

# ANNUAL REPORT 2021



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# INTRODUCTION CHAIRMAN

03

As we look back from the vantage point of our first 'in-person' AGM and Rugby League Council meeting for three years, we should consider how history will record 2021. The historians might describe it as a year of significant resilience for the sport, with some enjoyable ups and disappointing downs, but it was also a period when we took some very significant steps towards the bright future that lies ahead.

That resilience came from the way our sport at every level roared back to action. It was wonderful to see crowds back in stadiums, and competitions being played again. Men, women, wheelchair and grassroots competitions all came back to life. Covid-19 was still with us, so the rules were different, scrums were still absent, and many games had to be postponed as the RFL and clubs administered a class-leading Return to Play protocol, but we managed to complete the seasons and produce the excitement and thrills that our sport is known for.

Much of the credit to this must go to the Government and to Sport England for their continuing and constant financial support. I served with colleagues from Government and Sport England on the Loans Committee and saw how we distributed material and practical support to clubs to enable them to come through the challenges of the pandemic. Government stood by our sport all the way, also providing concrete, visible and substantial support to the Rugby League World Cup.

We also continue to owe our grateful thanks to the staff, directors, players, coaches, volunteers and fans of our great sport. We demonstrated resilience and resolve at every level and our sport is emerging stronger for it. The 'ups' included the return of internationals for our England teams. These included the creation of the Combined Nations All Stars, who ended up upsetting England in a midseason fixture at Warrington, and end-of-season fixtures for the men, women and wheelchair teams against France. These internationals gave the coaches and squads valuable preparation time together as they build towards the delayed Rugby League World Cup. There was outstanding action on the pitch. Dramatic finals and moments of great skill were everywhere. Having the privilege of presenting trophies in the sport means that I get to see the smiles on the faces of the winners. The delight, the excitement and the joy of winning is what we all become involved in sport to achieve and each time a trophy was lifted, it vindicated all the hard work and dedication of the staff, directors, players, coaches and fans. But it was also a year of 'downs.' There were challenges aplenty for the sport to bounce back from.

Not least of them was the tough decision to postpone the RLWC2021. Much has been said and written about how matters developed so that this became the only responsible decision that could be taken. It was a hugely-disappointing moment. Yet it is one that has seen all the resilience and creativity of which Rugby League is proud displayed by Jon Dutton and his wonderful team of staff, ambassadors, board members and stakeholders. They had to rebuild their staffing team, revisit the finances, refund some ticketholders, create a new sales process and build a new tournament schedule for October and November 2022. They have been exemplary in their skill and professionalism, and we can now look forward to the biggest, best and most inclusive tournament in the sport's history, and be proud of what the RLWC2021 team has achieved.



# INTRODUCTION CHAIRMAN

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It was also disappointing that Kirklees Council stepped back from their commitment to host the Rugby League Museum at the George Hotel in Huddersfield. But Rugby League always bounces back, and RL Cares will be bringing forward new plans to give our sport the recognition for heritage that it deserves.

Throughout 2021, behind the scenes, and with little fanfare, groups of colleagues and stakeholders worked to enable the exciting governance and strategy changes that we have announced in the first months of 2022.

The RFL Board developed the strategy that we published as 'More than a Sport,' the RFL's ambitions for the game from 2022 to 2030.

A Governance Realignment Group of colleagues from within RFL and SLE worked throughout the year to develop the realignment proposals that were unanimously agreed by clubs in March 2022.

A Strategy Working Group worked to develop and then propose a long-term partnership with IMG, which also received unanimous approval.

The work of the members of these groups was voluntary, unpaid and time consuming. Yet what emerged from their deliberations are hugely significant, positive and optimistic developments for our sport.

What was also meaningful was that we achieved unanimous votes at the RL Council and at the SLE Board for these momentous decisions. The fact that these were supported unanimously should not be understated. Such unity is rare in our sport.

It is this unity of purpose, shared commitment and common destiny that I want to seize on and try and continue. We have shown that we are willing to come together for the right purpose and our job now is to strive to maintain that unity of purpose.

I am committed to maintain the openness, trust, honesty and integrity that we have enjoyed over the last few months and I hope that you will all join me in that objective.



**Simon Johnson**  
RFL Chairman



# INTRODUCTION CEO

05

The year saw our eventual re-emergence from the jaws of the pandemic. It would be overstating the case to suggest that our world returned immediately to that we had known previously but, nevertheless, it gave us enough to allow us to plot our way forward. Not for the first time in its history, the sport yet again demonstrated a steadfast refusal to lie down.

It's said there is opportunity in every crisis, and in 2021 rugby league spotted the opportunity, grabbed it with both hands and ran with it. In the first instance, rugby league kicked down the door of Government and put the case for support, way ahead of every other sport. Having secured that foundation for all tiers of the game, it was then enabled to start planning for the future. Plans to re-align the sport and attract a strategic partner began to be formed in this difficult period, plans that will offer a hugely exciting future for the sport and get it onto the platforms it deserves.

As well as navigating these difficult waters, the sport in the northern hemisphere also had to weather the postponement of RLWC2021. It was incredibly disappointing that three tournaments which had been six years in the planning were delayed for a further 12 months. With the RFL providing close support, Jon Dutton and his colleagues at RLWC2021 reacted magnificently and through a great deal of hard work and determination, the tournaments will all now go ahead in full in the autumn of 2022. We have all the team at RLWC2021 to thank for that and we look forward to what will undoubtedly be the biggest and best World Cups ever delivered.

Rugby League Cares, the sport's own dedicated charity, also suffered great disappointment when, after 18 months of hard work, Kirklees Council abandoned its commitment to establish the project within the sport's spiritual home, the George Hotel. Since then, Chris Rostron and the RL Cares team have been focused on finding a solution and it is hoped that some positive news will be announced in the next few months.

So, in true rugby league style, the sport continued to get up and play the ball. Not only that, it created great attacking options when faced with each of these setbacks and in doing so, kept on progressing up the field of play.

On the pitch, from community through the professional tiers and on to the international stage, the clubs and players were magnificent throughout. They once again provided opportunities for people of all ages and backgrounds to play the sport and delivered incredible entertainment that thrilled spectators and viewers alike.

As ever, the annual blue-riband events were the Betfred Super League season and the Betfred Challenge Cup. After titanic battles in both competitions, St Helens proved themselves to be the unstoppable force of 2021 and secured both titles, despite epic battles against Catalans Dragons and Castleford Tigers at Old Trafford and Wembley Stadium. It was definitely the year of the Saints.

2021, importantly, was also the year that the game returned at all levels beneath the elite competitions. After a season of incubation, we saw the very welcome return of the Betfred Championship, League 1, Women's Super League, wheelchair competitions and every other form of rugby league played once again. It was fantastic to see those competitions resume and all those clubs and teams, old and new, retake the field of play.



# INTRODUCTION CEO

06

One of those very famous names, Featherstone Rovers also took the opportunity to lift silverware at Wembley with success in the AB Sundecks 1895 Cup. Toulouse Olympique, Barrow Raiders and Workington Town all secured promotion and in the Women's Super League and wheelchair competitions, St Helens and Leeds Rhinos were the respective dominant forces.

In and amongst all this, we also managed to stage internationals across men's, women's and wheelchair rugby league, both at home and in France. This was hugely important for so many reasons and absolutely critical on our path toward RLWC2021.

Out of adversity came a year of which rugby league can be extremely proud. None of the above could have been achieved without the family of rugby league pulling together. With fantastic support from Sport England and Government, the RFL, Super League Europe, RLWC2021 and Rugby League Cares worked together with incredible purpose to firstly protect and then drive the sport forward. Commercial partners, broadcasters, media, fans and participants all put their shoulders to the wheel and demonstrated just how much they cared. It was a fantastic show of unity that brought us through.

And so, despite the stresses and strains of the last two seasons, I firmly believe that we are now on a better course. After a year of development and consultation with all our stakeholders, the new RFL vision and strategy, More than a Sport, was agreed and launched in December 2021. This gives us a framework to work within.

An exciting journey lies ahead for rugby league; one which will see it develop the platform it needs to showcase itself properly. We all know how brilliant its value and what it has to offer; we need more people to see it and understand that too. We are changing shape radically and making ourselves Fit for the Future. We will now achieve our objectives.

So, we can not only look forward to enjoying the World Cups at the end of the year, we can also be excited about our future beyond 2022 and what lies ahead. After a tough time, we have emerged stronger.



**Ralph Rimmer**  
RFL Chief Executive Officer



# 2021 IN NUMBERS

07

**80,787**

active participants

**44,000**

core community participants

**7.5m**

terrestrial views on the BBC

**939,790**

average match audience for men's  
Betfred Challenge Cup final  
(peak 1.1m, audience share  
12.09 per cent)

**10.7m**

cumulative audience for the  
Betfred Super League in 2021

**158,711**

Betfred Super League  
average match audience

**15**

percentage increase in average  
match audience for the  
Million Pound Game

**564,827**

Cumulative views for  
Betfred Championship and League 1  
across Our League, The Sportsman  
and Sky Sports



# 2021 IN NUMBERS

08

**253k**

views on Our League

**489k**

views on Twitch

**165m**

impressions across RFL  
social media channels,  
up 250 per cent on 2019

**12m**

engagements and  
60 million videos

**918,000**

attendance at professional  
Rugby League games

**7**

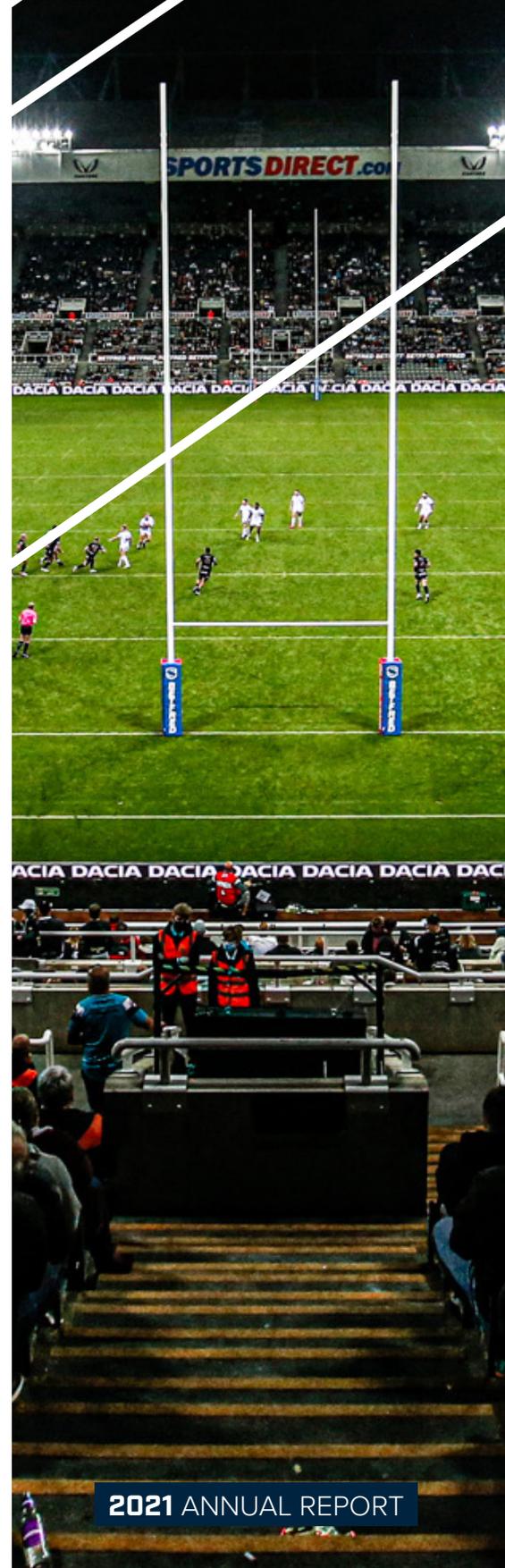
percentage increase in attendance  
at Magic Weekend vs 2019

**22**

percentage increase on average  
Betfred League 1 attendance since  
2019 and the third highest average  
attendance for more than  
a decade.

**149**

percentage increase in attendance  
for the League 1 Play-off Final from  
2019



# 2021 IN NUMBERS

**3,146**

attendance for Barrow Raiders v Workington Town, the highest League 1 regular season attendance since 2018

**40,500**

additional Our League members, an increase of 28.2 per cent

**49.5**

percentage increase in contactable customers, over 120,000 more than in 2020



# SUPER LEAGUE REVIEW

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The 2021 domestic rugby league season was dominated by St Helens to an unprecedented extent.

Kristian Woolf's team became the first since Leeds Rhinos in 2015 to clinch the double with victories in July's Betfred Challenge Cup final against Castleford Tigers, and three months later in the Betfred Super League Grand Final against Catalans Dragons – the latter enabling them to complete a hat-trick of titles, while the Cup win was their first for 13 years.

The unique aspect of Saints' 2021 ascendancy came as their women's team also doubled up, beating York City Knights in the Challenge Cup final, and Leeds Rhinos in the Betfred Women's Super League Grand Final at Headingley – the first two major titles in their short history.

The Saints captain Jodie Cunningham also lifted the League Leaders' Shield, the only available trophy which eluded Woolf's men as it went instead to the Catalans, effectively sealed with an astonishing comeback at Magic Weekend in Newcastle.

And there was also a double for Leeds Rhinos in Wheelchair Rugby League, as they retained the Challenge Cup they had won for the first time in 2019, and added a first Super League Grand Final triumph against Leyland Warriors – a game which broke new ground as it was televised live by Sky Sports.

That was a positive theme of the 2021 season, with more rugby league shown across more platforms than ever before.

