



**COMMUNITY RUGBY LEAGUE  
MORE THAN A SPORT UPDATE  
APRIL 2022**

## THE RUGBY FOOTBALL LEAGUE

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#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The intention is to provide a comprehensive update including activities undertaken by the Development and Community Game Delivery Team which contribute to the RFL's Community Strategy and Vision 2022-2030. In addition, we will update on relevant Talent programmes and work undertaken by the Match Officials' Department.

#### 2. COMMUNITY RL STRATEGY & VISION 22-30

The Community Strategy is now available on the RFL website and can be found [HERE](#).

This includes a focus on three key areas: -

- Supporting our **Core Community** game participants and clubs
- Delivering broad and flexible pathways in **Education**
- Tackling Inequalities and having a positive **Social Impact**

When relevant there will be updates in terms of **Communication, Digitisation and Insight** which underpin the work in the three key areas outlined above.

Our partnership with Sport England is instrumental in enabling us to achieve our strategic outcomes. We receive considerable support from them, not only financial but also in terms of specialist support, shared learnings, insight etc. We were therefore delighted to announce at the beginning of the month that the RFL will receive an investment of £11.9m of Funding over the next five years. For further information please see [HERE](#).

We are also pleased to announce the appointment of Jodie Cunningham of St Helens RLFC and England, and current Woman of Steel, as the National Women and Girls Development Manager. Jodie is one of several new staff who are joining the Development Team over the coming weeks as restructuring takes place to ensure we can deliver the new strategy. Staffing structure and strategic frameworks will be included in the next update.

##### **Core Community**

The Community Game provides the foundation on which the sport is built. Our priorities are to ensure growth through sustainable clubs and foundations, offer targeted initiatives, and provide appropriate and flexible playing opportunities.

Player retention is key to our ability to grow. To achieve this our ambition is to deliver culture change, improving our environments, and ensuring we are player centred.

**Sustain, Grow, Develop, Flexibility and Govern**

**Sustain** – Supporting Clubs, Foundations and RFL to become more sustainable.

### **Sky Try**

The Sky Try Programme has concluded. Work has been ongoing with Club Foundations throughout the last cycle to mitigate against the loss of Sky Try and generate additional revenue streams. Many Foundations have successfully introduced schools' programmes funded through alternative means.

### **Tackling Inequalities Fund (TIF)**

The RFL secured a total of £300,000 from Sport England's Tackling Inequalities Fund. This fund is to support priority audiences and community clubs return to play after the Pandemic.

During phase one in 2020, the £150,000 budget was awarded to community clubs in the most deprived areas of the country, and Wheelchair RL Clubs. A total of 101 clubs were invited to complete an application. Phase two is in progress and the £150,000 budget focuses on Women & Girl's RL, PDRL, LDRL, smaller clubs who are in a deprived area, and clubs who have players travelling from deprived areas. Over 100 clubs have been invited to apply for Phase 2 funding so far with £70,000 worth of grants to be awarded by September 2022.

The Tackling Inequalities Fund has now evolved into the Together Fund which will run until March 2023 and further opportunities to secure funding will be considered.

### **Rugby League Survival Fund**

The fund closed for new applications on 18<sup>th</sup> March, with the remaining grants to be awarded before the end of March 2022. All community clubs were invited to apply as well as Foundations delivering women's teams, wheelchair teams, PDRL and LDRL teams. The aim of the fund was to ensure groups disproportionately affected by the pandemic were supported and able to return.

Once all applications have been considered it is anticipated £1.45m of awards will have been made to around 200 clubs. However, work will be required in terms of monitoring, reporting, and evaluating the allocations.

### **CreatedBy Funding**

Whilst the window for large grant applications has closed the opportunity to secure a small grant of up to £15,000 remains. The RLWC CreatedBy online portal reopens on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022 and the Development Team will once again be involved in administering applications. A further £300,000 remains within the fund to be distributed.

### **OuRLeague Active**

The Community Game Delivery Team and colleagues across the organisation have worked tirelessly over the past two months to ensure that people were able not only to register but also to join OuRLeague Active. Most participants are paying the membership fee at the point of registration however there are several Clubs (112) that have opted to pay for their players' fees.

We have just announced our second monthly prize draw winners that see not only individual adult, and youth and junior players winning prizes, but also a community club receiving a prize which include "money can't buy" activities such as a coaching session with a coach of their choice.

Early registration data indicates there has been no adverse effect on numbers of active participants following the introduction of the scheme.

### **Play Fund Win – Community Game Raffle**

We will once again be partnering with Play Fund Win to give community clubs the opportunity to fundraise to help generate an additional source of revenue. Over £300,000 was raised last year with this year's target set at £1m. 70% of all entry fees go directly to the community club or foundation with the remaining 30% used to build up the prize pot and cover administration costs. Those taking part have two chances to win through a main draw and specific club jackpot. There will also be some 'money can't buy experiences' including the opportunity to spend the day with an England Team as they prepare for this autumn's RLWC2021.

