

ANNUAL REPORT 2024



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INTRODUCTION

CEO



For the sport of Rugby League and the RFL as its governing body, the year 2024 was both poignant and historic.

Fittingly, given his impact on Rugby League and the wider sporting public, Rob Burrow CBE was a central figure throughout. The end of his heroic and inspirational battle against Motor Neurone Disease was announced on the Sunday evening before the Betfred Challenge Cup Final's day, allowing the sport to pay a memorable and suitable tribute at Rugby League's traditional showpiece occasion at Wembley Stadium on June 8.

Rugby League Commercial had already announced, at the Super League season launch in January, that the Player of the Match at the Grand Final would receive the Rob Burrow Award, recognising Rob's special link to Old Trafford where he enjoyed so much success with Leeds Rhinos, including that unforgettable try against St Helens.

There was more history when Bevan French was the inaugural winner of that award after scoring a try that Rob would have loved, to settle a compelling 2025 Grand Final in Wigan's favour against Hull KR – as it meant the brilliant Australian had claimed a unique hat-trick of individual awards, following previous Player of the Match performances in the World Club Challenge against Penrith Panthers and in the aforementioned Challenge Cup Final at Wembley, the latter securing the Lance Todd Trophy.

Wigan's season was as dominant as French's big-match performances, as Matt Peet's Warriors secured a clean sweep of World Club Challenge, Challenge Cup, League Leaders' Shield and the Super League title – an achievement recognised and amplified in December when they were crowned Team of the Year at the BBC's annual Sports Personality Awards.

There was another significant first for the sport with the implementation of the Club Grading system that was one of the recommendations from IMG as part of their long-term strategic partnership with Rugby League.

It meant a considerable amount of work for the clubs both in compiling the necessary data and, as a positive result, in raising the level of many of the standards under measurement - and also for the RFL in the

assessment and implementation. The introduction of grading saw club investment and focus on areas such as digital and stadium facilities increase, which will positively impact both club financial sustainability and fan experience.

But in Wakefield Trinity, there could have been no better example of meeting the fresh challenges of grading to revitalise a famous old club. Under the leadership of Matt Ellis off the field and Daryl Powell closer to it, they attracted far bigger crowds for a successful campaign in the Betfred Championship than they had for some time in the Super League.

They also became the fifth winners of the AB Sundecks 1895 Cup on a memorable day for thousands of Trinity fans relishing a long-awaited day in the Wembley sun, and after securing the Betfred Championship title – which carried a six-figure prize pot – with victory over Toulouse Olympique at their redeveloped DIY Kitchens Stadium, they received recognition for their overall progress as they were one of nine clubs to receive an A grade, securing their return to the Super League in 2025.

Castleford Tigers and Leigh Leopards also secured A grades, while St Helens climbed to the top of the rankings to reflect their overall excellence.

There were so many memorable occasions throughout the season. Jodie Cunningham's Saints maintained their grip on the Betfred Women's Challenge Cup with victory over Leeds Rhinos in the second Wembley Final – exactly as they had in the first.

Catalans Dragons offered a reminder of the strength of Wheelchair Rugby League in France when they beat Wigan Warriors in the Betfred Wheelchair Challenge Cup Final in Sheffield, although the season ended with James Simpson's Leeds Rhinos regaining the Wheelchair Super League title, and Tom Coyd's England sharing the spoils with the France national team in a two-match series split between Wigan and Saint-Lo in Normandy.

Lindsay Anfield's York Valkyrie became the first team to retain the Betfred Women's Super League title with an outstanding win against Saints in their own backyard, and there was more history for Shaun Wane's England when they beat Samoa 2-0 in a first series between the nations – while Stuart Barrow's England Women turned on the style against Wales before the second of those wins at AMT Headingley.

Among a number of significant developments at the RFL, Phil Bentham returned from football's PGMOL as Head of Match Officials – with Dave Elliott, who had done an excellent job leading the officials on an interim basis, taking up a new position as Head of Education.

The Match Officials responded superbly to their move to the sport's headquarters on the Etihad Campus in Manchester, and after becoming the first woman to score a try at Wembley in St Helens' 2023 Challenge Cup Final win, Tara Jones registered a number of other significant firsts as a match official in her last season as a player – the first woman to referee a Betfred League One fixture, to be appointed as touch judge for a men's Super League match, and in October, following her retirement as a player, the first woman to join the RFL's full-time match officials squad.

It was a busy year for our campaigning and public affairs work. The All Party Parliamentary Group was reconstituted following Labour's landslide win in the General Election in July, and Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP continued to bang the drum for the sport to great effect in the corridors of power in his second year as RFL President – before handing the chains of office to Adam Hills MBE.

Our APPRLG provided valuable support when we launched the RFL Facilities Strategy in May, aiming to unlock investment of £100m to facilitate the sport's unique ability to transform lives and strengthen communities in some of the most challenged parts of the country.

We were delighted to add the Leeds Rhinos stalwart Sam Horner to the RFL Roll of Honour, and congratulated our colleagues at Rugby League Cares for presenting an outstanding night at The Edge in Wigan in the autumn at which the 1996 Great Britain Lionesses – true trailblazers – became the first team to be inducted, alongside a quartet of male greats – James Lomas, Alan

Prescott, Paul Sculthorpe MBE and Jamie Peacock MBE.

The year ended with recognition in the New Year's Honours List for four significant Rugby League personalities – Paul Caddick MBE, Ken Davy OBE, Andrea Dobson MBE and Tony Martin OBE – as we continued to press the claims of Rugby League.



ON FIELD

REVIEW



More than any other year since the club's dominance of British Rugby League in the decade leading up to the start of the Super League era in 1996, the year 2024 belonged to Wigan. The Warriors, steered as intelligently from the Chief Executive's office by their former international full-back Kris Radlinski as they were on the pitch by the head coach Matt Peet, won a Grand Slam of trophies, unique in the Super League era – World Club Challenge, Betfred Challenge Cup, League Leaders' Shield and the Betfred Super League Grand Final at Old Trafford in October.

Their achievements earned recognition well beyond Rugby League when they were named Team of the Year in the coveted BBC's Sports Personality Awards for 2024 – while Peet was pipped as Coach of the Year by Trevor and Jenny Meadows, who had plotted Keely Hodgkinson's path to 800 metres Olympics gold in Paris.

On the stage and in front of a TV audience of millions, Trevor – who briefly played for Chorley Borough – spoke of his admiration for Peet and the Wigan club, and his pride at being ranked alongside them. BBC Sport's extended coverage of Rugby League under a new three-year deal to run alongside the continued investment and coverage from Sky Sports was one of the major features of the 2024 season.

Both networks covered Wigan's breathless 16-12 victory over Penrith Panthers in front of a capacity crowd and record viewing figures in February. The win was Wigan's fifth world club title, equalling the record of Sydney Roosters, and their first since 2017. It was also a fourth defeat in the fixture for the Panthers, following their previous appearances against Wigan (1991), Bradford Bulls (2004) and St Helens (2023). But all who travelled with Penrith enhanced the club's reputation as the classiest of acts, led by the father-and-son combination of Ivan and Nathan Cleary.

The 2024 season ended with Penrith clinching their fourth consecutive NRL Grand Final victory, unprecedented in the modern era, a week before Wigan won their second – leaving little doubt that these were the sport's two outstanding clubs.

Wigan's Challenge Cup win in June was their 21st – seven more than any other club – but their first at Wembley since

2013. They beat Warrington Wolves, whose Wembley appearance confirmed their position as credible challengers, reflecting the early impact made by Sam Burgess following his appointment as head coach. Bevan French won the Lance Todd Trophy as player of the match, his second such award of the year after securing the equivalent award for the World Club Challenge, which was named after Bill Ashurst, a Great Britain forward who played for both Wigan and Penrith.