Sky led the way as the sport's primary broadcast partners, also televising the semi-finals and Grand Final of the BWSL, in addition to the midseason international double header featuring England's men and women in Warrington. The Women's Challenge Cup final was shown live on BBC2, ensuring record viewing figures, and the BBC also streamed the semi-finals, and two major wheelchair matches – the Challenge Cup final and England's midseason international against Wales.

The Sportsman emerged as valued new broadcast partners across a range of competitions on their YouTube channel, and the RFL's Our League web and app again underlined its value, especially in the early weeks of the season when matches were still required to be played behind closed doors following the announcement of another national lockdown in January.

There was an uneasy feeling of déjà vu when that led to a two-week delay in the start of the Super League campaign, from March 11 to March 26 – yet by the autumn, something approaching normality had returned.

It was just a relief to have the Super League back when Saints and Salford kicked off the first of three double-headers at Headingley – behind closed doors, but live on Sky Sports.

Leigh Centurions, who had been selected to replace Toronto Wolfpack as Super League's 12th club in December 2020, went agonisingly close to an opening win against Wigan, and Catalans snatched a dramatic 29-28 win against Hull KR thanks to a brilliant sidestepping run from Arthur Mourgue which set up James Maloney for a drop-goal.



# SUPER LEAGUE REVIEW

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Round Two was played over the Easter weekend and switched to the Totally Wicked Stadium in St Helens, again behind closed doors, and with Saints facing Hull KR it was dedicated to Mose Masoe, the huge Samoan forward who was so popular at both clubs before suffering a life-changing injury on the eve of the 2020 season.

There was a first step towards normality in Round Three as the six fixtures were played at six different venues, including Stade Gilbert Brutus in Perpignan, although still with no crowds – and a freakish moment of history as Ben Crooks scored straight from the kick-off for Hull KR against Huddersfield, touching down after seven seconds for Super League's earliest ever try. It was a month later, when the competition reached Round Six in mid-May, that limited crowds were permitted to return as lockdown restrictions continued to ease.

Leeds welcomed the first five-figure attendance of the season to Headingley for the visit of Salford in mid-July, and by late August the rebranded Rivals Round saw 16,000 at the DW Stadium to witness a convincing St Helens derby win, and a 15,000 attendance confirming the return of the blood and thunder of the Hull derby as the black and whites shaded a captivating contest 23-22. Covid-related postponements continued, however, justifying the decision to determine league positions on a percentage basis for the second consecutive season.

The Magic Weekend had been put back to September as a result of Covid-19, and that gave it an extra significance in terms of those league placings. It means that the Catalans versus St Helens game was a showdown for top spot and it didn't disappoint, as the Dragons fought back from 30-12 down with three late tries to take the game to golden point – and Maloney kicked the winner to seal pole position with two rounds remaining.

There was more golden-point drama in a memorable Magic Saturday as Kruse Leeming snatched a 25-24 victory over Hull FC which was to prove crucial as Leeds Rhinos qualified for the play-offs in fifth position.

The following weekend, Hull KR ensured they would join the Rhinos with a 26-19 home win against Castleford, their main challengers for sixth – while Warrington held on to third ahead of Wigan in fourth, having nudged ahead through a Magic win inspired by a George Williams try against his former club. However home advantage was to prove irrelevant in the Elimination Play-Offs, as Hull KR ensured a miserable end to Steve Price's tenure as Warrington coach with a 19-0 win featuring a memorable Mikey Lewis try, and Leeds shut out Wigan 8-0 in what would also prove to be Adrian Lam's last game in charge of the Warriors.

The following weekend, Leeds were blitzed 36-8 by St Helens in formidable fashion, while Catalans were pushed much harder by Tony Smith's Hull KR on a memorable occasion in Perpignan, eventually running out 28-10 winners in front of an 11,350 full house to secure their first Old Trafford appearance in the following weekend's Grand Final.

Leigh's relegation back to the Championship had long been secured but they did claim a couple of home wins against Salford and Wakefield to avoid the ignominy of ending the season on zero per cent.



# SUPER LEAGUE REVIEW

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## GRAND FINAL AND AWARDS

The presence of the Catalans ensured a unique occasion as the Grand Final returned to Old Trafford on October 9 after a two-year absence, the 2020 title decider having been played behind closed doors in Hull as a result of Covid-19.

Sam Tomkins had dominated the build-up, first with confirmation of his second Man of Steel award, nine years after he was recognised in his first stint with Wigan.

The 32-year-old was also a major doubt for the Grand Final after missing the semi-final win against Hull KR with a knee injury – but Steve McNamara, who was named Coach of the Year to make it a double awards triumph for the Dragons, included Tomkins in his familiar full-back position on the big night. It turned into another epic contest, with Saints shading it 12-10 thanks to two tries for Kevin Naiqama which also secured the Harry Sunderland Award for the Fijian centre.

Jack Welsby, the hero of St Helens' 2021 Grand Final win, had been named Young Player of the Year.

Saints became the second team to win a hat-trick of Super League titles, following Leeds Rhinos from 2007-9.



# CHAMPIONSHIP AND LEAGUE 1 REVIEW

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The Betfred Championship resumed in April under the same Covid-19 driven structure as the Betfred Super League, with positions to be determined by points percentage.

That was especially important in the case of Toulouse Olympique, with the RFL ruling that part-time Championship clubs could not be required to travel to France given the restrictions on travel, they ended up playing only 14 of the 22 scheduled fixtures – all of them away from home.

That made the success of Sylvain Houles's team all the more admirable, as they won all 14 for a 100 per cent record.

Toulouse were the only team to beat Featherstone, who finished second with 20 wins out of 21 – making both teams strong favourites to reach the Million Pound Match that would determine promotion to Super League.

That was how it turned out, but only after an enjoyable play-off series in which all matches were televised by Sky Sports.

In the first round Craig Lingard's Batley Bulldogs, who had maintained their recent habit of defying underwhelming pre-season expectations to finish fourth in the table, stunned John Kear's Bradford Bulls 23-10 at Mount Pleasant, while Whitehaven's excellent season, which had earned a sixth-place finish, ended with a highly creditable 24-20 defeat at Halifax.

Batley were then required to travel to Toulouse in the semi-finals, the first English Championship club to do so in 2021, and were threatening to pull off a huge upset when they trailed 16-12 at half-time, only to be blown away by the French team's power and pace in the last quarter.

Featherstone also eased to victory against Halifax, setting up an intriguing final which was watched by a noisy 9,000 crowd at Stade Ernest-Wallon. Toulouse's 34-12 win secured the Super League place which had been their aim since they joined the RFL in 2009.

At the other end of the table, Oldham and Swinton Lions were relegated after disappointing seasons.

They were replaced in the 2022 Betfred Championship by Barrow Raiders and Workington Town, meaning all three Cumbrian clubs would be reunited after Whitehaven's successful 2021 campaign.

Barrow, whose bid to bounce straight back to the Championship following relegation in 2019 had been frustrated by the Covid-19 complications of 2020, earned the automatic promotion place by finishing top of the table with 13 wins and a draw from 17 matches, generating a real wave of enthusiasm in the town and across south Cumbria.

Workington finished second and ensured they would also go up by beating Doncaster 36-12 in front of a jubilant Derwent Park crowd, a fitting climax to a play-off series which had seen Doncaster earn thrilling away wins at Keighley and North Wales Crusaders.



# CHAMPIONSHIP AND LEAGUE 1 REVIEW

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The Betfred Championship and League 1 awards were presented virtually with the traditional end-of-season event deemed impractical given the Covid-19 conditions.

Craig Hall was voted Championship Player of the Year in a poll of the competition's coaches, with the Oldham forward Tyler Dupree named Young Player of the Year, and Lingard voted Coach of the Year for his work at Batley.

The powerful Crusaders wing Rob Massam was voted League 1 Player of the Year, and coach Anthony Murray completed a double for the North Wales club, with Keighley's Phoenix Laulu-Togaga'e named Young Player of the Year.



# CHALLENGE CUP AND 1895 CUP REVIEW

15

It was a significant moment on Friday March 19, when Sheffield Eagles kicked off against York City Knights in the first Betfred Challenge Cup tie of 2021.

The match, which was played behind closed doors at Doncaster's Keepmoat Stadium, marked the first fixture for clubs from outside Super League since their 2020 season was ended so abruptly by the first Covid-19 lockdown – a break of more than 12 months.

It was also the first game of the 2021 season, following the decision to put back the Super League kick off by two weeks.

The RFL had announced in January that the Challenge Cup would return in an amended format to recognise the ongoing Covid-19 disruption, with the 13 English Betfred Championship clubs all involved ahead of the start of their competition in April, and the 10 League 1 clubs given the option of whether to join (it had already been announced that community clubs would not be able to participate in the competition in 2021).

In the event, three League 1 clubs – Barrow Raiders, Keighley Cougars and West Wales Raiders – chose to enter, setting up a first round of eight ties. West Wales then drew Widnes Vikings which generated considerable publicity, as well as live coverage on BBC Online, as they gave debuts to two high-profile recruits they had made for the 2020 season – Rangī Chase and Gavin Henson. They competed creditably before going down 58-4, and Barrow and Keighley were also beaten at Oldham and London Broncos, respectively, while York had an impressive 30-6 win against Sheffield, and Featherstone Rovers beat Bradford Bulls 41-16 in a second tie selected for broadcast by BBC Online.

The eight first round winners then contested the second round the following weekend to produce four teams to join the 12 Betfred Super League clubs in the third round – with Featherstone, Swinton, Widnes and York coming through.

The third round draw was conducted by Oliver Dowden, the Secretary of State for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, in an event hosted jointly with Rugby League World Cup 2021 at Warrington's Victoria Park, one of the many venues to have benefited from CreatedBy facilities funding.

The Secretary of State paired Leeds Rhinos, the 2020 winners, against the reigning Super League champions St Helens – and it was Saints who came through 26-18, in the first part of a double header behind closed doors at the Totally Wicked Stadium arranged at the request of the BBC.

Catalans Dragons won the second match 26-6 against Wakefield Trinity, and other ties included a Friday night thriller at Hull KR as Castleford finally emerged 33-32 winners in the fourth period of goldenpoint extra-time. Featherstone, Swinton, Widnes and York were kept apart in the draw and beaten by Hull FC, Warrington, Salford and Wigan, respectively, with Huddersfield beating the Super League newcomers Leigh.

The quarter-finals were played in May, on the last weekend before limited crowds were permitted to return to sporting events, and arranged as consecutive double headers at Headingley, with all four ties televised.



# CHALLENGE CUP AND 1895 CUP REVIEW

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On Friday night, Sky Sports viewers saw Warrington and St Helens earn places in the semi-finals by beating Catalans and Huddersfield, respectively.

On Saturday afternoon, Wigan were ground down 20-10 by an impressive Hull FC before Castleford won another golden-point thriller, this time 19-18 against Salford.

The semi-finals were played at Leigh Sports Village on June 5 as part of a triple-header also including the Betfred Women's Challenge Cup final, and a limited permitted attendance of around 4,000. St Helens beat Hull FC 33-18 in a tie marred by a serious Achilles injury to Hull's Josh Griffin, and Castleford played some dazzling rugby league to beat Warrington 35-20 and reach their first Cup final since 2014.

The final was played on Saturday July 17 at Wembley, with an attendance of up to 50 per cent of the stadium's capacity permitted after the match was included in the Government's Events Research Programme.

Saints were strong favourites, as they had been against Warrington in their last final appearance two years earlier, only to suffer a surprise defeat – and they were again given a major scare as the Tigers earned a 12-6 lead through tries from Jake Trueman and Niall Evalds, who won the Lance Todd Trophy as man of the match.

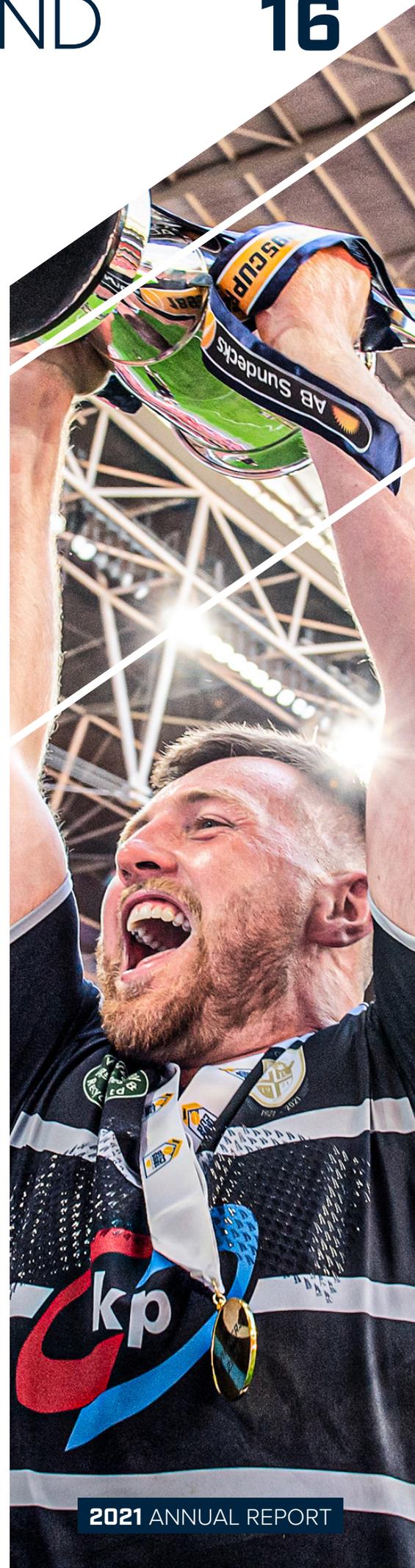
But Kristian Woolf's team showed their resilience and class in a second half played in draining heat to score 20 unanswered points, with tries from James Roby, Tommy Makinson and Kyle Amor. Lachlan Coote ended with five goals, the French half-back Theo Fages having opened the scoring before suffering a shoulder injury.