### **Club Support**

The RFL Safe Club and best practice guides are in place. Community Clubs will be able to access these valuable resources on the Club Matters website. They will assist development through the provision of toolkits, templates, and online learning modules. Working in conjunction with Club Matters will allow additional support tailored to each club's size and needs. Rolling out the Club Accreditation process will be a focus for the Development Team after RLWC2021.

We continue to work with clubs to produce Club Health Checks with the aim of assessing and providing recommendations for club management rather than playing activities. Such Health Checks assist with collection of data around club tenure, organisational structures governance and legal status. Health Checks not only identify areas where support maybe required but also assists the RFL in securing additional funding to support clubs and target it effectively.

### **Foundation Support**

The Foundations continue to be key partners and stakeholders within the sport. Recently we met with Foundations for the first time since the pandemic. Key agenda items included an overview of the recently confirmed Sport England investment and RFL Community Strategy. We also outlined plans for 'InspiredBy' our campaign to drive recruitment linked to the RLWC2021 and how we could work together to support growth of the game.

**Grow** – Update on our targeted growth approach driven through Regional, Local and Club Development Plans with a focus on the following key Target Growth Initiatives:

- Player Development Leagues
- Customer Centric Competitions
- Women's Super League & Women and Girls Community Game

### **Area Development Plans**

We are currently working with 25 Foundations and partners to deliver local development plans. These plans are spread across the country from Barrow & Newcastle in the North to London Broncos and London Skolars in the South. Work is also ongoing in Cornwall to support new activity, as well as Liverpool, Sheffield, Doncaster, Lancashire, Preston and across Greater Manchester. These plans focus on new participants within community, education, inclusion, and social environments. The emphasis is on targeting growth in new and existing clubs, the women and girls' game, and player development leagues thus ensuring we represent the diverse communities in which we work.

### **England Community Lions**

Selection has taken place for the Lions U19 team who will represent England in the European Championship in Italy later in the year. Development days have taken place across the regions with a final selection day recently to pick a train-on squad. Work is also underway with the U16's who will play Wales and Scotland, and U17's who will host a French regional team in late October / early November. As well as playing they will also watch the French Men's, Women's, and Wheelchair teams in the RLWC2021.

The PDRL team will compete in the Festival of World Cups in November and work is currently ongoing with classification and selection days ahead of the event.

The Women's team will host Ireland in early November, the day before both teams go and watch England Men and England Women in the RLWC2021.

England Universities (Men) will compete in the Presidents Cup prior to participating in the Student Four Nations which will be held in Galway, Ireland in June. The England Colleges (Women) will participate in the Women's Presidents Cup competition.

### **RLWC Maximisation**

A key focus throughout 2022 will be to ensure the community game maximises the significant opportunity presented by holding three World Cups on home soil. Utilising the 'Inspired By' hashtag, a campaign and programme of activity is planned to ensure potential new participants are inspired to play Rugby League and have opportunities to do so both before, during and after the tournament.

A co-ordinated approach across Clubs, Leagues, Foundations, Schools and other key stakeholders should result in the largest ever rugby league recruitment drive linked to RLWC2021 activity. Further updates will follow.

### **Player Development Leagues**

Pre-season meetings have taken place with the Greater Manchester Development League and the Midlands Junior League. After two Covid disrupted seasons, both are looking to include more opportunities in 2022. The number of new clubs and teams continuing to grow. We will support the All Golds to facilitate the West of England junior playing offer in 2022.

In addition, new PDLs in Lancashire, as well as and Girls Development Hubs will be the seeds for new development leagues in Cumbria, the South West and London.

Work will start over the next quarter to integrate more player and coach development opportunities into the calendars of the established leagues.

### **Girls RL**

There are more clubs, teams, players, and competitions than ever before for the 2022 season.

53 Clubs  
116 Teams

Currently the number of players registered is 1624: more than in the whole of 2019. We are confident that we will exceed the 2021 figure of 2196.

The Girls' League will run at the following age groups U11's, 12's, 13's, 14's, and 16's.

The National Premier Divisions at U14 and U16 should prove competitive. We will also run regional divisions beneath these. There will also be development leagues for new and emerging teams to facilitate fixtures at an appropriate level.

### **Women's RL**

Again, more teams and clubs are participating in the 2022 competition.

34 Clubs will participate in the Women's Northern Competitions. More teams have signed up for games across the South outside of the WSL South competition as we seek to build a full pyramid.

We will run a Championship, League One, League Two and a flexible Development League.

To align the competition with WSL and the structure of the Women's Challenge Cup we will also start the season with a cup. All teams who have entered will play four group games before a split with the top teams contesting the League Cup and the teams below competing for the Plate Competition.

### Customer Centric Competitions

Summarised below the number of teams taking part in 2022 season within the RFL Competitions and the National Conference League.