French went on to complete a unique treble at Old Trafford in October, when he scored the only try in Wigan's 9-2 win against Hull Kingston Rovers – a brilliant solo effort – to win the first Rob Burrow Award. That award had been introduced at the start of the season as a replacement for the Harry Sunderland Trophy, which dated back to Championship and Premiership Finals, and reflected Burrow's indelible link to the Grand Final through the try he scored for Leeds against St Helens at Old Trafford in 2011.

There was added poignancy to French's award, as there had been to the week of Wembley four months earlier, when Leeds announced the end of Burrow's heroic battle against Motor Neurone Disease on the evening of Sunday June 2, six days before the Challenge Cup final. Rugby League and the wider sporting world paid tribute at Wembley, with applause after seven minutes of each of the day's four finals. A special day at Wembley began with the inspiresport RFL Champion Schools Final for Year Seven Boys – the Steven Mullaney Memorial Match – which was won by St Peter's Catholic High of Wigan against Cardiff's Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Glantaf.

St Helens beat Leeds in the second Betfred Women's Challenge Cup final at Wembley – exactly as they had done in the first, this time with a convincing 22-0 scoreline extending their grip on the competition to a fourth year. And Finals Day was completed by Wakefield Trinity romping to a 50-6 win against Sheffield Eagles to become the fifth different club to win the AB Sundecks 1895 Cup since its introduction in 2019.

The sight of around 6,000 Trinity supporters celebrating behind the posts, as they became comfortably the best supported 1895 Cup finalists to date, was another Wembley highlight. Wakefield continued to enjoy their season outside Super League following relegation in 2023, as under the effective management combination of experienced coach Daryl Powell and ebullient owner Matt Ellis they finished top of the Betfred Championship table by a distance before going on to beat Toulouse Olympique in the Grand Final.

Their return to the elite in 2025 was confirmed days later, secured via the grading system introduced through Rugby League's strategic partnership with IMG. Wakefield replaced a London Broncos team who had battled bravely all season under the intelligent coaching of Mike Eccles, and who only finished bottom behind Hull FC on points difference.

Oldham, revitalised by a group of investors put together by the club's former scrum-half Mike Ford, swept to the Betfred League One title under the coaching of Sean Long, and Hunslet also secured promotion to the Championship for 2025 with a thrilling win at Swinton Lions, who were therefore relegated to League One alongside Dewsbury and Whitehaven – three teams going down as the first step towards establishing three divisions of 12 in 2027.

Catalans Dragons won the Betfred Wheelchair Challenge Cup for the second consecutive season, demolishing Wigan Warriors 81-18 in the final at the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield; and Leeds Rhinos secured their first Betfred Wheelchair Super League title since 2021 with a 52-32 win against Halifax Panthers at the University of Hull.

St Helens were denied a league and Cup double despite finishing top of the BWSL table by four points. That earned them home advantage in the Grand Final, but they were stunned by York Valkyrie, who won 18-8 to secure their second consecutive title in front of a competition-record crowd of 4,813. York full-back Georgie Hetherington, who had already been named Woman of Steel, added the Player of the Match award in her last appearance under that surname: she resumed her career in 2025 as Georgie Dagger, after marrying York Knights player Will.

England Women had two comfortable wins in 2024 – 42-0 against France in Toulouse in mid-season, then 82-0 against Wales at AMT Headingley in November, with the Wigan wing Anna Davies scoring five tries, and her Warriors team-mate Isabel Rowe kicking nine goals on her 18th birthday.

England Men also had a comfortable mid-season win against France in Toulouse, with two tries apiece for Ash Handley, Tom Johnstone and Jack Welsby, before they extended their winning record to seven matches since the 2022 World Cup with an impressive 2-0 series win against Samoa in the autumn. The Samoans, coached by Ben Gardiner and captained by Jarome Luai, were expected to offer more threat to England than Tonga on an equivalent tour 12 months earlier, having stunned England in that World Cup semi-final in London.

However, Shaun Wane's team again combined tough defence with skilful attack to secure wins by 34-18 at Wigan's Brick Community Stadium and 34-16 at Headingley. At that point, they were planning for a tour to Australia in 2025 – but the year ended with the first moves being made behind the scenes for a first Ashes series in England since 2003.

RFLSTAFF

FOCUS



Matty Lynn is the first to admit that if anyone told him 10 years ago he would be chasing a place as a full-time Super League referee, he'd question their grip on reality.

Having played rugby union at high school, Matty only took up Rugby League as a 14-year-old when his father and his best friend's dad decided to form a new team in the North Yorkshire town of Yarm.

Yarm Wolves were so successful that the local rugby union juniors switched codes en masse, creating a fantastic success story in the North East and propelling young Matty onto a whole new career pathway.

Matty ended up signing for the Newcastle Thunder Academy while Yarm have grown in strength and now field junior teams from under-10s level through to under-16s.

"It's been a very strange rugby journey and one I could never have predicted," said Matty, whose move into the world of match officials was encouraged by Newcastle when it became clear he was unlikely to progress to the senior ranks.

"There was no real sense of disappointment because I loved refereeing. I've always strived to be involved in sport at the highest level, be that as a player or match official.

"I'm too young and inexperienced to be a coach and I've always wanted to be out there on the pitch."

Now 22, Matty is currently a member of the Super League referees' development group and regularly referees at Championship and League One level, as well as being a touch-judge in Super League.

He combines his weekend roles on the pitch with a full-time position as Match Officials Administrator based at the Etihad Campus, where he is responsible for helping coordinate appointments across Championship, League 1, National Conference League, women's competitions and the Midlands leagues.

"If I'm the man in the middle on matchday, I'm sort of the middleman when it comes to notifying match officials about weekend appointments," he explained.

"I work closely with Phil Bentham, Julian King and Ben Thaler on the appointments, uploading details to Scheduler so that everyone knows which games they have coming up.

"It's a fascinating job and very rewarding to do." Perhaps even more rewarding for Matty is the

time he spends with the RFL's full-time referees, with whom he trains every Tuesday.

"It's great to spend time with the senior match officials because I'm learning so much from them all the time.

"Training on the field and sitting down to take part in game reviews is helping me all the time. They're all very supportive and are always encouraging me.

"Rugby league is very much my life now: when I'm not at work I'm training or officiating or reviewing my own performances on video. "I have absolutely zero spare time and I wouldn't have it any other way!"

TALENT & PERFORMANCE



For all the challenges in establishing a meaningful international calendar for the three senior England teams, activity in 2024 indicated that there is greater collaboration and understanding between key stakeholders.

England Senior Men benefited from a mid-season international and autumn Test series.

Head Coach Shaun Wane's squad for the match against France in Toulouse included four new additions, three of whom have previously been involved with the England Pathway's Programme. England emerged comfortable 40-8 winners.

We welcomed southern hemisphere opposition in Samoa for a two-Test series in the autumn. Both matches were won relatively comfortably, 34-16 in Wigan and 34-18 in Leeds. There were some world-class performances from some of the English players, perhaps most notably Herbie Farnworth, which bodes well for the future.

The women's international against Wales formed part of a double-header with the men's game against Samoa at Headingley. Stuart Barrow's squad included four players who had not previously been involved with the squad and three debutants on the day. The 82-point winning margin was a fair reflection of a match in which England looked sharp and executed ruthlessly, no doubt in part driven by competition for a place in the squad to face the Jillaroos in Las Vegas the following year.