The match was preceded by the second final of the AB Sundecks 1895 Cup, the competition that had been launched in 2019 to provide a second and more realistic chance for non-Super League clubs to reach Wembley.

The format was changed in response to the ongoing Covid restrictions, with the four Championship clubs who earned places in the third round of the Challenge Cup automatically qualifying for the 1895 semis.

York City Knights beat Swinton 36-22 to book their first Wembley appearance since 1931, and Featherstone won a thriller against Widnes to revive memories of their famous 1983 Challenge Cup final win against Hull FC.

It was Rovers who emerged triumphant 41-34, with their full-back Craig Hall winning the Ray French Award as man of the match, to become the second winners of the 1895 Cup, following on from Sheffield Eagles in 2019.



# ENGLAND

17

2021 began with renewed optimism and excitement in anticipation of three England teams competing in a home World Cup.

In April, Shaun Wane held his first on-field training session with the England squad since his appointment as Head Coach. Whilst the news of the postponement of RLWC2021 was disappointing, this did not stop the England Performance Unit delivering international playing opportunities for the senior men, Knights, women and wheelchair teams.

In the June mid-season international window, England Men lost narrowly to the re-assembled Combined Nations All Stars coached by World Cup-winning coach Tim Sheens. This match provided England with a high-quality match which would have been ideal preparation for RLWC2021. The match also captured the interest for other reasons: it made great viewing, it celebrated the diversity of the Betfred Super League, it provided representative playing opportunities for the All Stars and raised funds for the Mose Masoe Foundation.

As part of a mid-season double-header with the men at Warrington, England Women honed their RLWC2021 preparations with a 60-0 win over international newcomers, Wales. This match was broadcast live by Sky Sports and so further raised the profile of the women's game.

The England Wheelchair team also enjoyed a successful mid-season victory over Wales at Sheffield.

Whilst August brought news of the postponement of RLWC2021, England were still able to play in an autumn programme. Thanks to some hard work behind the scenes from 'the team that supports the team', the England Performance Unit was able to deliver six further international playing opportunities in October and November.

First up were Paul Anderson's England Knights, who took on Jamaica at Castleford in a fixture that also served as Jordan Turner's testimonial game. The Knights fielded a team with an average age of 21, including four teenagers. This is hugely encouraging and the Knights continue to supply players for the senior squad. Huddersfield Giant Will Pryce was man of the match in a 56-4 win.

Next came a men's and women's double header against France in Perpignan. There were eight England debutants in the men's 30-10 win; Niall Evalds, Tom Davies, Jordan Abdull, Paul McShane, Morgan Knowles, Kruiise Leeming, Mikolaj Oledzki and Joe Philbin.

England Women finished 2021 on a high and ran out 40-4 winners in a very competitive game.

In November, England Wheelchair played a home two-Test series at Medway Park against the world's Number 1-ranked wheelchair team, France.

Whilst losing both matches narrowly, the young squad showed great promise and room for improvement as they continue towards the rescheduled World Cup in 2022.

Alongside this series, there was also a Wheelchair 'Knights' match versus the French equivalent. This provided a valuable experience for the wider squad.



# ENGLAND PERFORMANCE UNIT

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## SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

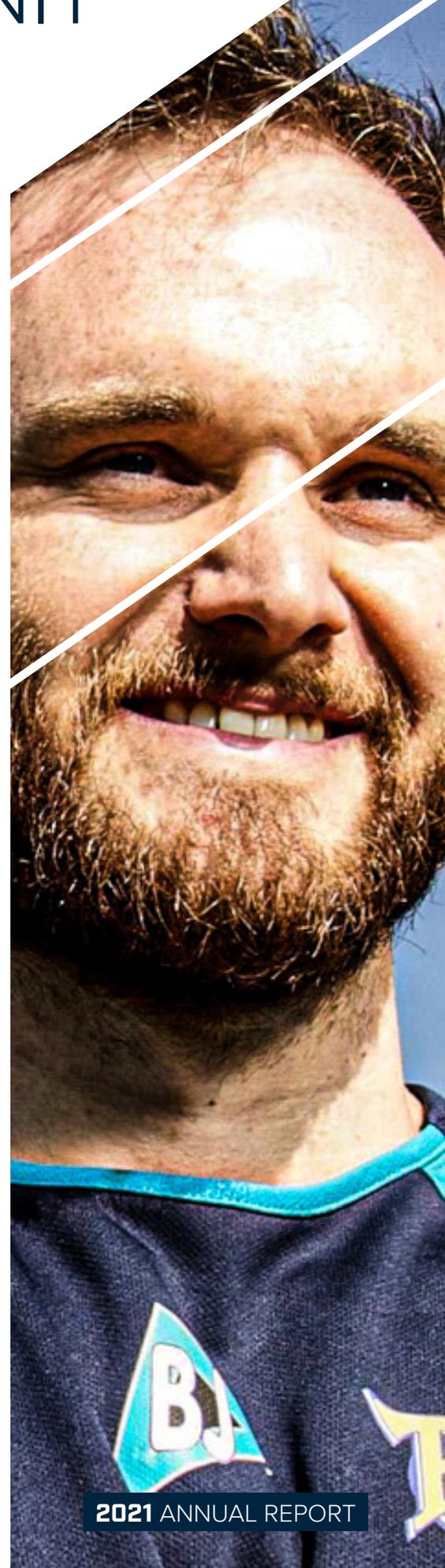
During 2021, members of the EPU Science and Medical staff continued to undertake research in rugby league, which not only improves player welfare but the sport more broadly. In 2021, rugby league was recognised as a leading sport for developing worldwide understanding of SARS-CoV-2 transmission risk in sport. EPU Science and Medical staff published the first study in the world in 2021 to evidence the transmission risk, which was possible due to the systems and structures the RFL developed and implemented across the sport.

Following the research on Covid-19, rigorous infection control standards remained, alongside player monitoring and tracking systems which are now used to prioritise concussion management and reduction.

Recognising the contribution of the RFL and EPU Science and Medical team, Professor Ben Jones is one of eight international experts on the Concussion Innovation and Technology Panel convened by DCMS.

The EPU Science and Medical team have prioritised research in the women and wheelchair game also, which is significantly under-researched. A study led by Dr Sean Scantlebury worked with international experts to identify injury risk factors unique to women's rugby league, which was recently published. This informs England practices, and also Women Super League medical standards. Understanding the physiology of women and wheelchair players is now embedded into the England programme calendar via systematic scientific testing at Leeds Beckett University.

The research undertaken by the EPU Science and Medical team demonstrates that the RFL prioritises player welfare and health synergistically with performance.



# WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' RUGBY LEAGUE

19

The year was another significant and successful one for the women's game.

Significant because after the loss of the 2020 campaign to Covid-19, there was a desperate need not only to get back on the field, but to resume the momentum that had been building – and to make up for lost time. Successful because that's exactly what happened.

The Betfred Women's Challenge Cup reached a wider audience than ever, with the BBC streaming the semi-finals as a double-header from York's LNER Community Stadium, before showing the final live on BBC2 for the first time. York relished home advantage to blitz Castleford Tigers 32-4 in the first semi-final, with Savannah Andrade scoring a blistering hat-trick, and St Helens then ensured there would be a new name on the trophy by beating holders Leeds Rhinos 20-12.

A few weeks later at the Leigh Sports Village, Saints claimed the Cup as their first major trophy, with the former rugby union three-quarter Rachael Woosey scoring two tries in their 36-4 win.

The Betfred Women's Super League returned as a 10-team competition, under the same points percentage system as applied in the men's professional leagues, which was to prove necessary as a number of teams were forced to withdraw from fixtures.

The 10 teams were split into two groups of five for the closing stages, leading to semi-finals and a final in each group.

In the top-five competition, Saints finished top, then beat Castleford to earn their Grand Final place – with Leeds earning the right to join them by beating York.

The Grand Final was played at Headingley in front of a record crowd of 4,235, and Saints maintained their dominance with a 28-0 win – with Sky Sports covering the match live.

In the Shield final which preceded the Grand Final, Huddersfield Giants sealed a memorable end to a season of huge progress by beating Featherstone Rovers.

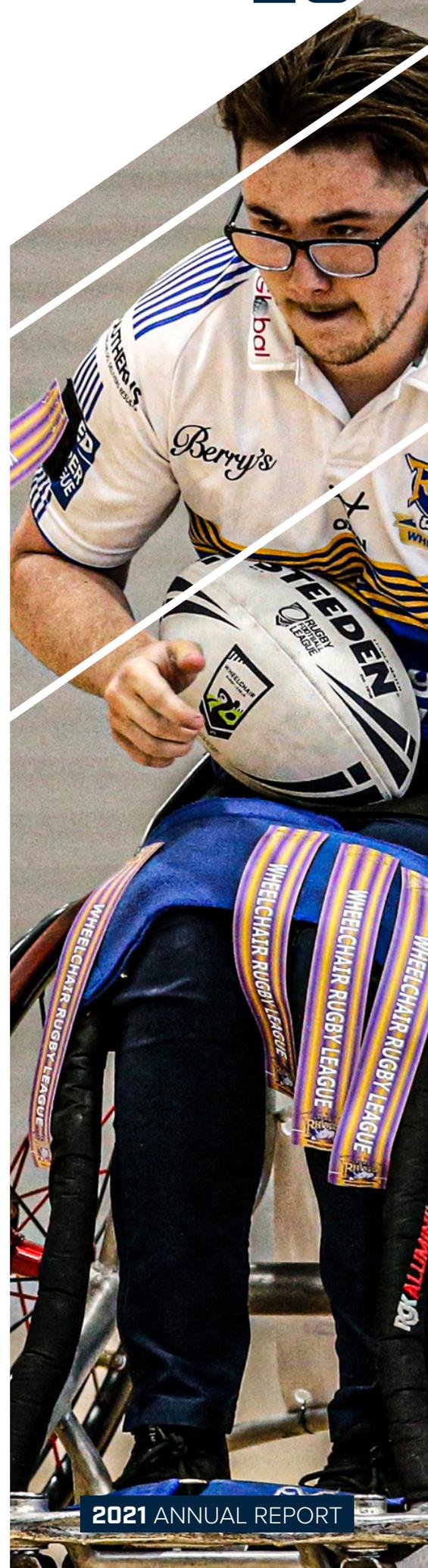


# WHEELCHAIR RUGBY LEAGUE

Like Women's Rugby League, the Wheelchair game had been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 – but it bounced back stronger than ever in 2021.

Leeds Rhinos retained the Challenge Cup they had won for the first time in 2019, beating Argonauts 60-28 at the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield in a match streamed live by BBC Sport. Tom Halliwell, who had been named the new England captain, scored five tries, and Nathan Collins kicked superbly.

Three months later, the Rhinos secured their second consecutive double by beating Leyland Warriors 52-36 at Gillingham's Medway Park, in the first Wheelchair Grand Final to be shown live on Sky Sports.



# COMMUNITY RUGBY LEAGUE

21

The Covid-19 pandemic continued to impact the community game in 2021. With restrictions still in place, the return of competitive community playing offers was delayed until May. Competition administrators, mindful of the possibility of further restrictions and club finances, adapted offers taking a more localised approach.

Once activity resumed, several challenges became apparent. Player availability emerged as an issue with significant numbers of positive cases of Covid-19 and players self-isolating proving problematic. This was particularly prevalent during the first half of the season. As the year went on and restrictions across society eased, other activities often took preference. The pandemic also affected the numbers of match officials available to officiate games, particularly in southern regions. Of special concern was the deterioration in behaviours, both on and off the field. Whilst similar issues have been seen more widely across society, it is something we need to, and are addressing within rugby league.

Although there were plenty of challenges, there were also numerous successes. Whilst in virtually every case curtailed or adapted, every format across every setting of the sport was able to return. The Yorkshire Men's League saw the highest-ever number of entrants and more games played than ever before. Junior activity and participant numbers returned strongly. As well as the return of existing activity, we were able to deliver some new activity in 2021, including the introduction of the Greater Manchester Player Development League supported by Foundations across the North West.

After a hugely-challenging 2020 for our inclusion participants taking part in the RFL's Learning Disability and Physical Disability offers, activity resumed in 2021, as it did with Wheelchair RL. Access to facilities was to prove particularly problematic. Over 8,000 players took part in our various social Rugby League offers, although as in other formats of the game activity was curtailed.

From a Sport England reporting perspective, the impact of Covid-19 will inevitably mean a minimum of two-year impact on numbers of active participants reported. The community game was decimated in 2020, fuelled by the unfortunate timing of lockdowns. A significant amount of activity in education settings reported in 2020 had already taken place prior to the first lockdown. The opposite was the case in 2021 with activity in education settings severely affected whilst the community game returned strongly. In terms of actual numbers reported, the figure in 2021 was 80,787 compared with 81,014 in 2020. The 2019 pre-pandemic high was 109,536 and the end of year reporting for 2022 will provide the clearest indication yet of the full impact of the pandemic.

Away from the pitch, the RFL's support for the community game continued, with both clubs and Foundations remaining a priority. As part of the wider Government support for Rugby League, the RFL secured £1.5m grant funding as well as an additional £150,000 of Tackling Inequalities funding. We continued to invest in digital resources such as Our Learning Zone to provide an eco-system of learning networks to connect and support volunteers across the game.



# PLAYER WELFARE

22

2021 was the third year in which player welfare services to the professional and semi-professional game were delivered on the RFL's behalf by Rugby League Cares.

The professional game was once again impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. This, like 2020, had an impact on not only the wider community but all stakeholders involved in the game. The charity supported many people during this time: a wide range of mental health issues arose in 2021 and the sport experienced an increase in several areas such as addiction (both alcohol and gambling), grief and general anxiety.