	Name of the Competition	Number of Teams 2020	Number of Teams 2021	Number of Teams 2022
1	NCL	49	49	48
2	Barrow & District Youth	50	55	56
3	East of England	9	12	9
4	Girls	88	117	122
5	London Men's League	7	9	10
6	Midlands	8	8	11
7	North East Open Age	8	12	8
8	North East Youth & Junior	36	31	29
9	North West Men's League	72	77	70
10	South West	6	4	5
11	Southern Conference League	14	13	14
12	West Cumbria Youth U12's and above	23	25	30
13	West of England	7	10	5
14	Wheelchair	20	30	25
15	Women's Championship, League 1, League 2 and Development	16	29	40
16	Women's Super League	10	16	19
17	Yorkshire Men's League	83	108	102

#### NCL

The NCL have added Bentley & Seaton Rangers to the competition for this season. Although some teams have withdrawn, there will be 4 divisions of 12 teams.

#### Barrow & District Youth

With a similar number of teams to 2021, B&D Youth will offer festivals for U6-9s, 'friendly' fixtures for U10s, and competitive fixtures for U12s & U14s. Barrow Raiders are proposing to work with local schools to increase the player numbers in areas where clubs may be struggling to attract new members.

### **East of England**

The East of England will be split into North and South divisions, with 9 teams in total.

### **London Men's League**

The season structure is the same as 2021 but the addition of South London Silverbacks the number of teams in the Premier has increased to 8.

### **Midlands**

The Midlands will see a return to a structured season in 2022, with 5 teams competing in the Midlands Premier and 6 in the Merit League.

### **North West Men's League**

There are 4 new teams in NWML, Askam, and Walney (Cumbria) and newly formed Liverpool Lizards, and Wyre Warriors. Haydock and Culcheth have not entered in 2022. A few clubs are not running a second team this year, which accounts for the slight drop in team numbers. There will be 7 competitive divisions, plus a Merit League, running from March through to September.

### **South West**

The South West will continue to run under a Merit Structure. Five teams have expressed interest in participating

### **Southern Conference League**

2 new clubs: Brentwood in the East and Bath Gladiators in the West, will join the SCL this year. 2022 will also see the return of Torfaen Tigers, who did not participate last season due to COVID implications.

### **West Cumbria Youth**

The numbers have grown slightly in 2022 due to the introduction of an U13s competition. These fixtures will be played midweek so as not to impact on the U14s. Some teams have struggled with numbers at particular age groups and have withdrawn from competitive fixtures this season.

### **West of England**

The West of England region is currently undergoing a period of transition, with 1 club moving up to SCL, Oxford moving location to go into the Midlands League and Worcester Jaguars ceasing operations.

### **Wheelchair**

In 2022, the Betfred Wheelchair Super League has expanded to a 7-team competition with the addition of Warrington Wolves and London Roosters. The season will see each team play each other once before a top four, bottom three split after round 8. The top four will play each other a further 2 times before play offs and a grand final. The bottom three teams in Super League will play top teams from the Betfred Championships North and South not only to test the teams in the divisions below, but also give viable playing opportunities for all. The Betfred Championship will be split into regional playing divisions, North and South. Both have 6 teams representing the largest league playing structure to date in the Wheelchair Game. There will be development team festivals and opportunities to play in reduced team size, wheelchair 4's offers. The Betfred Challenge Cup will again be played over two weekends, with a festival instead of a regular round, in qualifying for the final. This year both events, festival and final, will be played at Hull University's new Allam Arena.

## **Yorkshire Men's League**

The YML has had a handful of new teams (Harrogate Hawks, Rycroft Hammers and Derby Elks) and a couple returning (Castleford Panthers and Underbank Rangers). Two more divisions have been added in 2022: Premier to Div 7 (split into A, B and C) in 2022. New for 2022 is a Cup Competition. This consists of 4 separate competitions, with teams pooled together based on their respective divisions.

## **Develop**

### **Player Development Steering Group**

This group is driving cross-departmental work to develop a more connected approach across Coaching, Development, Operations, and Performance.

The focus is on the key interventions within the strategies of each department (Sport England and Community Game Strategy 2022-2030) and aims to deliver the player development framework.

From the following areas:

- Player Development Leagues – both new and incorporating values into existing leagues
- National Player Development Framework roll-out
- Player Engagement Project including App/comms
- Digital Engagement
- Community Coach Development
- England Talent Pathway (ETP)
- ETP 14+
- Girls Development/Talent
- Talent Inclusion
- Primary RL

Player Development Leagues, Primary RL and ETP have been prioritised. New PRL CPD has been rolled out and ETP CPD is being reviewed. Player Development League will see new offers in Lancashire throughout 2022.

## **Player Engagement**

The Player Engagement App; a key part of the hub, is a digitisation of the National Player Development Framework. It is in the development phase but will give each player a unique opportunity to see what age and stage-specific skills look like, together with a deeper understanding of whether they can complete the skill in a range of different settings.

The app will sit within OurLeague and will include the modules Skill to Play, Move to Play, Live to Play and Think to Play.

A Soft launch is planned for Summer 2022 with a full roll out in 2023.

## **Coach Engagement Development and Education**

There are several Coach development and education modules on Our Learning Zone which are free to access and available across four open groups. The number of free to access coach development modules currently stands at 40+. Further coach development resources will be developed and shared throughout 2022 covering more examples of coaching activities and practices.