The match produced further evidence that the female pathway is starting to produce consistently, with the squad containing nine Diploma in Sporting Excellence graduates. Congratulations should go to Anna Davies, who set a new England record with five tries.

As a consequence of a more coordinated approach and greater influence on the playing calendar, senior wheelchair Rugby League activity took place throughout the year. National Performance Squad Days took place on a regular basis during the summer before numbers were reduced, and a training squad was selected.

The first of two matches against France in November took place at Robin Park Arena in Wigan. Whilst the French team showed flashes of brilliance, it was a dominant performance by England who eventually ran out 63-33 winners.

The return fixture took place in Normandy towards the end of the month with the French gaining some revenge, emerging narrow winners 32-28. As part of the trip to Normandy, a warm-up fixture against a Spanish team was arranged with England winning 58-28.

Overall, the squad across the two matches comprised 16 players from eight clubs.

We continue to find new and innovative ways to ensure our talent pathways across the men's, women and wheelchair programmes continue to evolve. We are ensuring our activity aligns with our desire to widen talent pathways and engage with more players over a longer period.



RESEARCH UPDATE

Analysing and interpreting the instrumented mouthguard data from across the game, remains a key priority. The scientific techniques developed by James Tooby, the lead researcher from Leeds Beckett University who is managing the instrumented mouthguard data across Rugby League, have been adopted globally by other sports.

The team have been able to identify which match events are responsible for higher magnitude impacts, and which groups of players are at higher risk of large impacts. This has allowed ongoing discussions with various stakeholder groups on the best way to reduce higher magnitude impacts. Notably, the rates of concussion during the 2024 season, in the men's and women's Super League and Academy competitions all decreased below the historical average from the last five years.

Injury surveillance remains a core programme of work for the RFL, allowing the game to measure and then manage the injury risk, where possible. The duration of time a player is unavailable following an injury is reducing, which suggest there are less severe injuries. The findings continue to be shared back into the game, and in scientific publications. 2024 saw the publication of injuries rates in men's and women's Super League, and also men's and Academy Super League players, led by Dr Sarah Whitehead.

The performance of players across all competitions continues to be evaluated in various ways. The greatest improvements have been seen in the physical performance of women's Super League players, which evidences how the game continues to develop and grow.

The year saw the introduction of PaCE, which involves all clubs visiting Leeds Beckett University for Player and Coach Education days. Thanks to the comprehensive testing which takes place during the PaCE days, clubs are providing core-data on their players, as well as education sessions on various aspects of player development, player performance and



COMMUNITY

RUGBY LEAGUE



The Community Rugby League landscape in 2024 continued to evolve and grow, delivering against the aims set out in the RFL's Community Strategy 2022–2030. With renewed emphases on inclusion, opportunity, sustainability and local impact, the sport has strengthened its role at the heart of communities across the country.

Total participation rose to 97,958, a one per cent increase from 2023. This was driven by strong growth in youth age groups (plus 17 per cent), particularly among junior girls (plus six per cent), signalling success in efforts to make the game more accessible and appealing to young players. While the open-age male (minus eight per cent) category witnessed a decline, the overall base remained resilient, with signs of new players entering through more flexible formats.

Rugby League continued to demonstrate its inclusive values through the development of its diverse formats. Wheelchair Rugby League grew by eight per cent, supported by the introduction of a new categorisation system aimed at balancing competition and safety. In Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL) and Learning Disability Rugby League (LDRL), a focus on suitable participation led to a recalibration of numbers, ensuring the game remains enjoyable, safe, and accessible for all. These inclusive formats continue to serve as a powerful expression of Rugby League's commitment to providing meaningful playing opportunities regardless of ability.

Social forms of the game remained a vital entry and retention point. Touch, Tag and Masters Rugby League all showed continued growth, with a first-ever Junior Tag League in Brighton, expanded Women's Masters competitions and record numbers of participants in London touch leagues. The Women's Masters format, in particular saw participation more than double to 163 players, highlighting its appeal for new and returning players seeking a less contact-heavy way to engage with the sport.

Engagement within the education sector was also a strong point, with participation across schools, colleges and universities increasing by 1.35 per cent. The Champion Schools format was redesigned to be more inclusive and manageable, increasing the quality and reach of competitions. Growth was

especially notable in girls' Rugby League, supported by strategic partnerships with further education institutions and universities. These developments ensured continued momentum in the pathway from schools into community clubs and talent development.

The England Community Lions programme provided high-quality representative experiences for players across multiple formats. Over 1,200 nominations were received, with 146 players selected across the Lions age groups and formats. Highlights included the Under-19s retaining the European Championship and the first-ever England Men's Community Lions tour to Perth, Western Australia, which included a series win and a victory in the International Nines tournament. Representative tours for PDRL, LDRL and Wheelchair teams also continued to offer life-changing experiences for participants and staff.

Volunteers remain the lifeblood of the community game. In 2024, the sport recorded a 4.3 per cent increase in volunteers, with numbers now 21 per cent higher than in 2022. Notably, the female volunteer rate hit a record 51 per cent, thanks to targeted campaigns, enhanced support systems and the return of the National Volunteer Awards. New incentives, such as Tempo Time Credits, allowed volunteers to exchange hours for access to experiences, building a culture of appreciation and sustained engagement.

Investment in community facilities totalled £1.77 million, much of which supported pitch maintenance across the grassroots game. A coordinated use of PitchPower assessment reports and a strategic partnership with the Football Foundation and Sport England enabled clubs to apply for, and secure funding, to upgrade their infrastructure.

Despite ongoing challenges around pitch access and hire costs, the sport made important strides in improving the quality and availability of local playing environments.

The OurLeague Life initiative underpinned Rugby League's wider social impact ambitions. In 2024, this programme helped generate £650,000 in new funding and resources for community clubs and projects. Eight Wellbeing Hubs were launched to provide targeted support in areas affected by inequality and inactivity, helping to tackle mental health, food poverty, and social isolation through Rugby League. Partnerships with organisations such as the Youth Endowment Fund and Tempo further expanded the game's reach into diverse communities.

Governance reviews were conducted across several key pillars of the community game, including club development, coaching, officiating, competition structures, and behaviour management. The RESPECT campaign was reinforced to address growing challenges around touchline and on-field behaviour. Environmental considerations also began to be embedded more deliberately within the community framework.

Despite many positives, challenges persist. Declining numbers in the open-age game, rising facility costs and volunteer burnout remain issues that require ongoing attention. The need for a larger, well-trained match official workforce and improved competition delivery models was also highlighted during the year.



RFL STAFF

FOCUS



As Rugby League pioneers go, there is something refreshingly ordinary about Tara Jones. Ordinary but very extraordinary at the same time.

Having turned her back on an exceptional playing career with St Helens and England at the age of just 28, Tara ended 2024 by becoming the first woman to be appointed to the RFL's full-time match officials' squad.

That Tara has taken the move in her stride speaks volumes for both her attitude and her ability, two qualities that make her such a rich asset to the sport, not least in her position as an ambassador for women's referees.

Tara won every domestic honour during her time playing hooker at St Helens and was capped 14 times by England before she closed that spectacularly successful chapter and headed into uncharted territory as a professional match official.

"My move from playing to being a full-time match official was a process that happened over a long period of time," said Tara. "Just exactly when the transition would happen was uncertain but last year it got to the point where the opportunity presented itself and it felt right to take it, definitely one I couldn't leave behind."

"Like every retired player, if any team said to me 'We're a player short, would you like to play?' part of me would be really up for it, but I have absolutely no regrets about my decision. "I felt I'd achieved all I wanted to as a player and that is so much more to achieve as a match official."