During the year, the charity referred 109 players to Sporting Chance. Those 109 players received therapy via a total of 849 one-to-one sessions. This included four players receiving psychiatric assessment, three players undertaking 26-day residential programmes (complex interventions) and two players receiving residential re-start programmes (complex interventions). These were players that had already had 26-day residential provision. Two players also received detox (complex interventions) for substance addiction.

The team at RL Cares continued to consult players and staff during the 2021 period. A total of 811 consultations took place, which significantly took the pressure off the need to refer people to Sporting Chance. RL Cares staff continued to upskill in this area, with Transition Manager Francis Stephenson completing qualification in counselling and addiction.

A thorough review took place of rugby league's mental health provision in December 2021. This looked at NICE guidance, recent research around the area of mental health interventions, multi-disciplinary approaches to treatment and support, best practice in other sports and the formation of a working group to look at improving all aspects of the mental health provision offered by the sport. Recommendations were put forward with an aim of improving short- and long-term outcomes for all accessing this support in 2022.

These recommendations include a review of Sporting Chance services, new in-house 'triage' and clinical support, a new appointment – Wellbeing and Special Projects Manager – and a new partnership with the National Careers Service. A new focus on a biopsychosocial support was recommended to improve services.

The charity strengthened its relationship with several key stakeholders within the game. Director of Welfare, Steve McCormack was in weekly contact with all clubs to check on the wellbeing of staff and players. Key wellbeing support was given alongside the clubs' dedicated Player Welfare Managers. Key interventions also took place with personal linked to the pandemic and playing protocol.

Covid-19 officers at clubs were contacted weekly alongside twice weekly meetings with the RFL staff coordinating the Covid-19 protocol.

In discussions with the RFL, it was agreed to offer wellbeing support to the England Performance Unit (EPU). Steve McCormack and Francis Stephenson were embedded into the men's and wheelchair teams for the mid- and end-of-season Internationals. Huddersfield Giants Player Welfare Manager, Steve



# PLAYER WELFARE

Hardisty, was also part of the England Women's backroom staff: this was coordinated by Steve McCormack and proved a very worthwhile and important addition to the EPU

RL Cares continued its wellbeing and welfare support to match officials, club administrators and Women's Super League players.

The charity's Transition programme led by Francis Stephenson was a great success in 2021. Several events aimed at keeping retiring players connected and feeling valued by the sport took place. In April the inaugural Warriors Walk took place and involved tackling the Yorkshire Three Peaks. This enabled recently retired and past players to engage in a charity event, take part in a physical challenge and enjoy the camaraderie that comes with ex-team-mates and opponents. The event lasted for three days and proved an outstanding way of improving the sport's standing with past players.

Players who retired in 2020 were also invited to the Magic Weekend along with their partners as guests of the charity. Again, this proved to be a worthwhile exercise and will be repeated in 2022.

The transition programme has had an outstanding impact on the 28-plus age group in Super League. Ninety four per cent of players in this age group are now career engaged and planning for their future. This will lead to players leaving the game better prepared for life post-playing.



# OUR LEAGUE

Our League continued to provide an essential presence for the RFL during the 2021 season.

As in 2020, live streaming fixtures were essential for the sport during the lockdown period. For the period of March to July 2021, there were 178 live streams across Betfred Super League, Betfred Championship, League 1, Betfred Challenge Cup and friendlies, which averaged 10 live fixtures per week. In addition to the season ticket holder 'free' passes, there were additional pay-per-view options added for all but Super League.

Over £400k in revenue was generated and sent directly to clubs. Additionally, over 27,000 season ticket holders redeemed their access pass. The total refund rate was less than two per cent which is a testament to the stability of the systems and technology. During this period, there were over 200,000 live cumulative views and an average dwell time of 12 minutes 23 seconds.

Once fans were allowed to return to stands, Our League continued to support clubs as requested with freemium streaming and continued to stream a further 33 fixtures, taking the total cumulative live views for the season to over 250,000 with an average dwell time of 22 minutes 41 seconds.

Growth throughout the season remained stable with a rise of more than 20 per cent in new members. The average age sits well under that of a season ticket buyer at 42 but also offers a well-proportioned balance across all age groups. Eighty three per cent of Our League members have downloaded the app which allows direct access to marketing.

There was a total of over three million visits to the app during 2021 with an impressive average of 30 sessions per user.

The new feature of promotional content blocks has produced strong results with over 273,000 clicks on these alone, which drive key messages for the sport and offer commercial return for ticketing and merchandise.

## RLWC2021

In 2021 the RFL confirmed a RLWC2021 takeover using Our League as the official tournament app.

This approach will have several benefits for RLWC2021:

- Save RLWC2021 budget that can be used to develop even better content rather than being spent on an app build;
- An app that has already been downloaded by over 200,000 Rugby League fans;
- An app that has been fully tested around OTT, Match Centre, Predictor Game, ticket integration rather than developing an app with no ability to properly test it until the tournament is live.

The outcome is that the RFL is left with a genuine legacy of:

- A significant increase on number of new members joining Our League;
- A significantly increased number of people engaging with the app
- A wider reaching audience beyond the UK.



# PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMERCIAL

# 25

Despite the prolonged impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the postponement of RLWC2021, the RFL was still able to announce significant commercial successes in 2021.

Long-term partners of the sport, Betfred further increased their involvement with Rugby League by becoming title partners of the iconic Challenge Cup. Betfred were drawn in by the history of the 125-year-old competition and the size of the free-to-air audiences, plus being able to partner with the competition for men, women and wheelchair.

A new partnership was also struck with global energy drink company, Monster Energy to promote their sugar-free hydro-sport range of drinks.

Monster Energy has been at the forefront of motor and action sports for almost 20 years and has worked with some of the biggest athletes in the world. Now for the first time ever, the brand is bringing Monster Energy to the rugby scene in this debut partnership between England Rugby League and Monster HydroSport.

2021 also saw the resurgence of mid-season international matches with England Women playing Wales and England Men taking on the Combined Nations All Stars at Warrington's Halliwell Jones Stadium. In their inaugural year, the All Stars team were sponsored by national vehicle breakdown company Green Flag, whose headquarters is in Leeds.

A new multi-year technical kit partnership deal was also reached with Doncaster-based Oxen to supply all on-field and training apparel for the RFL and England Rugby League.

Again, the RFL were able to rely on their family of commercial partners to stick by them during the pandemic with brands like Ronseal deciding to re-focus their efforts on the Rugby League community. They sent England players down to Hindley community club in Wigan with a host of Ronseal products to give the club a welcome face-lift.



# SUPPORT TO THE SPORT

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## SPORT SURVIVAL PACKAGE LOANS

Having secured £16m of loan funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport in May 2020 in order to support Rugby League through the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent restriction on staging events in front of spectators, the RFL secured a further £16.7m of loans to support the game if required through to the planned completion of the Government's Spring Roadmap Covid-19 recovery plan to June 2021.

By the time all further applications had been received and successfully completed in 2021, a total of £24.2m of cash flow support was delivered to the game.

Following the awarding of £150,000 of grant funding in October 2020 from the Sport England Tackling Inequalities Fund to support the community game's return to play, the RFL was granted an additional £150,000 from Phase 3 of the same fund in March 2021.

In addition, in August 2021 the RFL received confirmation of a grant of £1.5m under the Sport Winter Survival Package to support community clubs affected by restrictions on spectators throughout the pandemic. This fund has been administered jointly by Sport England and the RFL. Clubs were invited to apply for support from October onwards.

Furthermore, the RFL was engaged by Sport England and DCMS to manage the Sports Survival Package loan programme in order to avoid the significant costs of external facilitation which were forecast to be around £1m. This involved the RFL assessing loan applications from bodies who were eligible to apply for a loan to support them through the pandemic, as well as ongoing fund management, administration, monitoring and reporting back to Sport England and DCMS.

In recognition of the significant resource needed from the RFL Finance Team required to manage the programme effectively, Sport England granted the RFL £100,000 to contribute to those internal resource costs.

## 2021 IN NUMBERS

**£32.7m** Covid-19 emergency support loan facility secured from DCMS

**32** clubs eligible for loan-funding support

**£24.2m** distributed to entities eligible for loan funding

**£300,000** Tackling Inequalities Fund grant secured to support community clubs to return to play

**£1.5m** Sport Winter Survival Package grant secured to support community clubs impacted by the pandemic

**£100k** secured to support the delivery of the Sport Survival Package loans.



# RUGBY LEAGUE WORLD CUP 2021

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It's fair to say that 2021 wasn't quite the year initially envisaged for the Rugby League World Cup.

A year that started brightly became engulfed in uncertainty due to the public health environment which resulted in the RLWC2021 board postponing the tournament on August 4.

The decision to postpone was hugely difficult but ultimately the correct one, with the Covid-19 pandemic creating a situation where the organisers were faced with the prospect of staging the tournament without some of the world's best players involved.

Such a scenario would not have been befitting of a World Cup, and actions quickly moved from disappointment and frustration to a swift focus on confirming plans to move the tournament from 2021 to 2022 and achieve the stated ambition of delivering the biggest, best and most inclusive Rugby League World Cup ever staged.

The tournament was relaunched 107 days after postponement on November 19 2021 after completing the challenge of ensuring the selected host towns and cities were able to reschedule matches and accommodate Rugby League in a packed sporting schedule.

All 18 original host venues confirmed their eagerness to stay involved, but with some necessary changes to the schedule. This included losing the spectacle of staging international Rugby League at Liverpool's famous Anfield stadium. Anfield's unavailability provided a golden opportunity to take a high-profile game to Wigan.

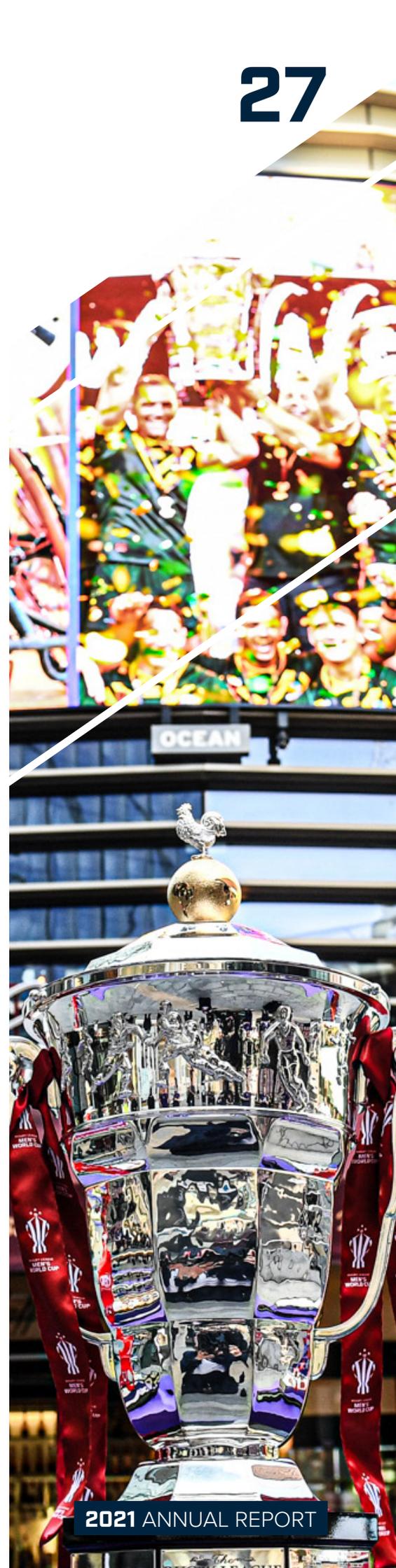
Despite the challenges of postponement, there was still plenty to be proud of in 2021 with RLWC's trailblazing Social Impact programme continuing to make a positive impact on people's lives.

From its very conception, making a real difference in towns and cities across the North of England has been a core focus for the tournament. The programme has been central to the tournament's objectives and change is happening right now, with the vast majority of the funding having been utilised before a ball has even been kicked.

Over £20 million of community capital projects have been delivered, making Rugby League more accessible, engaging and inclusive to people across England. Much of this money has been invested in low socio-economic areas, many of which have been hit hardest by the pandemic.

The tournament also completed two refund windows towards the end of 2021, providing fee-paying spectators with the option to recuperate some or all of their costs. While a minority of supporters chose to take up the option of a refund on their tickets, it was very encouraging that many opted to carry over tickets to 2022 and the year ended with ticket sales continuing to increase across all three men's, women's and wheelchair formats, as the tournament looks set to be the best attended.

With all the logistics confirmed, the additional time provided will ensure that the tournament will provide a spotlight on our great sport which should be a transformative moment for International Rugby League and continue to make a positive impact on people's lives, before, during and after the tournament.



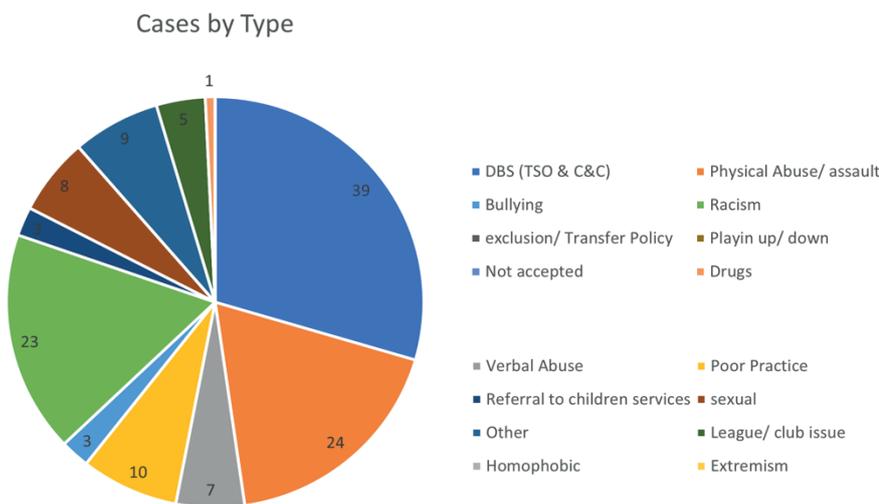
# SAFEGUARDING

As we continued to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic, 2021 saw a return of youth and junior rugby league in the community game, which provided a welcome return to activity for thousands of children and an opportunity to find some normality in uncertain times.