## **Coach Registrations**

Currently 2622 coaches are registered for the 2022 season. Some registrations records show that a significant number of coaches still need to complete qualifications that were impacted by the pandemic.

Emails will go to all unqualified coaches after 31<sup>st</sup> March informing them of the requirements to be licenced as a coach to deliver Rugby League activity, together with a reminder about the risks of not being qualified from an insurance perspective.

### **Coach Education Programme**

The 2021-22 Coach Education programme is now back to pre-pandemic levels.

To date 52 courses are either planned or delivered across both Level 1 and Level 2.

We are continuing to work closely with Community Leagues and Regions to identify demand and catch up on the backlog of coaches who still need to complete coaching qualifications now that we are able to deliver a full programme without any restrictions.

### **CoachRight 2022 Mandatory CPD Education**

As of 9th March, there were 2670 completed courses across all versions of CoachRight (Primary 1017 Youth 1092 Adult 561). The 2022 course has 2 new sections for coaches to complete Inclusion & Diversity, and Coaching Behaviours.

### **Coach Development Group**

The number of coaches in the group has risen from 833 to 1414 since the start of the year. A new resource, Raise Activate Mobilise Potentiate Warmup, was added in January which 306 coaches have accessed.

We are currently working on some resources to support Level 1 and Primary Rugby League coaches

### **Primary Rugby League Working Group**

Primary Rugby League Coach Workshops are currently being delivered by RFL staff and Foundations across the country. Around 300 coaches have attended the workshops to date.

The Primary Rugby League Coaches' handbook has been updated for 2022 and sent to all coaches registered at U6-U11.

The Parent Information sheet has been created and was sent on 22<sup>nd</sup> March to all parents of children registered at age groups U6-U11.

A press release will go out at the end of March promoting the above as we start the new Primary Rugby League Season.

### **Women's Leadership and Performance Coach Development Programme**

We are now currently in month ten of the programme. The remaining coaches have just finished block 3 which focused on Understanding the Environment and culminated in a 2 day residential Workshop.

Discussions are still ongoing in relation to the 2nd year of the programme and potential amendments. The application process is to be disseminated in late March. Successful applicants will be inducted onto the programme in May.

**Flexibility** – more flexible, social ways to play rugby league

**Try Tag:**

We continue our excellent relationship with Try Tag Rugby (TTR). 10,000 players took part in activity during 2021. Key aims for 2022 are for more exposure of the playing offer via Our League, the development of a junior playing offer, and to connect with a wider playing audience.

**Touch RL:**

During 2021 we had 40 sites with all registrations via GameDay. In 2022 this will be linked to Our League Active. The Foundation Touch series has grown and launched in Newcastle on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March. This year we expect 10 men's, 8 women's, 4 junior boys' and 14 junior girls' teams. A formal relationship is now in place with the England Touch Association.

**Masters RL:**

This format includes Our League Active as part of the registration process. In 2021 there were 2,000 players and further growth is anticipated. The offer launched on 12<sup>th</sup> March and will use increased social media to promote further opportunities to play. The Masters Management Group has plans to grow in 2022 with a larger calendar of mass participation events including Blackpool, regional festivals, international festivals, and a Festival of World Cups. Masters are now aligned to the Community Lions programme for all ingoing and outgoing tours and associated selection criteria.

**X-League:**

Twelve new clubs played in 2021 and new expressions of interest have been received. The offer is now also aligned to the Community Lions programme. There is now more emphasis on reward and recognition via Lionhearts. Rule standardisation has taken place throughout the close season and close work with the RFL Match Officials Dept and master's RL has accelerated this process. The offer will also align to Our League Active in 2022 and will see 4 big events throughout the year.

## **Govern**

One of the key themes which emerged from the Game Wide Review was around the control and influence of the RFL. A steering group was established to make recommendations on the steps the sport needs to take:

- Competitions and NGB to improve links between local schools and clubs
- Improve stakeholder relationships through more effective communication
- Stronger governance from NGB; influence competition offers where possible and create alternative offers where necessary
- Review regulations across the youth and junior game to reduce barriers to volunteering whilst maintaining high standards
- Ensure competition rules are consistent and maintain integrity whilst not acting as a deterrent preventing players taking part in the game
- Increase the number and quality of Match Officials

These recommendations then led to the key aspiration to 'Build and develop a 'One Game structure.'

### **Regional Development Forum**

It is our intention to establish Regional Development Forums which will be made of key stakeholders to ensure that the recommendations can be met and that the game can continue to flourish.

In 2021 we ran a pilot with the Southern Regions. The initial group included RFL Executives, Four Regional chairs (London and Southeast, Midlands, West of England and South West), and will include 2 independent members in 2022. Due to the size of the Southern Regions, there will then be Four Regional Development Forums. Key stakeholders currently being identified and approached. The aim is to have these groups in place by May 2022

The SCL Management Group will evolve into a Southern Competition Management Group able to support and develop competition structure and format across the South of the country. This group will be aligned to the SRDF structure to guarantee transparency and connectivity across the different groups and competitions, while ensuring competition isn't the only major focus of the regional stakeholder group.

