,515,639
Cost of sales	5	(2,881,637)	(3,538,763)
Gross profit		10,861,976	9,976,876
Payments to or on behalf of clubs and other member organisations	6	(5,533,984)	(5,724,466)
Administrative expenses		(5,466,362)	(4,849,585)
Operating loss	7	(138,370)	(597,175)
Interest receivable and similar income	11	573,340	482,498
Interest payable and similar expenses	12	(430,875)	(393,491)
Profit/(loss) before taxation		4,095	(508,168)
Tax on profit/(loss)	13	56	262
Profit/(loss) for the financial year		4,151	(507,906)

There was no other comprehensive income for 2025 (2024:£NIL).

The notes on pages 25 to 46 form part of these financial statements.

RFL (Governing Body) Limited
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Consolidated Statement of Cash Flows (continued)
For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

	2025	<i>2024</i>
	£	<i>£</i>
Cash flows from investing activities		
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	(46,628)	<i>(59,731)</i>
Sale of investment properties	260,000	<i>-</i>
Interest received	573,340	<i>482,498</i>
Net cash from investing activities	786,712	<i>422,767</i>
Cash flows from financing activities		
Repayment of other loans	(2,282,785)	<i>(3,247,737)</i>
Interest paid	(430,875)	<i>(393,491)</i>
Net cash used in financing activities	(2,713,660)	<i>(3,641,228)</i>
Net (decrease)/increase in cash and cash equivalents	(1,698,587)	<i>206,964</i>
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of year	6,117,666	<i>5,910,702</i>
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of year	4,419,079	<i>6,117,666</i>
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of year comprise:		
Cash at bank and in hand	4,419,079	<i>6,117,666</i>

The notes on pages 25 to 46 form part of these financial statements.

RFL (Governing Body) Limited
(A Company Limited by Guarantee)

Consolidated Analysis of Net Debt
For the Year Ended 31 December 2025

	At 1 January 2025 £	Cash flows £	At 31 December 2025 £
Cash at bank and in hand	6,117,666	(1,698,587)	4,419,079
Debt due after 1 year	(17,491,642)	1,024,938	(16,466,704)
Debt due within 1 year	(3,035,681)	1,257,847	(1,777,834)
	<u>(14,409,657)</u>	<u>584,198</u>	<u>(13,825,459)</u>

The notes on pages 25 to 46 form part of these financial statements.

BOARD PROFILE





PRESIDENT

ADAM HILLS MBE

Adam Hills MBE became the 33rd President of the Rugby Football League in 2025.

The popular comedian succeeded Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, the Speaker of the House of Commons – and became the first Australian to hold the honorary position.

Adam has been a long-time advocate of the sport, often using his media profile to help promote rugby league, having previously hosted Channel Four's Super League coverage and welcomed England's Wheelchair World Cup winners as guests on his *The Last Leg* show.

He has also played a big part in Physical Disability Rugby League since it was launched in 2018, playing for Warrington Wolves, as well as representing Australia in the PDRL World Cup.

On his appointment, Adam said: "I was asked if I'd be the President - and I immediately got goosebumps. I was initially worried that having an Aussie as President might look a bit weird.

"But I spoke to a few rugby league mates who said they thought I was the right person for the job. I guess with my profile, and unbridled enthusiasm for the game, I eventually figured that maybe I can bring some attention to the sport on a grand scale and help showcase this brilliant game."

A portrait of Steve Wild, a middle-aged man with grey hair and a beard, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and blue tie. He is wearing a gold chain with a plaque around his neck. The background is a plain, light grey.

VICE - PRESIDENT STEVE WILD

Swinton Lions CEO Steve Wild was elected as the RFL's vice-president on a two-year term starting in January 2025.

A long-serving rugby league administrator and lifelong Swinton fan, he said: "Supporting the Lions from the terraces at Station Road I am overwhelmed with pride at this appointment, and immensely humbled."

Steve succeeded Trevor Hunt in the role and continues to fly the flag for the sport both from within his role at his beloved Swinton and also through his honorary position with the governing body.

A close-up portrait of Nigel Wood OBE, a middle-aged man with a balding head and a grey beard, smiling. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a light purple shirt, and a striped tie. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

BOARD

NIGEL WOOD OBE

Nigel Wood OBE returned to the RFL Board as Senior Executive Director in spring 2025, having spent 17 years with the NGB from 2001, and been appointed Chief Executive in 2007. He became Chair of the RFL in March 2026 and he is also Chair of Rugby League Commercial.

He originally joined as Chief Operating Officer and Financial Director in 2001, having previously worked as Deputy Head of Finance for BBC North, and for the Halifax club.

He was Tournament Director when the RFL staged the successful 2013 Rugby League World Cup, and became Chair of the Rugby League International Federation the following year, becoming Chief Executive of the RLIF when he left the RFL in 2018.