Many club welfare officers faced significant challenges to ensure children could return to the sport, often doubling up as Covid-19 officers and being a listening ear for children coping with the effects of the pandemic.

Whilst the number of cases the sport dealt with rose compared to 2020, given community rugby league did not return until late spring, the case load was not as high as pre-pandemic.

The breakdown of cases is set out below:



The Annual Safeguarding Conference took place online due to national restrictions on people meeting in the UK being in place. Attendees were provided with up-to-date advice on how to deal with challenges facing the country in terms of mental health and return to play post-pandemic. The keynote speaker was Maggie Oliver, the whistleblowing police officer whose work uncovered the Rochdale sex abuse scandal. The numbers were the largest we have had, probably linked to the fact that it was held online.

The CPSU changed their awarding standard for 2021 and, as in the last few years, the RFL managed to meet the highest level of result with a standard of 'met'. This audit assesses the governing body against 10 standards including policy and procedures for responding to concerns. The CPSU stated that the RFL continues to show best practice in this area.

The Safeguarding Team, along with the Community Team, identified the need to ensure that volunteers were aware of some of the signs which may indicate that something is wrong and that they were aware of reporting procedures. Guidance was produced and published along with other return-to-play documentation.

## 2021 IN NUMBERS

- 981** people completed online safeguarding and protecting children courses
- 553** people completed safeguarding refresher courses
- 17** per cent of all safeguarding cases related to Unacceptable Language/Behaviour



## INTEGRITY REPORT 2021

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

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

In 2021, the RFL continued to ensure it complied with its implementation plans.

## MOUTHGUARD PROJECT

2021 saw the launch of the largest and most significant research project that the sport has undertaken. The RFL with the support of each Super League Club, partnered with Leeds Beckett University to start the TaCKLE Project. The study will quantify head acceleration exposure via instrumented mouthguards.

The validity study formed the pilot part of the project taking place before the work will move to a game wide three-year research study. The validity study was a critical element to the project to ensure that each mouthguard was robustly tested against clinician usability, player comfort and fit, data reporting both in lab tests and on-field. All of these aspects provide the project with mouthguards which players and clinicians can be content with, alongside ensuring the most accurate data is available through the study.

This three-year game-wide study will commence firstly with Betfred Super League and Academy players before it is widened to the Women's Super League and then the community game. The project will enable the sport to undertake other research projects and the data it will gather will further benefit the sport and provide valuable insights into head impacts.

The traction gathered and interest from other sports and external bodies (such as DCMS) demonstrates the pioneering nature of the project.

## 2021 in NUMBERS

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

617 samples collected for testing by UKAD.



# INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

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## TACKLE IT: RUGBY LEAGUE VERSUS DISCRIMINATION

During 2021, the RFL continued to work in partnership with Rugby League Cares, Super League Europe, the professional clubs and RLWC2021 to roll out the sport's Tackle It action plan.

Tackle It aims to make Rugby League a truly inclusive sport by tackling discrimination and breaking down any barriers to involvement.

Tackle It is a plan by the game, for the game – the result of listening and learning from the lived experience of people from across the sport, including players and coaches. The plan includes actions on player and coach recruitment and development, talent inclusion and progression, community outreach and club development, as well as ensuring zero tolerance of all forms of discrimination within the game.

There are four strategic goals.

- 1 To widen the reach and impact of Rugby League;
- 2 To diversify Rugby League's talent pool and workforce;
- 3 To improve the culture of Rugby League;
- 4 To clarify processes, instil confidence in, and encourage, the reporting of discrimination, and ensure appropriate sanctions are in place.

Responsibility for delivering against the plan rests with a wide range of organisations.

In 2021 the RFL appointed a full-time Inclusion Lead with specific responsibility for driving delivery of the Tackle It action plan across the sport and providing strategic advice and guidance. An experienced RFL Inclusion Board (which is a formal sub-committee of the RFL Board) continued to oversee progress against the plan and a cross-departmental working group continued to manage delivery of specific objectives.

Education continues to be a key part of the plan. 2021 saw ED&I forming part of the mandatory modules that have to be completed by all professional players as part of Education Week. The ED&I section of the mandatory Coachright module undertaken by all coaches was also significantly enhanced.

Prior to the start of the 2022 season it was decided that the pre-kick off 13-second window, during which teams and individuals are encouraged to express support for anti-discrimination, should remain in place for the duration of the season so that the game could continue to show its opposition to all forms of discrimination. As with 2021, it remained entirely up to players and match officials to decide what anti-discrimination gesture to make during this 13-second window. In a change with 2021, teams were asked to assume their kick-off positions for the 13 seconds rather than line up facing the main stand or dug out.

Our sport-wide Enjoy The Game campaign aims to ensure we are delivering a safe and inclusive sport for all to 'Enjoy the Game.' In 2021 we monitored disciplinary cases and match official abuse to establish baseline data. We worked to improve behaviour of touchlines in the community game, behaviour of coaches and players and of crowds at professional games. We produced assets for use by clubs and at central Rugby League events to promote the



# INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

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campaign and reiterate the Enjoy The Game message. We will continue this work throughout 2022 and beyond.

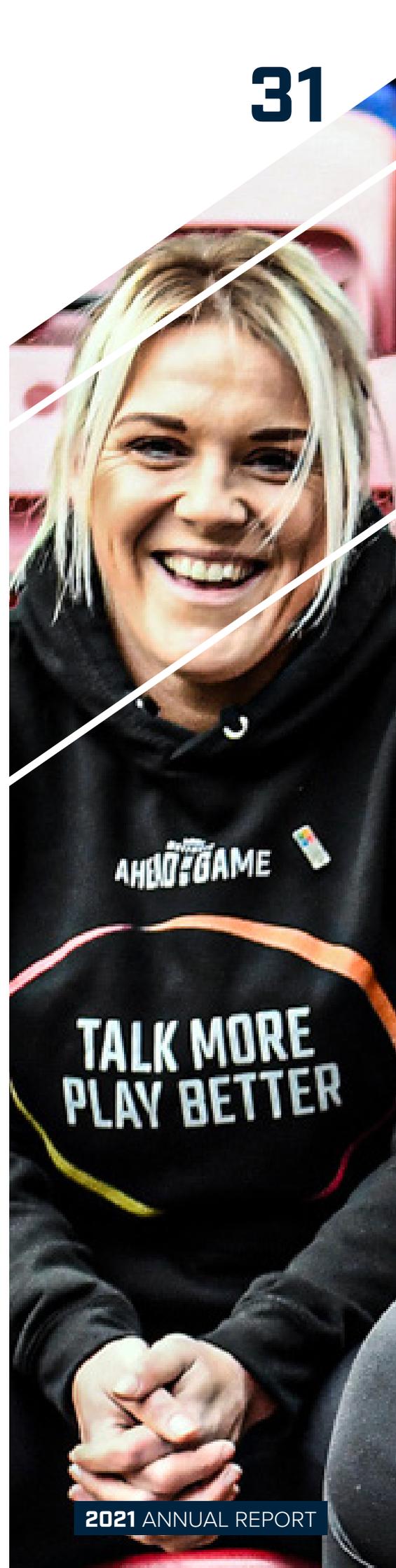
In March, we launched our These Girls Can report looking at the wider social impacts of the growth of Women's and Girls' Rugby League in the recent period. The report determined that the social value per female player is £409.60 and a social return of £4.06 for female players. This evidences the positive contribution the sport of Rugby League makes currently in England in terms of its social impact and return on investment specifically for women and girls.

The report also found that:

- 90** per cent of players and **78** per cent of coaches and volunteers claimed Rugby League has improved their self-confidence including body confidence;
- 90** per cent of players reported improved mental wellbeing as a consequence of playing Rugby League;
- 97** per cent of players reported improved fitness and physical wellbeing;
- 86** per cent of women's and girls' players said Rugby League has provided them with role models;

Rugby League is raising educational and career aspirations as well as sporting aspirations amongst girls and young women.

**Tackle It:** Rugby League versus Discrimination is available online at [rugby-league.com/tackleit](https://rugby-league.com/tackleit)



# MATCH OFFICIALS

The year saw the department build upon the foundations set in 2020, further developing on the strategy to incorporate more virtual courses. The creation of the virtual course during the pandemic was a huge success and this was scaled up further in 2021.

There were 431 newly-qualified officials from 20 courses. A total of 163 were retained with a retention rate of 37.82 per cent. The virtual courses proved to be extremely successful and more practical, with the strategy going forward to utilise the virtual courses alongside a mix of traditional classroom-based courses.

Regional training nights returned in 2021 to aid the development of officials. Weekly training nights were held in Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria and run by senior officials and coaches focusing on fitness, positioning and decision making, as well as providing a support and wellbeing network.

In terms of well-being of match officials, Rugby League Cares and State of Mind continued their support of Match Officials and presented at local societies and RFL nights on resilience and mental fitness. RL Cares support is available for all community game officials and this function provided a valuable benefit for many match officials, and will continue to do so.

2021 saw an increase in poor touchline behaviour and match official abuse. This led to Steve Ganson and Liam Moore presenting to the Whole Game Board about match official abuse. As a consequence, the Touchline Behaviour summit took place in November, where representatives from leagues, clubs, societies and the RFL highlighted the issues and put in place actions to improve behaviour. This included the introduction of 'Ref Cams,' initially trialled in the North West Counties and rolled out to other leagues in 2022.

The development of the 'Be the Ref' project was also launched with a first-of-its-kind virtual reality experience of refereeing a Super League match. Further development of this will continue into 2022.

Several societies recognised relationships with community clubs were vital and consequently referee engagement nights were created. The Wigan RL Referees Societies, in particular, held engagement nights at five local community clubs in 2021 and are continuing to hold more meetings in 2022.

The RFL signed an exciting partnership with ACME whistles. The objective of the partnership is to keep more referees on the pitch with the partnership supporting hundreds of referees coming through RFL training courses each year with additional layers of expert advice, content and support.

Each of the referees going on to officiate three games will also be presented with their own ACME 558 whistle in recognition of their achievement. ACME are also committed to recognising achievements both at community level and within the professional game with engraved whistles presented at relevant landmarks of achievement.



# MATCH OFFICIALS

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## PERFORMANCE

Following the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, in 2021 the Match Officials department enjoyed a 'refresh' of new training surroundings and new staff. On leaving Red Hall, the department based itself in Ruskin Drive Sports Village which provides a high-performance environment in which to train and learn.

Dave Elliott transferred across from the Performance Department to take on a newly-created role of Match Officials Senior Coach. As a Level 4 coach, Dave brought a wealth of high-performance coaching expertise and experience to the team. To complement this, the department linked with Liverpool John Moores University to provide cutting-edge support in sports science, psychology and nutrition.

A huge positive for the department is the emergence of Marcus Griffiths and Tom Grant as regular Super League officials. Marcus and Tom are examples of how the department has nurtured young match officials over a period of time to progress to elite status to ensure succession for the future in providing a plentiful supply of elite officials.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

Liam Moore followed up his breakthrough season in 2020 by refereeing both the 2021 Betfred Challenge Cup final and Betfred Super League Grand Final.

Robert Hicks refereed both the AB Sundecks 1895 Cup final and the Million Pound Game. Robert also stepped away from being a full-time match official to take up a senior role as RFL Director of Legal and Operations but he will continue on the part-time panel.

James Child took charge of the mid-season international between England and Combined Nations All Stars.

Ben Thaler achieved a personal milestone of refereeing his 400th Super League match when he took charge of Castleford vs Leeds in August 2021.

Gareth Hewer hung up his whistle at the end of the 2021 season. Gareth was a Grade 1 official for 17 years, officiated over 300 first grade games, and took charge of the 2016 Challenge Cup final. He has since joined the match officials coaching staff to mentor the emerging crop of match officials within the professional game.

At the end of the season, three new full time match officials were added to the elite panel in James Vella, Jack Smith and Liam Rush.



By definition, charities exist to provide support and assistance to those in need, so it is no surprise that in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic there was an unprecedented level of demand for the services of Rugby League Cares and the Rugby League Benevolent Fund.

Everyone involved with the sport's two charities continued to rise to the challenge of providing help where it was needed. We were proud to support those making extraordinary personal sacrifices to keep the sport going and privileged to work alongside people across our communities.

As the sport navigated its way through the pandemic, its ultimate reopening and the welcome return of fans, the Player Welfare team continued to provide a range of services to support players after their retirement and assist those suffering hardship and distress.