Tara took up her new roles in December 2024, by which point she had already blazed a trail by becoming the first woman to referee a League One fixture and serve as a touch-judge in several Super League fixtures.

As well as turning her back on playing, Tara left a job supporting and mentoring young people with social and mental health issues at a school in Warrington to join the match officials' squad. "It was quite a challenging job but very rewarding at the same time, and I do miss many of the people I used to work with," she said.

"I absolutely love working with the other match officials, they're really, really supportive and treat me exactly the same as everyone else. That's important to me."

"I've learned so much in such a short amount of time just from being around them and feel I'm

improving on a weekly basis."

Tara is under no illusion as to the amount of scrutiny she is, not least from other aspiring female match officials, who she is keen to encourage as much as possible.

"It's really important for other women and girls within the sport, whether they're a spectator, a player or an aspiring match official, that they have someone to look up to other than just players," said Tara.

"I hope that I'm giving all female match officials proof that there is the potential for them to get to the highest level. And that while they're on that journey, which can be a challenge at times, they have someone to turn to for guidance and support."



MATCH OFFICIALS



PERFORMANCE

After a thorough recruitment and interview process, Phil Bentham was appointed as Head of Match Officials in March 2024. An experienced former Super League referee who had previously worked as a coach within the department, Phil rejoined the RFL from the Professional Game Match Officials Board.

As part of a wider re-structure, significant on-field experience was added to the coaching staff with the recruitment of Andy Smith, Ian Smith, James Child and Matthew Thomason.

The start of the Betfred Super League season resulted in increased scrutiny of match officials. New laws and interpretations and increased TV and media opinion shone a brighter spotlight on key decisions made.

This was especially the case in respect of head contact, with the application of the appropriate sanctioning framework becoming subject to much debate. Throughout this period the match officials continued to do what was asked of them, i.e. consistently apply the framework.

New laws included removal of differential penalty, 18th player interchange, full penalty/set restart, unnecessary endangerment, shot clock and the green card. The adoption of new laws proved reasonably successful, although as is often the case, some areas required refinement as we progressed through the season.

Women and Girls Referee of the Year Tara Jones was appointed to the full time Match Official Panel towards the end of 2024, one of 11 female officials now qualified to officiate within the professional game.

PERFORMANCE

Our Regional Development Centres have supported community match officials to have better knowledge and understanding of the new community laws. Additional support was provided by way of online CPD initiatives delivered to 350 community match officials.

In terms of recruitment, the RFL had 618 match officials register throughout the year. This was considerably more than the

target of 550. In future years, we will be carrying out additional work to ensure the percentage of registered match officials who become active increases.

Significant changes were made to the Women's Pathway in 2024 with both Challenge Cup and Super League fixtures regularly reviewed.

In addition to her role as a match official, Tara Jones has been a hugely positive role model for female match officials, and we are continuing to see an increase in the number of female match officials: this was evidence by the all-female officiating team in the Women's Challenge Cup group stages.

ACHIEVEMENTS

There were several notable achievements throughout the season:

Liam Rush became the first mixed heritage official to referee a Men's Super League fixture;

Tara Jones became the first female to be appointed to a domestic men's professional match in the northern hemisphere, as well as the first female touch-judge in the men's Super League, 24 hours after playing in the Women's Super League.

Chris Kendall was appointed to referee his second consecutive men's Challenge Cup final with Aaron Moore taking charge of his first Wembley final in the Women's Challenge Cup final.

The match officiating team for the men's Super League Grand Final was also led by Chris Kendall, with Liam Rush leading the women's Grand Final.

We welcomed Samoa for a two-Test series at the end of the domestic season when Liam Moore and Chris Kendall took charge. Aaron Moore (France vs Wales men) and Tom Grant (Scotland vs Ireland men) also gained valuable international experience, as did James Vella (England vs Wales women)

HEADLINE

STATISTICS



PARTICIPATION

Total participants increased by 0.6 per cent from 2023 to 2024: this growth was driven by an increase in the number of players in youth and junior age groups, regardless of gender. The most significant growth continues to be in girls' youth and juniors: RFL programmes such as Rugbees and Futures have contributed significantly to this accelerated growth, with an increase of six per cent in junior girls and 88 per cent in youth girls.

The one area of concern remains men's open age numbers. This trend is not unique to rugby league and many of the challenges are societal. However, the RFL is doing all it can to understand why transitioning players from Youth to Open Age and retaining players in this setting is particularly challenging as we seek to put appropriate interventions in place.

Wheelchair RL continues to grow, by increasing eight per cent compared to 2023. Credit for this increase is due to the England Wheelchair RL Team, who have attended numerous events to continue to promote the sport.

The second largest source of participants comes from the education sector. Compared with the end of 2023, the year saw a one per cent increase in the number of participants across schools, colleges and universities.

Social forms of Rugby League also contribute significant numbers of participants to the total number of active participants. Overall, we saw a four per cent increase since the end of 2023. Our partners Try Tag Rugby contributed significantly to the overall total of 14,607 with 11,004 players.

DEVELOPMENT

Men's Betfred Super League

- 147 of the Betfred men's Super League games were broadcast in 2024, the most ever. This led to 11.7 million live linear TV viewers across Sky Sports and the BBC.
- 11 Betfred men's Super League games broadcast on Sky Sports and BBC peaked at over 200,000 audiences, 3 games at over 300,000, 4 games at over 400,000 and four games over 500,000.

Men's Championship

- The Championship Grand Final, Wakefield Trinity vs Toulouse Olympique XIII recorded 73,768 views on The Sportsman, the second highest number of views on the Sportsman since 2021.

Men's League One

- The League One promotion final, Keighley Cougars vs Hunslet RLFC attracted an audience of 13,528 on the Sportsman, similar to the 2023 promotion final.

Women's Betfred Super League

- Five Betfred Women's Super League games were broadcast on Sky Sports in 2024, with a cumulative match audience of 166,000.
- St Helens vs Leeds Rhinos peaked at 123,000, the second highest for a women's Super League game on record.

Challenge Cup

- The men's Betfred Challenge Cup from the quarter-finals to the final drew a cumulative audience of 2.4m across the BBC, with the final peaking at 1.2m.
- The Women's Challenge Cup final peaked at 414,000, up 34 per cent on 2023 and the highest peak audience for any women's Challenge Cup tie.

Internationals

- The second England vs Samoa Test match at Headingley saw an attendance of 16,068, the highest outside of a World Cup since 2018.
- The men's Test series vs Samoa recorded a cumulative match audience of 1.3m.
- The women's international against Wales peaked at 403,000 on BBC TV. This is the highest peak audience for a women's international outside of a World Cup.

ATTENDANCES

Men's Betfred Super League

- The 2024 average attendance of 9,620 was the fifth highest on record (since the inaugural Super League season in 1996) and the second-highest average attendance since 2012.
- 2024 saw the fastest time taken for the cumulative attendance to reach one million since 2011 (achieved in Round 19).
- The 2024 cumulative attendance was similar to 2023 (1,606,578 vs 1,607,225).

Men's Championship

- The 2024 cumulative regular season attendance increased by two per cent on 2023 (372,458 vs 365,075), with 182 games played.

Men's League One

- The promotion play-off final attendance was down by 59 per cent on 2023 (2,549 v 1,037)

Men's Betfred Challenge Cup

- The final was up by 11 per cent vs 2023 (64,845 vs 58,213)

Women's Betfred Super League

- The 2024 Grand Final saw a record attendance of 4,813, up by six per cent on 2023.
- The cumulative attendance was 42,450.