He was awarded the OBE for Services to Rugby League in the Queen's Birthday Honours of 2018.

A portrait of Emma Rosewarne MBE, a woman with long blonde hair and bangs, smiling slightly. She is wearing a dark top with a vibrant pink and black patterned scarf. The background is plain white.

BOARD

EMMA ROSEWARNE MBE

Emma Rosewarne MBE had a career of almost four decades in Rugby League administration with the RFL and Rugby League Cares, and was appointed the RFL's first Head of Welfare.

She joined the RFL in 1983 in the operations department and was at the heart of major initiatives from the implementation of the salary cap to safeguarding policy and equality work, as well as contributing to the work of Rugby League Cares.

She was awarded the MBE in 2022 for her services to the sport, and specifically to player welfare.

A portrait of Lord Jonathan Caine, a middle-aged man with short, light brown hair and glasses. He is wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue and white checkered shirt. The background is slightly blurred, showing some red and white patterns.

BOARD

LORD JONATHAN CAINE

Born and brought up in east Leeds, and a lifelong Rugby League enthusiast, Lord Jonathan Caine is a member of the UK House of Lords, having been nominated for a life peerage in David Cameron's Resignation Peerages List in 2016, and created Baron Caine of Temple Newsam in the City of Leeds.

He served six Conservative Secretaries of State as a Special Adviser between 1991-5 and 2010-19. Lord Caine was appointed as Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office in 2021 where he remained until the 2024 General Election.

He was a member of the Board for Rugby League World Cup 2021, and has been a long-serving member of the All-Party Parliamentary Rugby League Group, returning for a second spell as Vice Chair in 2024.

In 2020, he was appointed as Chair of a seven-strong Panel to determine which club replaced Toronto Wolfpack in the Betfred Super League, and was elected to the RFL Board in the summer of 2025 as a member of the Strategic Review launched earlier in the year.

Lord Caine currently divides his time between Westminster and his home in Leeds.

A close-up portrait of Dermot Power, an older man with white hair and black-rimmed glasses, wearing a blue and white striped shirt under a dark suit jacket. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light color.

BOARD

DERMOT POWER

Dermot Power is a Chartered Accountant and retired Insolvency Practitioner.

He spent over 40 years in major and international accountancy practices with 38 of them as a Partner.

Dermot has extensive Non-Executive Director experience including as Non-Executive Chairman, Chair of Audit and Risk Committees and of Remuneration Committees.

He has also been a member of numerous Sub-Committees as well as the Governing Council of the accountancy and business advice firm BDO for more than a decade.

Since retiring from practice he has been heavily engaged in the governance, strategy and direction of several successful private companies in a range of sectors.

Having coached junior rugby for over 15 years, Dermot was also a main board director at Sale Sharks where he acted as the link between the Academy and the RFU.

Together with the former England international Fran Cotton, Dermot had overall responsibility for the vision and direction of the Academy together with safeguarding and health and safety.