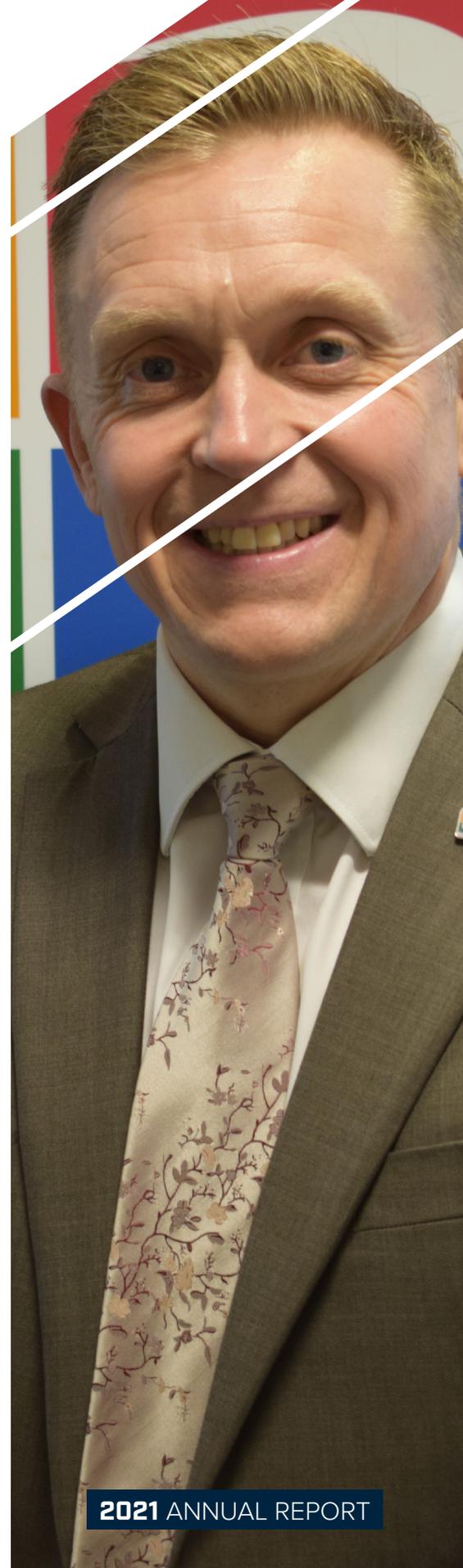
Without fans, clubs were understandably forced to keep many of their staff furloughed, including player welfare managers. As a result, Steve McCormack and his colleagues were often called upon to provide direct support to players, administrators and officials. On occasion, this proved to be an enormous challenge, and it is a testimony to the skill and dedication of the Player Welfare team that all those who came forward for assistance were provided with the help they needed.

RL Cares's Community programme continued to grow at an exceptional rate. The charity was privileged to welcome John Heritage to its team on a three-month secondment from the NHS. John's background as a senior leader within the NHS proved to be invaluable and opened the door to a new partnership with the NHS, RL Cares 4 NHS. John arranged a successful 12-month pilot programme with three hospital trusts in Warrington, St Helens and Cheshire which focused on providing wellbeing to staff and supporting recruitment activities to help the NHS retain and recruit more people. Led by former Great Britain and Warrington player Paul Wood, the programme proved to be a huge success and is being rolled out across 2022 to seven hospitals and social care teams in the North West. Talks are also taking place that would see other NHS regions in England enjoy the benefits of working with RL Cares.

RL Cares's ongoing partnership with Movember and RLWC2021 was given a huge boost when face to face Ahead of the Game programme delivery could finally start. Despite the postponement of the tournament, RL Cares, Movember and RLWC2021 agreed to extend the programme, enabling direct delivery to thousands of young Rugby League players, coaches and parents commenced in earnest. Feedback from participants was universally positive and was reflected in an insightful documentary screened by Sky Sports in October. The film showcased the extraordinary work of Keith Senior and his team of former and current player facilitators and the positive impact they have on young people in the sport.

2021 was an exciting year for the Offload programme, which was expanded to 12 areas across the north of England, working in partnership with 11 club foundations; Bradford, Featherstone, Halifax, Huddersfield, Hull FC, Leeds, Salford, St Helens, Warrington, Widnes and Wigan.

The start of the year brought more accolades for Offload when Edge Hill University published a paper citing Offload as a global leading example of best practice for the design and delivery of a mental fitness programme through sport.



Despite the continuing challenges on delivery due to the pandemic there were some great successes. Adaptations to the programmes allowed us to reach even more people in different settings who might not previously have been able to access the programme.

Both virtual and face-to-face sessions provided much needed support for people working from home or isolated from normal support networks and restricted from their normal routines and coping strategies.

A total of 830 people attended Offload sessions at club stadiums, community rugby league clubs, community venues, education settings and workplaces. The increased workload of the Player Welfare team and the growth of community programme delivery came at a time when both charities had limited opportunity to fundraise. It was therefore welcome to be in a position later in the year to push on with two fundraising events, the Warriors Walk and the UK Red Great North Ride. The Warriors Walk enabled former players to come back together and take on the Yorkshire Three Peaks challenge: 26 miles of mountainous terrain is a challenge for most, but taking this on without fully functioning knees and hips was hard work for our retired players. Fortunately, the walkers rose to the task superbly, working together to complete the challenge and enjoy what proved to be a tremendous experience.

The Great North Ride was a 220-mile three-day bike ride from Whitehaven on the west coast to the North Sea resort of Tynemouth that generated over £15,000 for the charity and was a gentle stepping stone for all those who had committed to the delayed Empire State 500 challenge in the summer of 2022.

Everyone connected with the charities were saddened by the passing of Matt King OBE. Many colleagues, especially those involved with the RL Benevolent Fund, had developed a wonderful relationship with Matt and his family and the loss of a friend and such an inspirational character was hard to bear. Covid-19 restrictions meant the opportunity to mark Matt's impact on the sport had to be delayed but later in the year the RL Benevolent Fund hosted a wonderful luncheon to celebrate the life of a young man whose positive impact on the sport continues to be felt.

The event featured the launch of the Matt King Educational Bursary, which will see the RFL, the RL Benevolent Fund and Matt's family award £10,000 every year to inspirational young leaders in the sport.

The Rugby League Benevolent Fund continued to experience challenging times in 2021. Covid-19 responses were very much at the forefront of actions as isolation, loneliness and damaging variable statutory welfare provision highlighted the need for the fund to provide additional care support.

Contacts with beneficiaries was maintained on a weekly basis. Our care and directional support was much appreciated by beneficiaries and their families. The fund gave additional support to those families who experienced bereavement after long-term illnesses or tragic accidental events.

Mose Masoe returned home after his catastrophic injury playing for Hull KR. The fund supported Mose and his family pastorally and financially, providing specialist care. In a period where event fundraising was almost impossible, the fund orchestrated direct fundraising to Mose of more than £200,000. This was a very proud achievement.



# CHARITIES

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The RL Lions Association was forced to postpone its annual luncheon, from which the fund receives generous support, but the fund did benefit from substantial donations from the Steve Prescott Foundation and the Mackay Trust. While breaks in lockdown created a piecemeal return to normality, we look forward to a sustainable response in the future. Fundraising events will now enable us to support, and react to, the most vulnerable and needy within our family of sport.

After almost 18 months of investment and hard work by RL Cares, the RFL and others, the sport's much celebrated plans for a National Rugby League Museum to be housed within the historic George Hotel in Huddersfield were dashed when Kirklees council reneged on its agreement and withdrew its support. This left the project without any realistic prospect of continuing in the West Yorkshire town.

A sport with so much history, with so many incredible stories so closely aligned to the contemporary experience of people today doesn't just need a museum, it must have a museum. So, and like many in the sport before us, we faced the challenge head on and continue to persevere with our aim of realising a facility that will tell the magical story of this great sport and the people involved in it.

As we look forward, the strategic focus of the charities remains the same, secure more funding and resources, to help more people in more significant and impactful ways and lead them to a healthier and more prosperous life. At the centre of this effort are the people who work within the charities. Their unswerving focus on helping people is what drives our work forward and I thank everyone involved - the trustees, staff, partners and stakeholders - for their commitment to our good causes. We were all therefore delighted when Steve Ball, who as a result of his selfless dedication to others, was awarded the MBE in the Queen's honours list.

It is through great people that we succeed, and we were equally pleased to announce Kevin Sinfield OBE had agreed to join the board as trustee in December 2021. Kevin's passion for Rugby League and its people is exemplified through his extraordinary support of his friend Rob Burrow MBE. Kevin joins a strong board led by our hardworking chairman Tim Adams MBE and further reinforces the ongoing commitment to positively changing the lives of many more people throughout the sport in 2022.

## **Chris Rostron**

Head of Rugby League Cares



# RED HALL

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An important chapter in the sport's history was brought to an end on April 30 2021 when the RFL closed the doors on Red Hall for the very last time.

The 17th century Grade II listed building on the outskirts of Leeds had been the home of the governing body since 1995 and was vacated ahead of the relocation to a new purpose-built base as part of the Sport City development at Manchester's Etihad Campus.

That move will be completed in two stages, with the RFL having relocated to Quay West in Salford until work on the organisation's new headquarters is completed.

Red Hall was at the epicentre of some of the most far-reaching events in the history of rugby league during its 26-year tenure as the sport's headquarters. It was from here that the game's move from winter to summer was achieved, and from where Rugby League entered into the exciting Super League era. In the first year after the RFL relocated from nearby Chapeltown Road in Leeds, Red Hall became the hub for the hugely successful Centenary World Cup and Emerging Nations tournaments; a second memorable World Cup was delivered from the building in 2000.

In its day, the Red Hall boardroom and the Chief Executive's office witnessed some seismic political events and structural reshuffles, including several changes of leadership, the advent and demise of licensing and the introduction of the salary cap.

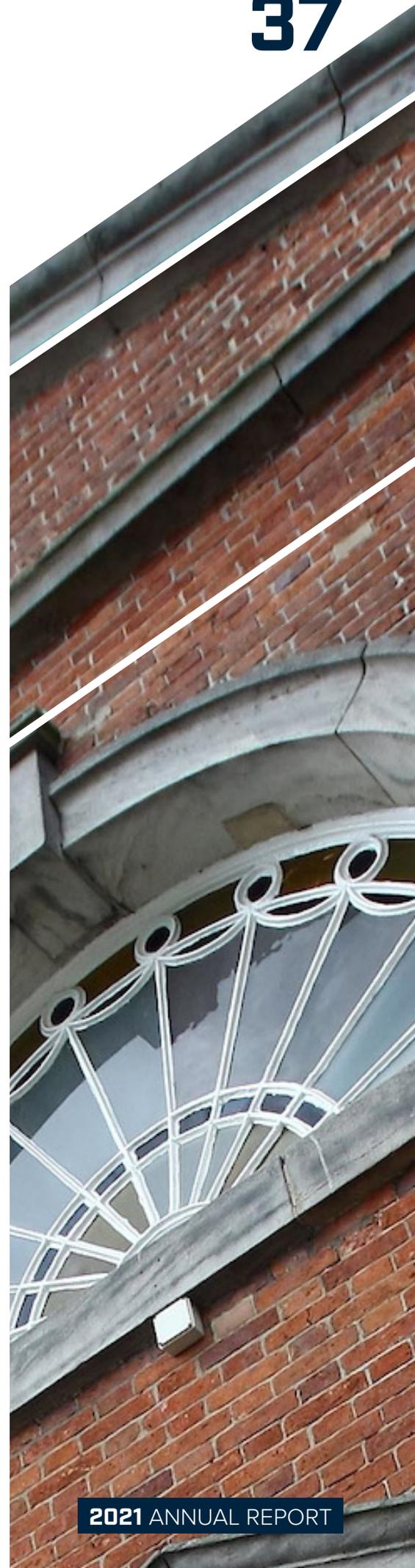
Hundreds of staff went through the front door of Red Hall, as did many players and coaches, especially on Tuesday evenings when the building hosted meetings of the RFL Disciplinary Committee. Leeds Rhinos prop Barrie McDermott, now a member of the Sky Sports presentation team, visited Red Hall so frequently on Tuesdays he joked he should be given his own parking space!

For all its Georgian splendour and magnificent setting amidst open parkland surrounded by mature trees, Red Hall was far from an ideal building in which to house a complex organisation like the governing body.

Many of its rooms were cold and draughty; others heated up like greenhouses when the sun shone; the strongroom where some of the sport's historic trophies were housed often flooded; and the fragmented nature of the layout presented constant challenges. In addition, accessibility to the motorway network usually meant a slow trip through Leeds city centre to get to and from Red Hall. And then there were the heating and lighting costs...Yet for all its foibles and eccentricities, Red Hall will be remembered as a happy place of work for staff, as Ralph Rimmer concluded at the end of April.

"This is a significant day and also a poignant one, especially for those of us who have been with the RFL for some time and therefore have so many fond memories of Red Hall," said Ralph, who was the fifth person to lead the organisation from Red Hall following in the steps of Maurice Lindsay, Neil Tunnicliffe, Richard Lewis and Nigel Wood.

"It has been a distinctive base for a National Governing Body, a building which can genuinely be described as iconic, with so much history, and also the feel of the countryside.



# RED HALL

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“It’s important that we also recognise the RFL’s lengthy connections to Yorkshire and especially Leeds, which has been home to the governing body for almost a century.

“However, the opportunity to move to Sport City which emerged a few years ago was irresistible – the chance to forge fresh history for the RFL in Manchester, to be one of a number of NGBs sharing knowledge on the same campus, and bringing all RFL operations and staff together on to one site presents significant advantages in terms of financial and environmental sustainability. This is about us adapting for the future.”

Red Hall has been developed as a private cosmetic surgery hospital and the surrounding area, including nearby parkland, has been earmarked for 400 new home. Whether the patients leaving the building after surgery can put on the same brave face as some of the players who fell foul of the judiciary process at Red Hall remains to be seen.



The RFL continued to seek to ensure that the principles of good governance are embedded in all aspects of its work. A detailed Governance Statement reporting on the RFL's governance arrangements and performance during 2021 is published on the RFL website.

The key governance changes and matters for the RFL during 2021 were:

- The RFL published its strategy for 2022 to 2030;
- The RFL and Super League (Europe) Limited commenced discussions regarding the realignment of the governance of the Sport;
- The RFL was subject to an audit by Sport England's assurance partner (BDO) and received a 'good' rating for both Governance and Finance;
- Clare Balding OBE's term as President was extended to the Council meeting in December 2022;
- The term of office of Chris Hurst was extended to the AGM in 2024;
- The Clinical Advisory Group was made a formal sub-committee of the RFL Board.