Women's Challenge Cup

- The 2024 Challenge Cup final, played as a double-header with the men's final, saw a record attendance of 9,608.

Internationals

- The cumulative attendance for the England vs Samoa Test series was 31,205.



RFL STAFF

FOCUS



One of the sport's proudest achievements in recent years has been the growth of women's and girls' Rugby League, a success story that continues to go from strength to strength. From a purely numbers perspective, growth has been phenomenal yet the statistics alone cannot convey the euphoria and joy that the opportunity to play Rugby League for the first time has brought to people of all ages.

Since October 2024, much of the responsibility for putting smiles on the faces of so many women and girls across England has fallen to Mikayla Gillespie, the RFL's Women and Girls Development Officer.

A proud Kiwi, Mikayla joined the governing body having previously worked as an engagement and participation specialist in her native New Zealand, predominantly in cricket. "It's a fantastic role and one I'm really enjoying," said Mikayla. "My job involves trying to develop and grow the game across all levels, from little five-year-old girls picking up a rugby ball for the first time through to open age and the Women's Super League.

"The women's and girls' game has made huge strides and there's still an enormous amount of potential.

"A lot of what we do is about helping clubs who want to have girls' teams find a start point: we look at what facilities they have in place, what resources are available and any issues that might arise. "Running a girls' team is quite different to running a boys' team, in lots of ways, but there are rarely any problems that are insurmountable.

"The RFL's Futures programme is a big help in this regard. "Facilities are always a challenge, so we try to identify what a club's priorities are. There are only so many changing rooms and so much grass available to play on.

"While we don't have the finances to build new facilities for clubs, we do have lots of expertise to help them find other sources of funding." As well as being bitten by a desire to travel and experience other cultures, one of Mikayla's motivations for flying to the other side of the world was a curiosity about the sports industry in the UK.

"Sport has always played a big part of my life, as it does for many New Zealanders and people here in England, but there are some major differences in the way sport is regarded," she said.

"I grew up in a culture where everyone plays sport purely for the fun of it but here in the UK there are some alternative perceptions about sport, including a lot more focus on the elite pathway and striving to play at higher levels. "That's been a bit of an eye opener for me. "Of course, what is mutual to both countries is the level of excitement and joy that playing a team sport like Rugby League brings to girls. It's really cool to see.

"It's hard to believe how far the women's and girls' game has come in such a short space of time but the amount of passion I've seen in people at clubs from Newcastle down to London is immense.

"Who could fail to be excited by that?"



OUR LEAGUE ACTIVE

Our League Active is the participation membership scheme that was launched by the RFL in 2022 to support the sustainability and development of the Community Game. Members receive a wide range of benefits, including personal accident and public liability insurance, as well as access to a personalised digital dashboard.

For 2024, the budgeted profit for Our League Active was £547,965, based on projected revenue of £676,260 (including insurance), and budgeted costs of £178,295. A further £50,000 was forecast from additional revenue streams, though no income was ultimately generated from these sources.

Actual income for 2024 totalled £713,360, with 38,651 individuals contributing to an overall profit of £557,436, exceeding the budgeted profit despite the shortfall in additional revenue.

In September 2024, the Community Board approved a recommendation by the RFL Executive Board to increase membership fees by £2 across all categories. This is expected to generate an additional £100,000 in income for 2025.

SAFEGUARDING & INTEGRITY



In its purest form, safeguarding is about protecting the health and wellbeing of children and adults at risk; ensuring they can participate in rugby free from harm, abuse and neglect.

The RFL believes there is a duty on every member to create an environment where best practice is engrained in the day-to-day delivery of the sport and participants can feel safe. This was set out in the RFL's Safeguarding Policy 2024:

3.1 Duty of Care

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

In practise, safeguarding means:

- Preventing abuse or neglect before it happens;
- Promoting safe and supportive environments;
- Responding when someone is at risk or has been harmed.

We want children to play in a safe space and will respect the choices of adults at risk whilst protecting them from harm. Safeguarding remains a key strategic priority for the sport, one which requires constant attention.

For example, a significant financial commitment was made to purchase referee head cameras in 2022-23 to enable the capture of better evidence and data within the community game where on-field assaults, touch line behaviours and abuse of junior match officials continue to be a challenge.

However, cameras and batteries must be maintained and the message that their use is advantageous must be continually reinforced.

The Safeguarding Case Management Group continues to monitor safeguarding cases, including the use of Unacceptable Language and Behaviour (ULAB). 2024 saw another increase in reports following a year-on-year upward trend: 216 cases in 2022, 269 cases in 2023 and 298 cases in 2024.



The annual Safeguarding Conference was hosted at the Totally Wicked Stadium in St Helens in January 2024 with around 115 volunteers and Club Welfare Officers in attendance. Topics covered at the conference included a presentation on the 'impact of words'; the role of compliance; and current thinking on concussion protocols.

In the summer of 2024, the Child Protection in Sport Unit of the NSPCC (CPSU) conducted its annual audit into the sport's procedures. Once again, the outcome audit was very positive and the RFL maintained the highest rating of 'Met'. The next CPSU audit is scheduled for September 2025. In addition, despite a change of Safeguarding Manager in September, the relationship and engagement with the CPSU continued to be positive, with all training, conferences and lead officer forums being attended.

The RFL is regarded as a sport demonstrating best practice and a positive example capable of addressing poor behaviours with the limited resources available to the organisation.

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INTEGRITY

The RFL confirmed the adoption of the UK Anti-Doping Rules which are contained within the 2024 Operational Rules and thereby ensures that UK Anti-Doping Rules are binding upon relevant individuals involved Rugby League.

Additionally, the RFL ensures that any relevant contracts in place with players and individuals involved in the sport contain an agreement to be bound by the relevant Anti-Doping Rules and Betting Code of Conduct, in addition to a commitment from all relevant participants to cooperate with any relevant anti-doping and/or betting investigation and subsequent proceedings. Integrity education continued across the sport in 2024, both in anti-doping and betting. Anti-doping and betting education is mandatory to relevant individuals in the sport, with a provision for stand down in the RFL Operational Rules if such mandatory education has not been completed by a certain date. The online courses are shared with clubs in late autumn to allow clubs time to factor these into their pre-season plans.

The education programme also encompasses the Community Game and there has been a renewed focus on ensuring that community players, all of whom are bound by the RFL's Anti-Doping Rules and the Betting and Related Activity Code of Conduct, are aware of their obligations and uphold the principles of Clean Sport.

The RFL makes available a number of integrity materials and resources to clubs to distribute to players and club members, and these are supported by information published on the RFL's website and its social media channels. Delivery of key messages at appropriate forums such as annual conferences also takes place.

In 2024, clubs were required to book their players onto an anti-doping course, which is compulsory for men's first team, women's first team and (where relevant), Reserves and Academy teams. Both the online course and the face-to-face training provide information on prohibited substances, Therapeutic Use Exemptions (TUEs) and checking supplements and medication.

Head and assistant coaches at all men's Super League, Championship and League 1 clubs were instructed to attend a UKAD-hosted education session in person in August. A follow up session was arranged in October for those who could not attend. The October session was also opened up to Heads of Youth.

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

Communications throughout 2024 included the 2024 World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Prohibited List, which featured the change in status of Tramadol since January 1 2024: this was shared with club doctors and athlete support personnel via email and posted on the RFL's website.

Information was also circulated on the process for applying for a Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE), and reminders on the due diligence required around supplement use and the taking of medications. In 2024 all participating players in the early rounds of the Challenge Cup received communications on betting and the applicable rules.