## **Sports Code of Good Governance**

At their meeting in March, the Community Board reviewed the proposed Community Game Governance Framework which sets out plans for issuing guidance to Clubs and Leagues.

There are a number of advantages of improving the Governance of both Community Game Competitions and also Clubs:

1. Better decision making.
2. Ensuring the decision-making forums within organisations represent the communities in which they are based. In turn this will inspire greater inclusivity and diversity within that organisation.
3. Increasing accountability of the people making decisions.
4. Improving communication with stakeholders which will in turn increase not only the profile of the organisation but also the relevance of that organisation within the wider community it serves.
5. Reducing exposure to risk and liability.
6. Protecting all involved in the sport and ensuring that participants feel engaged and can make a difference when it comes to making changes to the sport.
7. This will ensure that Clubs have the ability to attract more members, understand their community and the positive social impact they can have.

The framework sets out the 13 principles of good governance as approved by the RFL and goes on to make recommendations about what minimum standards are for both a Club and a Competition.

The expectation is that Clubs and Competitions will be able to meet all requirements by the end of the next Sport England funding cycle in 2027. The principles would only be guidance for Community Clubs, but certain criteria would be mandatory within Club Accreditation and Club Development Plans.

The key principles in deciding the minimum standards are:

1. Organisations are made up of volunteers whose time is precious. Therefore, what we include must be achievable, understandable, and based on protecting volunteers.
2. Good governance and structures support better decision making and improve accountability of Management Groups to ensure each is representative of its community.
3. A framework encourages volunteers to become involved in their local club/league by making their involvement clear, accountable and skills based. Club Accreditation will have a dedicated section on Club Governance that will set out the mandatory elements of good governance for Clubs. This document will be used to shape the mandatory elements of such accreditation.

## Enjoy the Game

A significant amount of work has been undertaken with meeting with the Competition Chairs and Discipline Chairs to address the perceived inconsistency with the approach to issuing misconduct sanctions. To support this, a generic dismissal report form has been created and circulated to all Competitions and Match Officials for them to use when dealing with misconduct cases. It was agreed that all results of discipline cases are to be sent to the RFL who will monitor and report on the discipline cases across the community game.

To address these issues, all match official abuse cases will be referred to the Safeguarding Management Group for assessment. They will determine whether this is a safeguarding case, due to the match official being Under-18 or whether the League can deal with these cases directly.

To support Clubs in spreading the Enjoy the Game message posters have been refreshed and are available for Clubs to download from the website. In addition, we have turned the Respect Code of Conduct into a document to be shared within Clubs to reinforce the importance of adhering to these. There are all available on the RFL website [HERE](#).

In 2022, in conjunction with the NCL, we will be running a bodycam initiative which will see match officials wearing bodycam's during play. Together, with copies of the games, the bodycam footage can be used in reviewing games and environments.

A touchline behaviour project is being run in conjunction with Liverpool John Moore's University, to gain more intelligence on touchline behaviours. This will allow a more focused intervention to improve environments. It involves:

- 1) A survey to be distributed to players, parents, coaches, and officials. The first will be in March and the second in Aug/Sept.
- 2) identification of focus groups/clubs to include representatives of players, parents, coaches, and officials.
- 3) video observation to establish comparisons between:
  - a. Area Comparison
  - b. Age Comparison
  - c. Competition Comparison
  - d. Time of year Comparison
  - e. When in the game Comparison

## Game Day Manager Training

The Game Day Manager training course has been updated. To date we have had 1350 people undertake this course. All Game Day Managers need to retake the course.

## Operational Rules

At pre-season Clubs meetings we highlighted the changes to the sentencing guidelines for 2022.

There are now tougher sanctions for offences involving contact to the head, such as punching, kicking and headbutting. If a match official sees an intentional head butt or strike to the head during play this will result in an immediate red card.

The main reasons for the changes are as follows.

- Player welfare is paramount. All players have a right to enjoy the game.

- The Laws Committee had expressed concerns about the On Field Sentencing Guidelines for breaches of Law 15.1 (a) in relation to Punching/Kicking and Headbutting.
- Tougher sanctions offer a stronger deterrent to violent play, which has no place in the modern game.
- Foul play damages Rugby League's reputation as a game for everybody to enjoy and is a barrier to increase participation and potential commercial investment.
- Rugby League, like all sports, must protect itself from future litigation claims by taking a firm stance against intentional acts of misconduct on the field.

These changes bring penalties for 'intentional acts' in line with those set out within the On Field Sentencing Guidelines. Sentencing Guidelines can be found on the RFL website [HERE](#).

The Community Game Development Team will monitor all discipline cases across Competitions.

The Community Board Regulatory Group will meet in May to review any proposed changes to the 2023 rules.

### **Education Resilience and Pathways**

RL delivery in education settings gives the opportunity to reach participants who may otherwise never get the opportunity to experience the sport. Playing offers and educational resources will be widened and will cover all variations of the sport. Our aim is to ensure the educational pathway is broad and flexible and contributes to the growth and development of Rugby League across the country.