## BOARD AND MEETINGS

The Non-Executive Directors of the RFL during 2021 were Simon Johnson (Chair), Chris Brindley (Senior Independent Director), Chris Hurst, Sandy Lindsay and Rimla Akhtar and the Executive Directors were Ralph Rimmer and Karen Moorhouse.

During 2021 there were seven formal Board meetings. There was 100 per cent attendance at these meetings by all directors (save for one director missing one meeting due to being on paternity leave).

In addition, there was a significant number of Board meetings held virtually and further decisions made in writing. The number reflected the impact of coronavirus on the sport and the number of decisions that consequentially had to be made.

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

## WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

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

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

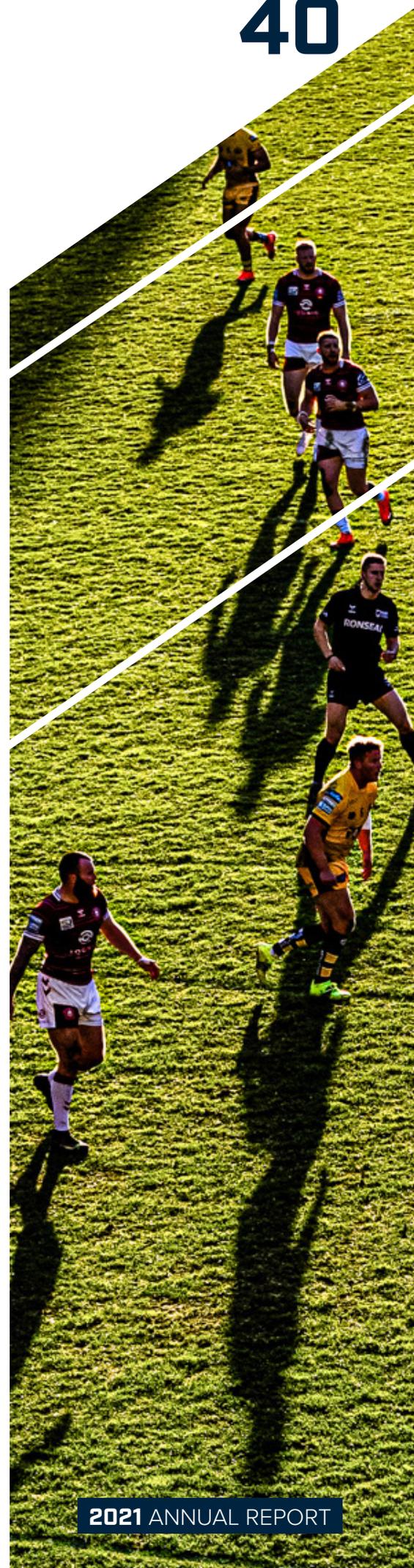
## ROLE OF RFL

As the governing body of Rugby League, during 2021 the RFL governed, developed, promoted and grew the sport. This included:

- **Governance:** Regulatory and operational matters concerning the entire sport including: the appointment of match officials, player registrations and the enforcement of the salary cap, facility standards, safeguarding, medical standards and on-field and off-field disciplinary matters.



- **Participation:** Working with foundations and other partners, developing and growing grassroots Rugby League in clubs and educational settings. Inclusive playing offers ranged from primary school age opportunities to youth, open age, Touch, Tag, Disability RL (physical disability and learning disability), Masters and Wheelchair RL.
- **Professional competitions:** The operation of, and marketing, promotion and presentation of, the Challenge Cup, the 1895 Cup, the Championship, League 1 and Women's Super League. SLE is responsible for the marketing, promotion and presentation of the Super League competition. The RFL provided several core services to SLE in relation to the operation of the Super League. SLE paid a fee to the RFL towards its costs and a solidarity payment towards the operation of the other professional league competitions.
- **Representative teams:** The operation of the England Performance Unit comprising the England Men's Senior, Knights, Women's Senior, Wheelchair, Academy and Youth teams.
- **World Cup 2022:** Working closely with Rugby League World Cup 2021 Limited (the wholly-owned subsidiary company running the World Cup in 2022) to ensure that the benefits and legacy of hosting the World Cup benefit the whole of the sport.



# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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## SUMMARY AND RESULTS

The consolidated accounts for the RFL show a profit before tax for the financial year of £1,008k for the year ended December 31 2021 (2020: £25k). The RFL has maintained an aggregate positive cash balance throughout the year.

## IMPACT OF COVID-19

The impact of Covid-19 has been significant for Rugby League. The key areas which directly affect the RFL's trading activities are as follows:

## CENTRAL EVENTS

The restrictions placed on the ability to stage events in front of spectators has significantly impacted on the RFL's ticket income. The measures put in place by Government saw reduced spectators at both the Betfred Challenge Cup semi-finals and final in 2021, as well as the postponement of Rugby League World Cup 2021.

## BROADCAST INCOME

The RFL and SLE in 2021 paid Sky a rebate due to the lack of ability to deliver live content in 2020 as a result of restrictions placed on the hosting of live sporting events. Super League fixtures resumed from August 2020 behind closed doors (BCD) and continued as such until the Government roadmap allowed some fans into stadia from May 17 2021. Matches played BCD allowed the sport to honour its broadcast contract with Sky and secured the contracted 2021 broadcast revenue from Sky and BBC.

## CASHFLOW MANAGEMENT

During 2021, short-term cash flow was carefully managed, and the medium-term external finance arranged in 2017 remained in place. In addition to this, the RFL was successful in applying to the DCMS Rugby League Professional Sport Support Fund for a loan of £4.5m which was approved by an independent Loan Committee made up of officials from DCMS, the RFL and Sport England. This will support the cash flow of the business for the foreseeable future. As part of the RFL's move to the Etihad Campus, in May 2021 its office in Leeds was sold and this made a significant positive impact on the RFL's cashflow along with reducing expected long-term estates liabilities. Cash flow is continuously monitored, and the budget approved by the Board for 2022 generated a small profit to further increase cash and reserves.

## KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Board monitors executive performance with reference to the Strategic Plan by measuring key performance indicators (KPIs) as part of the RFL's Operational Plan. The KPIs of the RFL are reviewed by the Executive team at its weekly meetings and by the directors at each Board meeting. These KPIs have been chosen as they allow the directors to closely monitor the performance of the RFL against the targets set in the Strategic Plan.



# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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## PRINCIPAL RISKS AND UNCERTAINTIES

The Board and Executive team had budgeted to make a profit in 2021 (£817k) in order to continue the financial turnaround from the previous two years and to build reserves for future DCMS loan repayments. Strict cost control and management of spend by the Executive enabled the group to deliver to budget in a challenging year where the impacts of Covid-19 continued to effect trading.

## DETAILED ANALYSIS OF TRADING

It is important to note that these statements are consolidated and incorporate the results of Rugby League World Cup 2021 Limited and RFL Investments 2020 Limited, both wholly-owned subsidiaries of RFL (Governing Body) Limited. The reader should take this into account when reviewing year-on-year results in all areas, but it is mainly costs which are impacted in 2021 with the bulk of the revenue and costs of RLWC2021 being recognised in 2022, the year of the event. RFL Investments 2020 Limited is the vehicle for the administration of the sport's loan funding from DCMS and its balance sheet reflects the long-term liability to DCMS for the loans made to eligible entities in 2020 and 2021. The accounts of both these subsidiaries are reported in full and filed at Companies House.

Year-on-year turnover increased by 32 per cent from £18,801k to £24,764k which can be attributed in the main to the impact of reduced restrictions on spectators at events as a result of Covid-19 and the inclusion of some match Income derived from central events in 2021. Sponsorship income also saw some recovery, increasing to £1,668k from £860k.

Government funding from Sport England rose from £5,662k in 2020 to £8,351k – an increase of 47 per cent mainly due to grants received by RLWC2021 Limited in support of preparations for the Rugby League World Cup which is to be held in England in 2022.

The existing BBC and Sky broadcast contracts continued in 2021. Overall broadcast income increased from £8,777k to £9,434k in 2021. The increase is due to the rebate payable to Sky due to non-delivery of televised fixtures in 2020 arising from restrictions placed on live sporting events due to Covid-19. Within the RFL accounts, the cost of sales heading is broken down into two sections, the first being the external, third-party costs of making the sale and the second being the cost of sales that are internal to the RFL's stakeholders such as payments directly made to clubs. External cost of sales increased from £3,520k in 2020 to £5,800k in 2021. This rise is attributable to the increase in match costs due to the easing of Government restrictions in relation to staging central events. Grant-funded activities expenditure increased from £2,059k in 2020 to £3,125k in 2021 reflecting the level of programme activity delivered in 2021, and its associated income.

Payments to and on behalf of clubs is made up of the cost of sales element of £1,204k (2020: £1,841k) and a further amount of £7,153k (2020: £5,860k) shown below Gross Profit on the Profit and Loss Account, which in 2021 brought the total payable to and on behalf of clubs to £8,356k (2020: £7,701k).



# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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In 2021, Operating Costs increased to £10,055k from £8,275k in 2020. This is due to the classification of grant-funded expenditure in RLWC2021 Limited as operating costs as activity and planning of the event begin to increase.

Group Staff Costs have significantly increased from £6,096k in 2020 to £6,847k in 2021. This is due to the impact of Covid-19 in 2020 as well as increase in staff costs relating to the preparations for RLWC2021. Director remuneration slightly increased from £440k in 2020 to £455k in 2021. Interest receivable by the RFL in 2021 was £169k (2020: £7k). In 2021, £169k was received by RFL Investments 2020 Limited in respect of interest repayments from clubs who received support from the Sport Survival Package. This is repayable to DCMS after the balance sheet date.



# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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## GROUP STATEMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE INCOME FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

	Notes	2021 £	2020
<b>Turnover</b> 3		24,764,054	18,801,042
Cost of sales	4	(5,800,170)	(3,520,223)
Cost of sales payable to or on behalf of clubs	5	(1,203,500)	(1,841,178)
<b>Total cost of sales</b>		<u>(7,003,670)</u>	<u>(5,361,401)</u>
<b>Gross profit</b>		17,760,384	13,439,641
Payments to or on behalf of clubs and other member organisations	5	(7,152,509)	(5,860,126)
Operating costs (		10,054,721)	(8,274,673)
<b>Total administrative costs</b>		<u>(17,207,230)</u>	<u>(14,134,799)</u>
Other operating income		75,614	49,930
Exceptional item	6	380,000	-
<b>Operating profit/(loss)</b> 7		<u>1,008,768</u>	<u>(145,228)</u>
Interest receivable and similar income	11	169,115	7,371
Interest payable and similar expenses	12	(169,745)	-
Amounts gained/(written off) investments	13	-	163,241
<b>Profit before taxation</b>		<u>1,008,138</u>	<u>25,384</u>
Tax on profit	14	50,861	-
<b>Profit for the financial year</b>		<u><u>1,058,999</u></u>	<u><u>25,384</u></u>

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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## GROUP BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021

	Notes	2021	2020
	£	£	£
<b>Fixed assets</b>			
Tangible assets	15	446,594	1,798,689
Investment properties	16	750,000	750,000
		<u>1,196,594</u>	<u>2,548,689</u>
<b>Current assets</b>			
Debtors falling due after more than one year	18	18,960,864	7,842,927
Debtors falling due within one year	18	6,340,707	20,584,584
Cash at bank and in hand		15,485,041	10,634,014
		<u>40,786,612</u>	<u>39,061,525</u>
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due within one year</b>	19	(19,579,650) (	27,515,044)
<b>Net current assets</b>		<u>21,206,962</u> 1	<u>1,546,481</u>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>		<u>22,403,556</u>	<u>14,095,170</u>
<b>Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year</b>	20	(21,435,304)	(14,185,917)
<b>Net assets/(liabilities)</b>		<u>968,252</u>	<u>(90,747)</u>
<b>Capital and reserves</b>			
Revaluation reserve	24	118,993	565,219
Profit and loss reserves	24	849,259	(655,966)
<b>Total equity</b>		<u>968,252</u>	<u>(90,747)</u>

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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## COMPANY BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2021

	Notes	2021		2020
	£	£	£	£
<b>Fixed assets</b>				
Tangible assets	15	340,000		1,615,000
Investment properties	16	750,000		750,000
Investments	17	389,861		389,861
		<u>1,479,861</u>		<u>2,754,861</u>
<b>Current assets</b>				
Debtors	18	1,831,300		72,280
<b>Net current assets</b>		<u>1,831,300</u>		<u>72,280</u>
<b>Total assets less current liabilities</b>		<u>3,311,161</u>		<u>2,827,141</u>
<b>Provisions for liabilities</b>	22	(22,609)		(62,122)
<b>Net assets</b>		<u>3,288,552</u>		<u>2,765,019</u>
<b>Capital and reserves</b>				
Revaluation reserve	24	118,993		565,219
Accumulated surplus/(deficit)	24	3,169,559		2,199,800
<b>Total equity</b>		<u>3,288,552</u>		<u>2,765,019</u>

As permitted by s408 Companies Act 2006, the company has not presented its own profit and loss account and related notes. The company's profit for the year was £523,533 (2020 - £0 profit).