BOARD

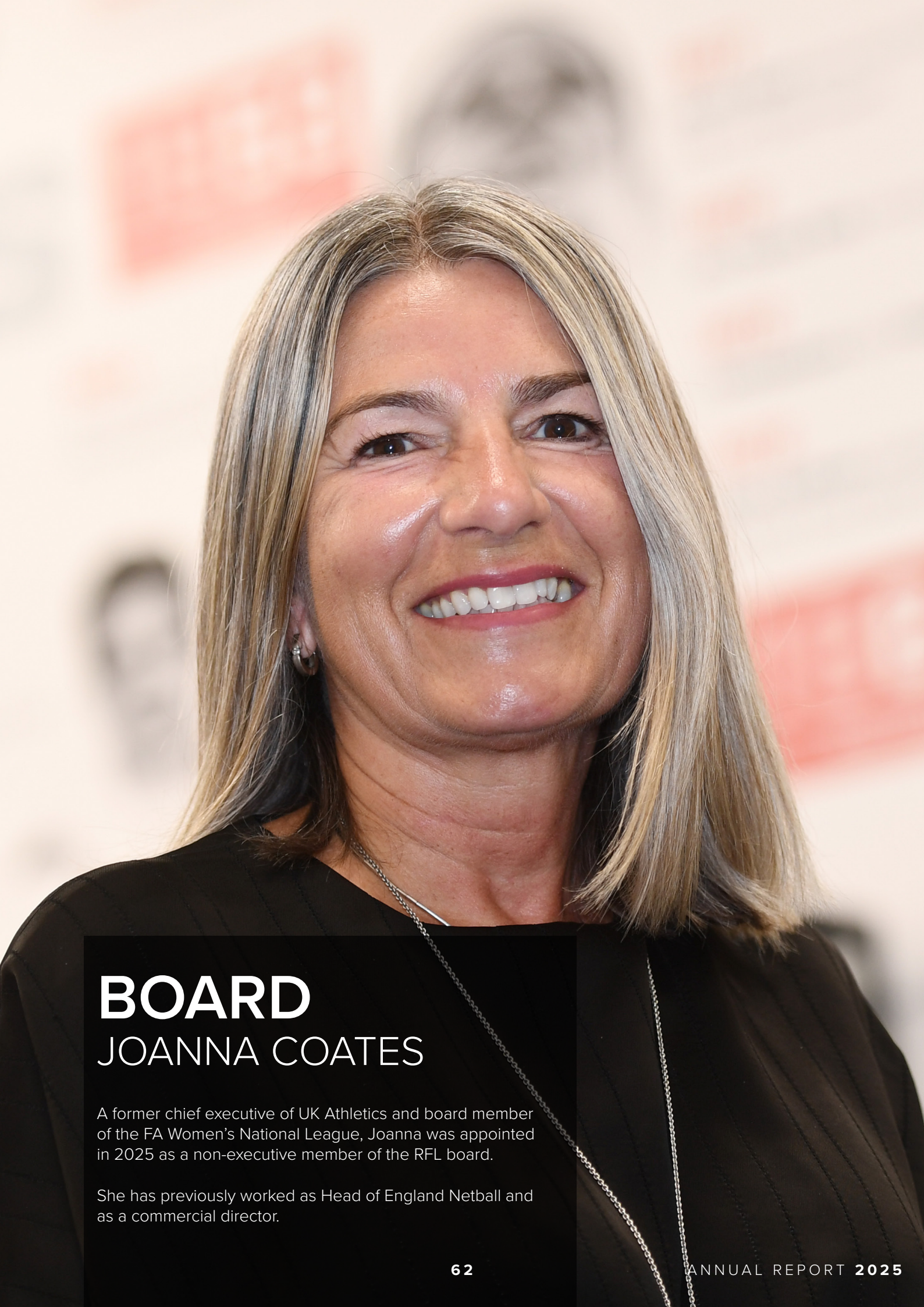
MARTIN COYD OBE

Martin Coyd OBE is the General Manager of England Wheelchair Rugby League, having played a leading role in the development of Wheelchair Rugby League over the last two decades.

Prior to that, he was one of the driving forces behind the recognition of Rugby League as a sport that could be played in the Armed Forces, having served for 18 years in the Royal Engineers – A member of the RFL Roll of Honour, he was awarded the Spirit Of Rugby League Award in 2013 and made an OBE in the 2014 New Year's Honours List for Services to Rugby League.

He has established Wheelchair and running Rugby League at the Medway Dragons in Kent, was Chair of London RL for 10 years and is a long-serving member of the RFL Community Board.

Away from the sport, he is a Stonewall Champion and was named in the SHP list of the 10 Most Influential in Health and Safety in 2017, 2018 and 2019.



BOARD

JOANNA COATES

A former chief executive of UK Athletics and board member of the FA Women's National League, Joanna was appointed in 2025 as a non-executive member of the RFL board.

She has previously worked as Head of England Netball and as a commercial director.



BOARD

ROBERT GRAHAM

Appointed in 2016, Rob joined the RFL as Finance Manager and has held various roles at the governing body including Head of Finance and Director of Finance. Rob was also the Rugby League World Cup 2021 Director of Finance.

Rob's current role is Director of Finance, Facilities and Central Services for the RFL and RL Commercial. He is also a Trustee of the RFL Facilities Trust and the RFL Community Trust.

A close-up portrait of Abi Ekoku, a Black man with a shaved head and a short, grey-tipped beard. He is wearing a dark blue suit jacket over a white shirt. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The background is blurred, showing some red and white elements.

BOARD

ABI EKOKU

Abi Ekoku is a Business Development and Strategy Consultant with significant experience in leading professional service teams and managing multi stakeholder groups - from Design & Planning, through Construction and across Marketing, Sales and Client Relations - primarily in property development and leisure investment environments.

A former England & Team GB international athlete, Abi switched to professional Rugby League in the 1993-4 season, playing for London Broncos, Halifax RLFC and Bradford Bulls.

Following retirement, he was appointed as full-time Chair of the Rugby League Players' Association and went on to be Managing Director of Keighley Cougars, Bradford Bulls CEO and Great Britain Rugby League Team Manager.

Simon Johnson

(resigned 11 March 2025)

Sandy Lindsay MBE

(resigned 28 January 2025)

Dr Cherrie Daley

(resigned 21 March 2025)

Julia Newton

(resigned 21 March 2025)

Tony Sutton

(resigned 15 September 2025)