#### **Schools**

Champion Schools qualifying competitions have been completed across all regions. The boys' and girls' matches and festivals have been well attended. This success shows the valuable work done during the pandemic to provide virtual activities and safe return to play resources has ensured that Rugby League has retained its value within school sports. The National rounds of the competition are now underway in all year groups.

Information about the return of the School Games National 9s has been shared through Foundations. Qualifying festivals will begin after Easter. In some areas, schools participating in alternate Rugby League formats have been offered the chance to participate in the finals event. The competition this year will retain its RLWC2021 theme and be branded 'Inspiration All 9s' and will include a girls offer for the first time.

Membership of the Education Resources group has grown to over 700 users. The use of the platform has been expanded to include sharing of regional and national Champion Schools results, pathways and updates.

The 'Introduction to Teaching Rugby League' course has been delivered to 12 cohorts across 8 institutions since September 2021. A total of 220 future PE teachers and sports coaches have accessed this. Discussions are continuing to add 7 other Universities to the delivery in 2022-23.

Several Foundations have delivered events in a variety of formats to engage with new schools and new players as part of their development plans.

#### **Colleges**

The College season for the vast majority of teams finished at the end of March. The season will culminate with the College Cup Final on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, which will be held at Headingley Stadium in Leeds.

This season we operated with 4 Divisions, Premier, Championship, Yorkshire and North West. A number of divisions have been disrupted with Covid, more so in the early part of the season. Since the turn of the year, we approached all teams to provide an indication as to what level of activity they wished to be involved in from January through to the end of the season. This allowed us to cater for teams who wanted to play regularly, would prefer to play every now and again, or would struggle to play at all. New dates were issued for all postponed games, and additional scheduled fixtures were provided to ensure all those that wanted regular match activity had fixtures issued.

At the start of the season dates were scheduled to host Girls' Festival events. On 5 occasions these were regionalised with a Yorkshire and North West event taking place on the same date. On 2 occasions National events were held. The final events took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March. These events have been successful, although attendance has been variable. There is a good foundation to work from.

We have also introduced the festival approach within the Boys game as a result of feedback. Both Leeds Rhinos Development Activity and New College Pontefract hosted successful 9s events on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March. We will work with other Foundations to replicate this activity across a number of venues next season.

### **Universities**

The University season ended with BUCS Big Wednesday on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March. The event saw the National Championship Final between Northumbria University and Leeds Beckett which resulted in a 4<sup>th</sup> successive victory for Northumbria. Hull University took the spoils in the National Trophy Final against Birmingham University.

Earlier in the month Loughborough University's 2<sup>nd</sup> team won the Midlands Conference Cup overcoming Leicester University 24-16. The University of Manchester were victorious in the Northern Conference Cup Final edging out the University of Sheffield 16-12.

BUCS Rugby League 9s returns to the calendar on April 6<sup>th</sup>, with a competition for Championship, Trophy, and a Women's event. This will coincide with a Forum to meet the key stakeholders from the teams and hold an open discussion with the objective of growing the competition entry back to its pre-pandemic levels.

### **Social Impact**

Our Social Impact work is the sports USP. We will continue to develop work in this area by tackling inequalities and further embedding the Our League Life brand and principles. This will maximise Rugby League's proven ability to deliver positive social impacts beyond traditional sport into the heart of our core communities.

### **Inclusion RL**

The PDRL season is now set with a record 7 teams participating in the regular season, Warrington Wolves, Warrington Wire, Leeds Rhinos, Wakefield Trinity, Castleford Tigers and Wigan Warriors will be joined by Bradford Bulls who are in their inaugural season. A further 2 development teams, (Leigh Centurions and Salford Red Devils), will be playing throughout the year as well.

We anticipate significant growth in participation figures this year. Our aim is to develop specific opportunities within the festivals for juniors to ensure young people with disabilities have an appropriate playing opportunity and can enjoy participating. The finals day will be at a headline venue and give the final domestic event of the year an extra special feel. We are also exploring opportunities for PDRL teams to play at both Magic Weekend and Grand Finals. We have secured the largest ever level of support for PDRL teams. This enables us to continue to drive up standards and create the best, most welcoming, and impactful environments for our disabled athletes.

Hopwood Hall College will become the central base throughout the year where the Lions Team will meet and train. The sport has also been invited to attend Limb Powers adult and junior festivals to showcase the sport to demographics of individuals living with limb difference and all interested parties. Both events are hosted at Stoke Mandeville stadium, the birthplace of the Paralympics. The England Community Lion's team, the premier PDRL squad in the world, will represent us. This will create the biggest opportunity to raise the profile of the sport in the disability landscape. The PD Origin game will once again be hosted at Warrington's Victoria Park venue.

The Learning Disability Super League has continued to grow this season with 3 new teams/foundations. The season will be shorter than previous years, but each festival will have a greater impact and larger participation. There will be opportunities for Foundations to host smaller scale exhibition opportunities away from the central activity. This will ensure more games are played and more activity occurs whilst still focussing on large scale festivals. The season will culminate with a world cup themed event at Leeds' Emerald Headingley Stadium, which will also see all participants invited to World Cup activity during tournament time.