ANTI-DOPING

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

The National Anti-Doping Policy seeks to facilitate an environment which:

- Provides for an even playing field for players and athletes to compete;
- Preserves and upholds the ethics and morals of sport;
- Safeguards players' physical and mental wellbeing.

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

The RFL carries out regular monitoring in terms of its compliance with the UKAD Assurance Framework requirements, each of which are derived from the NGB responsibilities set out in Section 4 of the National Anti-Doping Policy.

The UKAD Assurance Framework is the primary mechanism through which NGBs demonstrate to UKAD their compliance with the UK's National Anti-Doping Policy. The Assurance Framework outlines a number of mandatory requirements and provides NGBs with clear instructions on how they can meet them. In October 2024, the RFL was selected for, and participated in, an Assurance Framework Review Meeting with UKAD. The RFL was able to demonstrate its compliance with the framework.

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

TESTING

Testing is carried out by UKAD across the entire game and a budget for testing is agreed between the RFL and UKAD at the start of the year. UKAD carry out a combination of in- and out-of-competition tests and whilst the majority are urine samples, blood sampling has also taken place in the past couple of years. UKAD determines which players are tested. The RFL contributes to the funding of this testing whilst some is carried out as public interest testing. The breakdown of tests carried out are detailed below.

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

The 2024 anti-doping testing figures for Rugby League were as follows:

Period	1 Jan-31 March 2024	1 April-30 June 2024	1 July-30 Sept 2024	1 Oct – 31 Dec 2024	TOTAL
Total samples collected and tested	183	127	216	154	680
In-competition	27	52	88	24	191
Out-of-competition	156	75	128	130	489

Whilst testing is a crucial element of the Anti-Doping programme, the RFL also works in conjunction with UKAD using intelligence to ensure that resources are focused in key areas and where particular concerns are identified. Intelligence-sharing supports the RFL and UKAD in developing effective testing and investigation strategies. The RFL and UKAD have a data sharing agreement in place which ensures the effective transfer of data and information between the two organisations and provides appropriate legal protections and safeguards.

The RFL passes any intelligence in relation to any anti-doping complaints or concerns to UKAD - it is obliged to do so pursuant to the National Anti-Doping Policy. UKAD also has a confidential hotline which allows anyone to report concerns direct to them. The 'Protect Your Sport' platform serves as an integral tool to protect and uphold Clean Sport and makes it easy for anyone to report concerns directly to UKAD:

<https://www.ukad.org.uk/protect-your-sport>

In 2024, there was just one Anti-Doping Rule Violation (ADRV) in Rugby League. There are currently 10 players who are banned from the sport for ADRVs. It should be noted that Rugby League makes up just under a quarter of all current ADRVs listed by UKAD with regards to suspensions not yet served.

GAMBLING

There is no over-arching body ensuring implementation of standards for betting activity, but the RFL has a robust Implementation Plan in place to ensure integrity in this area is upheld and protected. The Executive continue to ensure that this is regularly reviewed and that there is ongoing compliance.

The RFL has a partnership with Sportradar, who provide intelligence services based on data acquired from gambling markets. In the event of suspicious betting patterns, Sportradar notify the RFL of such activity and either compliance action would be undertaken and/or a referral to the Gambling Commission would be made, depending upon the details of the case.

The RFL also has data sharing agreements in place with leading betting companies in order to ensure that in the event of any suspicious activity, data can be appropriately and legally shared freely between the RFL and the relevant betting company. This serves to assist the RFL in identifying any suspicious betting or patterns.

Two breaches of the Betting Code of Conduct were identified in 2024. Both cases were brought to the RFL's attention by a betting company. Player X and Player Y (unreported cases), who are both professional players, were investigated for betting that took place in 2017 and received a formal warning from the RFL Compliance Department. Both players had placed bets on teams to win; their bets did not involve any of the teams they were playing for at the time. Player X had also placed one bet in 2024 involving a match where he was not a player for either of the clubs involved.

STAFF FOCUS



Toby Hughes's perception of the Rugby Football League and the way the sport is administered has changed considerably since he joined the governing body as Finance Assistant in July 2024.

For all his lifelong involvement in the sport, Toby admits to have experienced something of an awakening throughout his time working for the RFL.

"It's definitely opened my eyes to just how hard everyone at the RFL works and how committed they all are to making the game better," said Toby, who combines his work in the finance team with playing stand-off for League One club North Wales Crusaders.

"As a player you have these preconceived ideas about the RFL and then you come here and see the reality."

Toby began his Rugby League journey as an Under-7s player at Newton Storm ARLFC, from where he joined the Warrington Wolves Academy before moving to Salford to play in the Super League club's reserve team.

The offer of a contract saw him switch to League One rugby with North Wales in 2023, since when he has continued to combine work and playing rugby with studying for accountancy qualifications.

"I love it at the Crusaders, it's been a fantastic chapter in my life and it's good to be part of such a great group of people," he said.

"When I was at Warrington it became difficult to juggle my rugby career when I got my first job as an apprentice, so I left to focus on work. "I returned to Newton and played there and was really happy, then Salford offered me the chance to play reserve level, which ultimately led to my move into the semi-professional ranks.

"I'm enjoying playing part-time rugby, it suits me really well because my finance career is very important to me. I train twice a week in Liverpool with the Crusaders and there's little disruption to my work at the RFL.

"Having a dual-career approach is the way forward for a lot of players: you really do get the best of both worlds."

Toby's role at the RFL sees him work on purchase ledgers and helping the wider finance team collate management accounts. At the same time, he is continuing to study for professional accountancy qualifications, fully supported by the RFL.

"I can't thank the RFL enough for being so flexible and so understanding," he said. "Balancing work, rugby and study has always been tricky but the RFL have been great. It's reassuring to know that should something come up to make my life even more complicated, the RFL would be accommodating.

EQUALITY

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION



The RFL's commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion (ED&I) within the organisation and across the sport is outlined in the Tackle It Plan. This is a sport-wide ED&I action plan that was first published in October 2020. In 2023, coinciding with the midpoint of a five-year action plan, the Senior EDI Partner (then Inclusion Lead) led a review of Tackle It with the support of the Inclusion Board. Tackle It was refreshed to increase efficiency and more effectively drive positive change in Rugby League, with actions refocused and refined in key areas to reflect progress made as well as work to be done.

In 2024, the Tackle It Plan was updated once again to support the RFL's Sport England Diversity Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) as part of our compliance with the Code for Sports Governance.

Also that year, responsibility shifted for the Tackle It Plan from a cross-departmental working group and peripheral stakeholders to the RFL Executive and RL Commercial, enabling the sport to go both further and faster.

Tackle It outlines three strategic commitments as part of the overarching goal to widen the reach and impact of Rugby League:

1. Diversify Rugby League's talent pool and workforce;
2. Improve the culture of Rugby League;
3. Clarify processes, instil confidence in – and encourage – the reporting of discrimination, and ensure appropriate sanctions are in place. Rugby League has a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination and unacceptable behaviour.

The Inclusion Board was also refreshed in 2023 following a Board evaluation process that highlighted gaps in representation. An open recruitment process saw three members - Chris Gibbons, John Hughes and Michael Lawrence - reappointed and joined by new members, Debbie Bullock, James Child, Dan Clarke, Kelsey Gentles and Heather Robinson. The Inclusion board, chaired by Jamie Jones Buchanan, brings fresh energy and enthusiasm, a deeper and wider level of engagement with the sport and broader lived experience and professional expertise to strengthen its ability to act as a critical friend to the RFL.