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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## GROUP STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

	Revaluation reserve	Profit and loss reserves	Total
	£	£	
<b>Balance at 1 January 2020</b>	565,219	(681,350)	(116,131)
<b>Year ended 31 December 2020:</b>			
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year -	2	5,384	5,384
<b>Balance at 31 December 2020</b>	565,219	(655,966)	(90,747)
<b>Year ended 31 December 2021:</b>			
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year -	1	,058,999	,058,999
Transfers	(446,226)	46,226	-
<b>Balance at 31 December 2021</b>	118,993	849,259	968,252

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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## COMPANY STATEMENT OF CHANGES IN EQUITY FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

	Revaluation reserve £	Accumulated surplus £	Total £
<b>Balance at 1 January 2020</b>	565,219	2,199,800	2,765,019
<b>Year ended 31 December 2020:</b>			
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year -	-	-	-
<b>Balance at 31 December 2020</b>	565,219	2,199,800	2,765,019
<b>Year ended 31 December 2021:</b>			
Profit and total comprehensive income for the year -	5	23,533	23,533
Transfers	(446,226)	46,226	-
<b>Balance at 31 December 2021</b>	118,993	3,169,559	3,288,552

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

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## GROUP STATEMENT OF CASH FLOWS FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2021

	Notes	2021		2020	
		£	£	£	£
<b>Cash flows from operating activities</b>					
Cash absorbed by operations	29	(5,821,085)		(8,345,703)	
Income taxes refunded/(paid) 1		59,061		(318)	
<b>Net cash outflow from operating activities</b>		<b>(5,662,024)</b>		<b>(8,346,021)</b>	
<b>Investing activities</b>					
Purchase of tangible fixed assets (		31,108)	(	49,912)	
Proceeds on disposal of tangible fixed assets		1,655,524		-	
Interest received		7,525		7,371	
<b>Net cash generated from/(used in) investing activities</b>		<b>1,631,941</b>		<b>(42,541)</b>	
<b>Financing activities</b>					
Proceeds from borrowings		8,881,095		14,155,000	
<b>Net cash generated from financing activities</b>		<b>8,881,095</b>		<b>14,155,000</b>	
<b>Net increase in cash and cash equivalents</b>		<b>4,851,012</b>		<b>5,766,438</b>	
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of year 1		0,634,014		4,867,576	
<b>Cash and cash equivalents at end of year</b>		<b>15,485,026</b>		<b>10,634,014</b>	
<b>Relating to:</b>					
Cash at bank and in hand 1		5,485,041		10,634,014	
Bank overdrafts included in creditors payable within one year		(15)		-	

# PRESIDENT

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## **PRESIDENT: CLARE BALDING CBE**

Clare Balding CBE's term as President of the Rugby Football League was extended to December 2022 in recognition of the unique circumstances of the last two years and the delay to RLWC2021.

Clare had become the governing body's 30th President in July 2020, initially on a two-year term.

The celebrated broadcaster, journalist and author has a lifelong love of rugby league stemming from her family's roots in Knowsley. She presented the BBC's rugby league coverage from 2006 to 2012 and has been a familiar and popular figure on the coverage of many sports on both the BBC and Channel 4, including horse racing, six Olympic Games, Wimbledon and the Paralympics.

Clare, a passionate dog-lover, is the anchor of Channel 4's coverage of Crufts and has written a Sunday Times bestseller.

In June 2022, Clare was awarded a CBE for services to sport and charity in the Queen's Birthday Honours.



# VICE PRESIDENT

## VICE PRESIDENT: MIKE SMITH

A lifelong supporter of Hull Kingston Rovers, Mike was the East Riding club's Chief Executive for over 10 years until February 2021.

Mike's love affair with Rugby League was fostered at Skirlaugh ARLFC, where he had a long-term involvement as a volunteer. He served Skirlaugh for more than a decade, playing a key role in their emergence as a powerhouse in the National Conference League, then broadened his Rugby League involvement by helping to arrange the Rumble by the Humber – the boxing bout between Lee Radford and Stuart Fielden which raised more than £50,000 for the Steve Prescott Foundation. Soon after that, he was invited by Hull KR Chairman Neil Hudgell to join Rovers, initially liaising with community clubs, before taking over as Commercial Manager and then Chief Executive.

Mike's tireless efforts at Hull KR were recognised in 2020 when he received the Colin Hutton Outstanding Contribution Award for his hard work behind the scenes during the pandemic.

He stepped down as Chief Executive following a period of poor health with pancreatitis but remained at Rovers throughout 2021 into 2022 working with the club's charitable foundation.

Mike will continue as RFL Vice-President until July 2022, when he moves to a new role as Deputy Vice-President for six months until December 2022, in response to the postponement of the Rugby League World Cup.

He will be succeeded as RFL Vice-President by BARLA Chair Sue Taylor, who will join Clare Balding as one half of the first all-female duo in these honorary roles. Due in part to the delay to the Rugby League World Cup, Sue's tenure will last 18 months rather than the normal 12.





**SIMON JOHNSON**

Previously the RFL's Senior Non-Executive Director having joined the Board in July 2014, Simon became the Chair of the RFL in October 2019. Alongside his appointment, two additional Non-Executive Directors were added to the Board.

Simon runs a consultancy business advising clients in the sport and leisure industries and charitable third sector. He spent seven years as Chief Executive of the Jewish Leadership Council. Before that, he had a 20-year career that saw him operate at the highest levels of the sports and media industries. After a period as the senior lawyer at the Premier League, Simon's career in sport saw him spend four years as Director of Corporate Affairs at the Football Association, followed by a role as COO of England's bid to host the 2018 FIFA World Cup.

He started his career as a lawyer, spending 10 years with ITV, the majority as Director of Rights and Business Affairs.

Away from sport, Simon lives in London with his wife and three children. He is an active participant in community and charitable institutions.



**CHRIS BRINDLEY MBE**

After executive roles in the UK with NatWest, British Gas and Metro Bank, Chris now has a portfolio of non-executive director (NED) and chair roles in business and sport. He is also a global keynote speaker and executive coach. Chris is Chair of Rugby League World Cup 2021, Senior NED at the RFL, Senior NED at the Manchester Football Association, NED at Equilibrium LLP, NED at Her Spirit, Business Adviser to Zellar Limited and Chair of the Sporting House Group. From an executive coaching perspective, Chris is the Leadership and Business Coach at Metro Bank, Switch the Play, Athlete Inspired Programme and Goodson Thomas. He has coached executives from companies such as Heineken, Muller, Telent and Halfords. Chris is also a Business Mentor for the Premier League Elite Academy Managers Programme, and subject lead for the people module on the Executive Education programme 'How to be a CEO in a Sporting Organisation.'

He has also worked extensively with academics from leading business schools as well as executives, managers and team leaders within global PLCs. His accolades include Britain's Best Boss, Most Outstanding Workplace at the National Business Awards; Sales and Marketing Director of the Year (three consecutive years), and in 2017 was awarded United Kingdom Non-Executive Director of the Year by the Institute of Directors.



Chris has spoken in the UK, Europe, Africa and Australia on topics including change management, culture, building high-performing teams, customer experience and coaching.

In June 2018, he was awarded an MBE for his services to sport.



**CHRIS HURST**

Chris joined the RFL Board in December 2018 with almost 20 years of experience in the sports industry working for the Premier League, International Cricket Council, BBC Sport and Nielsen Sports, before launching his own digital sports business in 2018 – C J Hurst Consultancy – which provides strategic advice to leading organisations across the sports industry.

At Nielsen Sports, Chris oversaw the organisation’s digital offer in UK and Europe, working with leading rights holders and brands on a range of key digital issues.

As BBC Sport’s first dedicated social media editor, he developed and delivered a strategy focused on growing BBC’s social media reach and engaging younger audiences.

In his role as Digital Development Editor for BBC Sport’s award-winning interactive services, Chris oversaw the editorial development plans for the Rio Olympics that were used by 102 million unique browsers across the globe.

Chris also works as a Trustee on the Board of the Women’s Sport Trust.



**DR RIMLA AKHTAR OBE**

Dr Akhtar has over 18 years’ experience in the sports industry across the UK, Middle East and Asia, after a successful career in the city at leading global professional services firm Pricewaterhouse Coopers.

In 2014, she became the first Muslim and Asian woman on the FA Council in addition to her role on the Inclusion Advisory Board at the FA, and in 2015 she was awarded an MBE for her contribution to equality and diversity in sport. She holds a portfolio of additional strategic and boardroom roles, including as an Independent Director of the Sports Ground Safety Authority, council member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland and independent director of Bettys and Taylors Group.

She was ranked 14th in the 2018 Forbes global list of the most powerful women in sport. She founded the leading global sport development consultancy, RimJhim Consulting; she was Chair of the Muslim Women’s Sport Foundation until December 2018; and co-founded the global Muslim Women in Sport Network.



Dr Akhtar was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in June 2021 for services to equality and diversity in sport.



**SANDY LINDSAY MBE**

Sandy is Chair of Tangerine, the specialist creative communications agency she founded in Manchester in 2002 and which she put into employee ownership in 2017.

In 2015 she was awarded the MBE for services to business and young people, and in the same year she was named North West Director of the Year by the Institute of Directors (and Highly Commended in the same awards nationally). That followed the launch in 2013 of The Juice Academy, the UK's first industry-led social media apprenticeship which has created jobs for more than 400 young people in the North West and across the UK. In 2020 she co-founded a third business, Vine Insights, which helps brands understand their audiences online.

A champion of social mobility, Sandy chairs the Skills Group for the North West Business Leadership Team and is on the Business Leadership Council of Teach First. She is Vice Chair of the charity Forever Manchester and a Non-Executive Director of Flock and Northcoders.



**RALPH RIMMER**

Ralph was appointed CEO of the RFL in July 2018, having taken the role on an interim basis in January 2018.

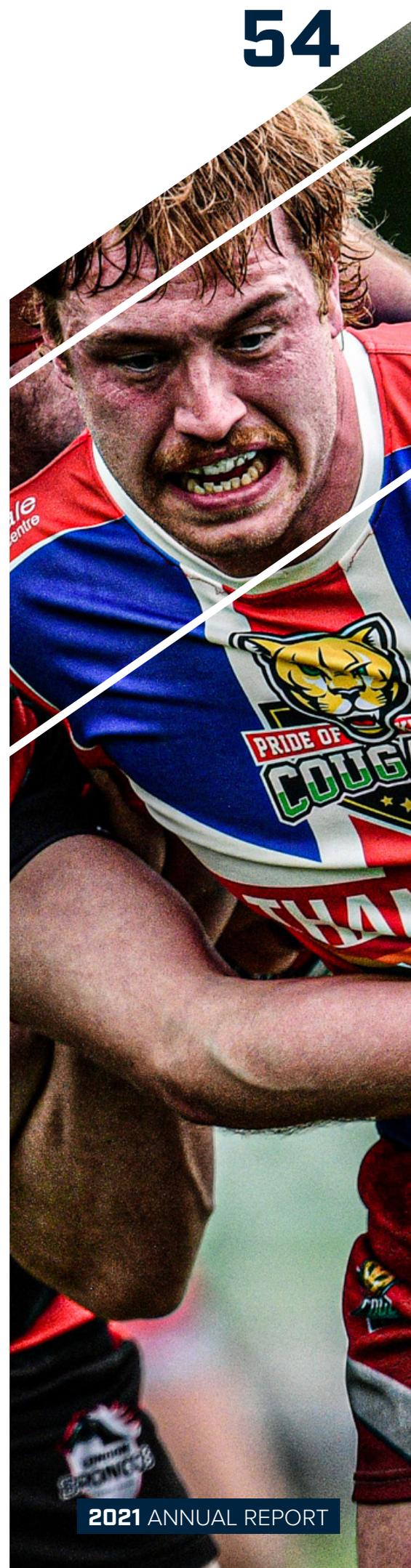
He has been a member of the RFL Board since 2013 after joining the organisation as Chief Operating Officer in October 2010.

Ralph has a wealth of experience at every level of the game, coupled with extensive knowledge in stadia and leisure development.

He played community Rugby League for many years as a junior and senior for Ulverston ARLFC and went on to captain the Liverpool University team and play at student international level, before playing for Wakefield side, Stanley Old Boys.

He began his professional career within the sport in South Yorkshire in 1991 as a Development Officer with Doncaster. He then took up a similar role with Sheffield Eagles three years later, going on to become General Manager and then Chief Executive of the then Super League club.

Following the club's historic Challenge Cup final victory over Wigan at Wembley in 1998, Ralph went on to spend five years as Chief Executive at Huddersfield Giants before moving on to the board as a non-executive director and taking on the role of managing director of the stadium company, Kirklees Stadium Development Ltd.



Ralph spent four years as a non-executive director of Huddersfield Town AFC, helping to take the club out of administration. He also managed the Ireland national Rugby League team from 1997 to 2002 (including the 2000 Rugby League World Cup) and the Yorkshire Origin team in 2002. He was non-executive Chairman of the Sporting Pride Community Trust in Huddersfield, between 2007 and 2010.

As Managing Director of KSDL he was Project Lead on the £2m stadium redevelopment in 2007 and also on the £150m HD One Leisure Development. He has acted as a management consultant on several stadium developments including Leigh Sports Village, Colchester United FC Stadium and the Salford City Stadium.



**KAREN MOORHOUSE**

Karen Moorhouse is the RFL's Chief Regulatory Officer with overall responsibility for all governance and regulatory matters across the whole of the game, including salary cap and player registrations, facility standards, safeguarding, medical, on-field and off-field disciplinary matters and player welfare.

She has been Company Secretary since 2017 and became a Director in January 2018.

Karen is also a non-executive director of RLWC2021 Limited - the company organising this year's Rugby League World Cup in England.

She joined the RFL in 2008 as Compliance Manager. In 2009 Karen became Head of Legal and then in 2014 assumed her current role. As Head of Legal, Karen was also on the Project Board of the Rugby League World Cup 2013.

Karen is a qualified solicitor having read law at Cambridge University, graduating with a First Class Degree. She completed her solicitor training contract at Magic Circle law firm Linklaters, subsequently qualifying into the Banking Department.

In 2005 Karen joined the Football Association as an in-house lawyer with responsibility for a range of sponsorship, commercial and other legal matters.