## **Our League Life** - Maximising RL's ability to deliver positive social impact beyond sport

### **Inspiring Futures**

From January, the Foundations will participate in a Randomised Control Trial (RCT) with 2 schools each. Following completion of the RCT, Manchester Metropolitan University will collate and evaluate the results which will be shared with the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF). If the results prove that the Inspiring Futures project has a positive impact on the choices and behaviours of the children and young people involved, we hope to acquire more YEF funding and expand the project to include more Foundations and schools.

### **Street Games**

We are developing a partnership with Street Games. This will link in with their sport offers and act as an entry point for youngsters from LSEG (Lower Socio-Economic Groups) and link with the new player development league in Greater Manchester. This partnership is part of a wider project to break down the barriers people from less affluent areas face when trying to access sport.

### **Our League Life Community Hubs**

The Development Team assisted by Ian Braid DOCIA sport is working with 5 community clubs to establish a sustainable network of community wellbeing hubs. The key objectives are to improve the health and well-being of the local community, develop a community hub at the clubs based on wellness, and support the growth of social activities.

### **Volunteer Workforce**

We are finalising an update of the volunteer strategy and have recruited a new Volunteer Manager who will work with the RLWC2021 before returning to the RFL after the tournament. The role will be focussed on supporting the recruitment, training, deployment, and retention of new volunteers into community Rugby League clubs.

### **Facilities**

Through our involvement with the Pitch Advisory Service, we now have a full time Rugby League Key Account Manager (Richard Eastman) in post. Richard has completed over 30 Club Agronomist Pitch Reports and is supporting the volunteer workforce to maintain and improve pitches and environments. Two development opportunities have also been delivered including a webinar and workshop at the Halliwell Jones Stadium on equipment and marking out Rugby League pitches. We also now have in place an online toolkit specific to Rugby League [here](#) and an online OuRLearning Zone community to access education and qualifications linked to becoming a Level 2 qualified Grounds Manager.

We are also working with consultants, funded through the RFL Facilities Trust, to produce a new RFL Facilities Strategy. The last strategy was produced in 2017 and underpinned the securing of funds to deliver the RLWC2021 CreatedBy programme. The new strategy will be instrumental in sourcing new capital funding.

## **Communications (Stakeholder Engagement)**

We continue to send weekly communication out to Community Clubs and Leagues. In 2022 we will streamline our messaging.

### **Digitisation**

#### **Our Learning Zone**

The RFL have just agreed another 3-year partnership with Hive Learning for use of the Our Learning Zone platform. . During the initial 3-year partnership some key milestones were noted:

- Over 9,000 users have accessed the system
- There have been 1,530,000 learning interactions on the platform
- There have been 978,000 views of resources on the platform
- There have been approx. 30,000 course completions of education modules on the platform
- 60% of users access the platform on their mobile phone

### **Insight**

Work is continuing with Sport England to put in place a monitoring, evaluation and learning framework from 2022 onwards. We will continue to report on numbers of active participants, but we will also see a far greater emphasis on shared learnings and being able to measure the impact of taking part in Rugby League.

## **3. TALENT PROGRAMMES**

### **Talent Development Under-12 to Under-14**

#### **ETP 12 – 14**

ETP 12 – 14 has entered a review process to update the programme, focusing on aligning the scheme with the Player Development App. Education modules are currently being re-written and discussions have been held with the clubs on changes to the scheme including the potential for open access festival activity based around small sided games which explore a specific theme. These discussions will be extended to the community playing leagues.

#### **ETP14+**

ETP 14 + has been delivered by 12 foundations over the past 12 months, offering a playing opportunity and later development pathway for over 400 players. A number of players have progressed to licensed academies, Community Lions, Development Academies. This helps to support their retention in the community game.

A review of the programme is underway with consideration being given to align all playing opportunities into one playing window from November – February.

#### **Talent Inclusion**

Olivia McDonagh has been appointed as the new Talent Inclusion Officer. She took up her post in February.

East Manchester Academy are piloting a 12-week Inclusion and Rugby League programme. This includes classroom sessions and an outdoor introduction to RL. This will be supported by an After-school club. This programme will be extended after Easter to 2 more schools.

An Open access Talent Hub will be launched in Manchester after Easter, open to both boys and girls focusing on players from under-represented communities. This will be targeted at U12 – U16.

The Tackle IT Academy for boys from under-represented communities, which runs on similar lines to the girls Diploma in Sporting Excellence (DiSE), will see 7 players commencing the programme in September 2021. These activities are all based in London and the home counties.

## Academies

### Licensed Academies

The three probationary Licensed Academies continue to be monitored. This has seen improvements as they progress towards achieving a status of “Good” in the Accreditation. Should they attain this, they would achieve a full licence to the end of 2027.

All Academies have received the newly adopted format of criteria for the Accreditation process and will be visited between May and the end of October. The visits will be carried out by an independent assessor, who will then report back to the clubs and the RFL.