The Tackle It refresh added new ambitious targets around the diversity of the sport's match officials: the Match Official department is now tracking the diversity of Super League match

official appointments as an indicator of the performance of the national talent development pathway. This approach underlines the achievements of match officials that has already seen the first Super League referee with a mixed ethnic background and the first female to referee a Women's Betfred Challenge Cup semi-final.

Education remains a key ED&I priority, alongside addressing incidents and patterns of concern. There are multiple possible explanations for these increases, including greater awareness of the offensiveness of the terminology and greater confidence that action will be taken. However, increased use in the game (and sport and society more broadly) will continue to be monitored. Staff have been through an active bystander training programme, in addition to training on the updated Employment Rights Bill.

The RFL continues to participate in the Sporting Equals Race Representation Index (RRI), which evaluates the ethnic diversity of sporting national governing bodies across five key areas: – boards, Executive leadership, coaching, athletes and officials. This is part of efforts to tackle racial inequality and hold organisations to account on their diversity commitments. The latest results of the index have been delayed.

The 2024 season saw clubs designate home games as inclusion fixtures under the RL Together banner, supported by digital assets produced by RL Commercial. RL Together inclusion fixtures give clubs the opportunity to showcase their EDI impact within their local communities and be a platform for expanding their connections and supporter base.

Tackle It includes a target for 100 per cent of Super League clubs to deliver a dedicated fixture: this target has yet to be reached. To assist in identifying potential themed matchdays and to support wider EDI planning, an EDI calendar was produced and has been shared with all clubs.

A Reporting Discrimination online form has been introduced to encourage detailed reporting, which in turn will lead to better outcomes when incidents do occur (Reporting Discrimination (rugby-league.com)). The form provides three ways to report an incident:

club staff with responsibility for EDI to share their priorities, good practice and identified needs.

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1. Tell the RFL about a specific incident so it can be investigated and potentially charged;
2. Anonymously make the RFL aware of something;
3. Inform the RFL of a concern with a view to discussing it and establishing next steps.

Tackle It now outlines an action to reinvest misconduct fines back into the game via preventative and restorative action. Fines for unacceptable language and behaviour have been used by clubs to undertake work at club foundations to address issues. In the Community Game, the RFL is delivering Tackle It workshops to educate individuals and clubs alleged and charged with using unacceptable language and behaviour. This measure supports the Operational Rules Tribunal function.

As always, the RFL welcomes collaboration with clubs to achieve progress in ED&I in Rugby League, and invites clubs, club ED&I leads and club staff with responsibility for EDI to share their priorities, good practice and identified needs.



PLAYER WELLBEING



Rugby League Cares continued to deliver, report and measure the sport's welfare provision in 2024.

Working alongside member clubs, the charity ensured that the game's wellbeing programme is seen as gold standard by other sports in the UK and further afield.

RL Cares is responsible for delivering the sport's Welfare Policy on behalf of the RFL. The strength of this arrangement is the independence of the charity, which is not linked directly to the governing body. This ensures there are no conflicts of interest when working with clubs and players in all wellbeing/welfare situations.

Through its partnership with education provider UCEN Manchester, RL Cares strengthened its commitment to continuous professional development, academic minimum standards and future recommendations for sports professionals to achieve a Level 6 Athlete Wellbeing qualification by co-creating a bespoke Level 4 (HND), Level 5 (Foundation Degree), and Level 6 (Undergraduate Degree) Athlete Wellbeing Course.

All modules and course specifications were successfully validated in November by Sheffield Hallam University, with a proposed opening cohort in 2026.

This development positions the charity and UCEN Manchester at the forefront of industry-leading wellbeing qualifications.

The charity continued to enhance the skills and minimum standards of all clubs in the Betfred Super League and Betfred Championship. In December 2024, 15 learners completed a Level 3 bespoke Counselling Skills Course, following on from a cohort of 15 learners gaining the same qualification in 2023. This initiative ensures that all clubs meet the required minimum standard qualifications and have the capacity to provide wellbeing support for their teams.

In addition, RL Cares has supported Edge Hill University with research on the mental health and wellbeing of Academy-age athletes. Stages 1 and 2 of the research, which included one-on-one interviews with all Player Welfare Managers (PWMs), were completed in 2024. Clubs provided athletes for Stage 2, where Academy-age players who participated in workshops during Phase 1 were interviewed about their beliefs and opinions regarding current mental health provisions and club education programmes.

Ongoing support was also provided to the British Army STEPS programme in collaboration with Professional Academies. The content focuses on the importance of camaraderie, teamwork and fostering a sense of belonging, alongside numerous opportunities for young athletes to pursue careers in the armed forces while continuing to compete at high levels in their chosen sports after leaving the performance pathway at their clubs.

Support for England Performance Unit/ England Community Lions

RL Cares continued to provide wellbeing support for the England teams during the 2024 autumn Internationals.

Director of Wellbeing Steve McCormack supported the England Community Lions team in Australia, while Steve Hardisty assisted the England men's team during their two-Test series with Samoa, and Francis Stephenson supported the England women's and wheelchair teams against Wales and France.

This support is crucial for building relationships with the sport's key figures - the players - and for offering essential wellbeing support when needed. Notably, the charity's engagement with England teams over the past five years has fostered a strong rapport with staff and players at all levels, facilitating the integration of positive wellbeing programmes across all Super League clubs.

RL Player Portal

The Rugby League Player Portal is a dedicated online resource that has enhanced the charity's visibility, bolstered its brand and showcased wellbeing provisions to Rugby League and its stakeholders. We regularly update content to ensure it remains relevant, engaging and supported by academic research. In 2025 RL Cares is aiming to improve all aspects of the portal Usability has been improved and updated to include current mental health and emergency signposting links, enhancing our ability to collaborate with other sports' governing bodies and associations.

Education and training grants

The charity has streamlined its education and training grants policy, implementing greater due diligence concerning players' career action plans, the quality of applications from player welfare managers and the educational institutions recruiting players for courses. Since the pandemic, we have observed an increase in online and bespoke courses, necessitating increased scrutiny to ensure the best pathways for players' futures education grants.

The Education Grants Working Group convenes before allocating any funds to players, ensuring they align with their career plans and that the charity conducts due diligence before fund allocation.

RL Cares Brain Health Fund

In 2024, the Rugby League Cares Brain Health Fund supported various initiatives:

Admiral Nurse / Dementia UK

We have partnered with Dementia UK to make the services of a dedicated Admiral Nurse available to current and retired professional players, and to their immediate carers at regular monthly brain health clinics.

Nurse provision has been exceptional, significantly impacting those with dementia and their families. Feedback from attendees has been outstanding with moving levels of gratitude expressed by players and their families.

Rugby Kinematics Injury Threshold Study

This study aims to define brain strain thresholds that lead to objective evidence of brain injury, facilitating better-informed clinical decisions regarding player safety. It is relevant to the long-term brain health of rugby league players and supports.

Other Brain Health initiatives are being considered by the Brain Health Fund committee.

RUGBY LEAGUE CHARITIES



Rugby League Cares continued to make considerable investments into Rugby League in 2024, enhancing, and making a positive difference to, the lives of thousands of people across the sport's communities.

Whilst player wellbeing remained the charity's main focus, RL Cares again utilised its learning and expertise in that field to support people from all backgrounds in the villages, towns and cities where Rugby League is played, helping them to lead happy, fulfilled and healthy lives. RL Cares believes that everyone playing Rugby League should be able to access support when they need it.