The U18's season has commenced with all player registrations being closely monitored by the RFL in light of clubs being able to sign players on professional contracts or on community registrations. This is to make sure that there is a system to monitor the impact upon the club's recruitment numbers in 2022.

The U16 games programme has been agreed for 2022 with mid-week games, to avoid any clashes with the community game, and any potential clashes with champion schools' fixtures. London had to withdraw from the first four U16's fixtures. This allowed an opportunity to be taken up by Salford Red Devils, who currently do not have a scholarship. Salford have run a successful EtP 14+ programme in recent times, and have been engaging with local players from Manchester and other areas not populated with Licensed Academies. They have also formed a relationship with Wales RL and will look to engage with some of these players within this opportunity.

### Reserves

After some delays due to weather, the Reserves competition began at the end of February. This pool of players will be closely monitored by the RFL with regards to player registrations and playing opportunities in 2022.

**Development Academies** - All Development Academies are back playing.

Current Development Academies – Wakefield Trinity/Wakefield College, Hull FC/ Hull Foundation Sports College, Hull KR/Archbishop Sentamu/Hull College, Salford Red Devils/Eccles Sixth Form, Halifax Panthers/Calderdale College, Bradford Bulls/Bradford New College, Warrington Wolves/Priestley College, Widnes Vikings/Cronton College, London Broncos/Sigma Academy, York City Knights/York College, Wales RL/Coleg Cymoedd, Huddersfield Giants/ Huddersfield Giants Foundation College/Greenhead College.

We are working with some clubs to complete their applications. These has previously been Cat 3 Academies: Rochdale Hornets, Barrow Raiders, Wigan Warriors, St Helens.

We are working towards creating a “Development Academy League” for more remote areas: West Cumbria, London, North East.

### Girls Talent Pathways

**Talent Hubs** – The Regional Talent Hubs was suspended in 2021, to allow players to focus on their community RL. This programme will return in 2022.

The Hubs will be held in May/June with three sites – North West, West Yorkshire and Central Yorkshire. The 2 age groups will be U15 & U16 with 24 players per age group per hub. A wider regional offer with a national footprint will be run by the Development department.

**DiSE** – The DiSE programme saw its first graduates including Keira Bennett who played in the WSL Grand Final for Leeds Rhinos. Thirty new athletes joined the 30 players who have moved into the second year of the programme. All the players will be attending a 5-day training camp at Woodhouse Grove at Easter.

Conor Meese has been appointed as DiSE Manager and will oversee all the programmes: Girls, Tackle IT and Elite Academies. This is a significant investment in developing the programme.

## 4. MATCH OFFICIALS

### Recruitment

2022	Date	Attended	Male	Female	Joined society?	Retain %
Cornwall, Virtual	07/01/2022	1	1	0	TBC	
Rochdale, Rochdale Mayfield ARLFC	15/01/2022	4	0	4	TBC	
Armed Forces, Aldershot Garrison	19/02/2022	4	4	0	TBC	
Barrow, Barrow Island ARLFC	21/02/2022	8	7	1	TBC	
Virtual, West Cumbria	23/02/2022	5	5	0	TBC	
Wigan & St.Helens, Ince Rose Bridge	26/02/2021	TBC				
Virtual, ZOOM	07/03/2022	TBC				
Featherstone Rovers, Post Office Road	02/04/2022	TBC				
Barrow, Hindpool ARLFC	11/04/2022	TBC				
Virtual, ZOOM	12/04/2022	TBC				
Armed Forces, RAF Leeming	23/04/2022	TBC				
Virtual, ZOOM	09/05/2022	TBC				
<b>Total:</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>		

The 2022 strategy is to run the traditional classroom-based courses alongside a selection of virtual courses across the year. The table shows a promising start to the year and we will continue to add more opportunities throughout the year.

Aaron Moore is in charge of the Lead the Game project. A course took place at the Aldershot Garrison in February with the aim of getting more Armed Forces veterans onto the pathway.

### Retention

The BARLA Cup Finals saw the first all-female match officials’ team. Rhiannon Horsman refereed the game, with Annabelle Jackson and Megan Mills the touch judges, and Beth Neilson the reserve referee.

Three of these officials were recruited within the past 18 months. This demonstrates the recruitment strategy is working. The challenge is to retain these officials and get more females onto the pathway aspiring to achieve in the same way as Caitlin Beevers who refereed a Challenge Cup Round 1 match.

A full article with more detail can be found [HERE](#).

### **Referee Cams**

On the back of the Touchline Behaviour summit and work already done by State of Mind, the NCL agreed to purchase 6 referee cams to be trialled in the NCL. These are now in operation on 6 NCL matches per weekend. The footage is of very high quality and uploaded to a One Drive folder where they can be accessed by MO coaches to aid development and coaching, but also the NCL disciplinary to use as video evidence. Liam Moore presented the project to all NCL clubs and the initial feedback from referees has been very positive, with the belief that wearing the head cam offers a deterrent to poor player behaviour.

More research will be done during the season in collaboration with Dr Phil Cooper from State of Mind. An article on this can be found [HERE](#).