A significant proportion of the charity's activities is centred around mental health and wellbeing, and a comprehensive support package was maintained throughout the year. This included:

- Free 1-2-1 counselling and mental fitness coaching to Community Club players struggling to access statutory services. This service was accessed by over 100 people in 2024;
- Free mental fitness and resilience courses for adults, including the charity's own widely-acclaimed Offload programme being delivered to Masters Players and professional club Past Players' Associations (around 2,000 adults per year);
- Free mental health and literacy programmes for young community players (aged 11-18) and their supportive adults (approx. 15,000 young people per year);
- Free mental health literacy coaching to Rugby League community coaches.

Mental health literacy and resilience programmes for young players, their parents and their coaches are funded and supported by the global charity Movember. RL Cares led the delivery of the Movember Ahead of the Game programme across England and Wales in 2024, building on the huge success of the programme's delivery to players, coaches and officials involved in RLWC2021. Ahead of the Game is regarded as the most evidence-based mental health and sport programme in the world, and under RL Cares's leadership the programme has supported over 30,000 young people to date.

To facilitate this work across Rugby League communities, Movember and RL Cares have invested more than £350,000 in a number of Rugby League club Foundations to enable them to deliver the programme within their own communities. These foundations are Leeds

Rhinos, Hull FC, Sheffield Eagles, Warrington Wolves and Wigan Warriors. More foundations will begin delivering on the programme later in 2025.

Working alongside Movember, RL Cares was able to exert influence on Government health policy in 2024 and built a strong working relationship with Wes Streeting MP, Secretary for Health and Social Care, which culminated in him announcing a first-ever Mens' Health Strategy in November.

RL Cares again ran a successful series of events throughout 2024, working alongside, and supporting, a wide range of partners to deliver first-class experiences for all involved, and raising important funds.

The 2024 RFL President's Ball was held at the Queen's Hotel in Leeds in January when the Speaker of the House of Commons, Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, hosted over 300 guests at an event that raised more than £12,000 for the Rugby League Benevolent Fund.

Sir Lindsay also hosted RL Cares and its partners at a networking event at Speaker's House in February, helping raise the profile of the charity and the important work it does.

The annual RL Cares fundraising bike ride took place over four days in southern Ireland in June and featured former Super League and England players Adrian Morley, Gareth Ellis and Nathan McAvoy, whose presence helped the charity raise £18,000. The ride provided RL Cares with the opportunity to team up with Rugby Players Ireland, the organisation responsible for delivering player welfare services to rugby union players across the island of Ireland.

RL Cares delivered a fantastic Rugby League Hall of Fame induction dinner at The Edge in Wigan on behalf of the RFL in October, when six players – four men and two women – and the first-ever team were elevated into the sport's most prestigious club. The players were Paul Sculthorpe MBE, Jamie Peacock MBE, Michelle Land, Jane Banks, Alan Prescott and James Lomas, while the inaugural team entrants into the Hall of Fame were the 1996 Great Britain Lionesses, the last senior British team to win Rugby League's Ashes against Australia. The event recorded a surplus of £4,000.

In 2024, the Rugby League Benevolent Fund maintained its commitment to providing lifelong support to players who suffer life-changing injuries on the field of play.

GOVERNANCE CODE



GOVERNANCE CODE

The Rugby Football League is committed to good corporate governance and throughout 2024 continued to seek to ensure that the principles of good governance were embedded in all aspects of its work.

A detailed Governance Statement reporting on the RFL's governance arrangements and performance during 2024 is published on the RFL website.

The key governance changes and matters for the RFL during 2024 were:

- Adam Hills was appointed as President for 2025 & 2026.
- Danika Priim and Stephen Wild were appointed as Vice President's from December 2024 to the Council meeting in December 2026.
- Julia Newton was elected as a Non-Executive Director for the period to the Council meeting in Summer 2027.

BOARD AND MEETINGS

During 2024, the Non-Executive Directors of the RFL were:

- Simon Johnson (Chair)
- Sandy Lindsay
- Cherrie Daley
- Julia Newton (appointed during the year)

During 2024, the Executive Director was Tony Sutton, and the Company Secretary was Robert Hicks. The Board also had two observers, Ed Mallaburn and Jamie Jones-Buchanan.

There were six formal Board meetings during 2024. There was 100 per cent attendance at these meetings by all directors.

In addition, there was a number of Board meetings held virtually, and further decisions made in writing.

RL COMMERCIAL LIMITED

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

The shares in RL Commercial are held equally by the RFL and SLE. The Board of RL Commercial is responsible for overseeing the revenue generation within RL Commercial. In 2024 the Board of RL Commercial comprised:

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

The RFL and SLE worked collaboratively in relation to the appointment of the Board to ensure it had an appropriate range of skills and experience.

During 2024, the Non-Executive Directors of RL Commercial were:

- Frank Slevin (Chair)
- Simon Johnson
- Anna Chanduvi
- Peter Hutton
- Jonathan Murphy (resigned in the year)
- Eamonn McManus (appointed in the year)
- Paul Lakin (appointed in the year)
- Ed Mallaburn

The Managing Director of RL Commercial was Rhodri Jones, and the Company Secretary was Robert Hicks.

ROLE OF THE RFL

As the governing body of Rugby League, during 2024 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 the Challenge Cup, the 1895 Cup, the Championship, League 1 and Men's and Women's Super League. The RFL provided several core services to RL Commercial in relation to the operation of the professional pyramid as set out within the realignment agreements.

REPRESENTATIVE TEAMS The operation of the England Performance Unit made up of the England Men's Senior, Knights, Women's Senior, Wheelchair, Academy and Youth The sub-committees of the Board (Audit and Risk; Remuneration Committee; Nominations Committee; the Laws Committee; Community Board; Inclusion Board; Clinical Advisory Group; and Brain Health Sub-Committee) met as required throughout the year. 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.



FINANCIAL REVIEW AND ACCOUNTS



Business review and results

The consolidated accounts for the RFL show a loss before tax for the financial year of £507k for the year ended 31 December 2024 (2023: loss £552k). The RFL has maintained an aggregate positive cash balance throughout the year.

At 31 December 2024, this aggregate balance was £6,118k (2023: £5,911k).

Principal risks and uncertainties

The Board and Executive team had budgeted to make a planned loss in 2024 of £800k. In order to invest in some key areas of the RFL's business activities where attention was needed to bolster governance and facilitate growth, the Board approved a trading loss of £300k. Owing to the anticipated sale of Odsal Stadium at a lower value than the investment property was held in its balance sheet, a write-down of £500k was added to the Budget to make the total budgeted loss £800k in the year.

The consolidated reported Group trading loss before tax was £507k which predominantly relates to lower than expected revenues from RL Commercial Limited, as well as higher than anticipated costs arising in the Senior England programmes. The write-down of the investment property that was marketed for sale in early 2024 was recognised in 2023 following an offer received. This resulted in an impairment of £499k.

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.

In 2024 the Rugby League World Cup 2021 shows a break-even position. RFL Investments 2020 Limited is the vehicle for the administration of the Sport Survival Fund and its Balance Sheet reflects the long-term liability in relation to the loans made to eligible entities in 2020, 2021 and 2022.

The accounts of both these subsidiaries are reported and filed at Companies House. Year on year turnover decreased to £13,516k from £15,035k in 2023 which can be attributed in the main to a reduction in

Government funding in relation to grants from Sport England. Government funding from Sport England has reduced from £4,819k in 2023 to £3,241k in 2024. Whilst the year-on-year level of funding has remained the same, the income is released in line with programme activity which varies throughout the funding cycle.

The residual value share from RL Commercial is £8,202k in 2024 compared to £8,439k in 2023. The reduction reflects the reduced value of the Sky contract which was renewed in 2024 and is contracted until the end of 2026.

Cost of sales reduced from £4,344k to £3,538k in 2024. This reduction is attributable to the reduction in grant-funded activities, which has reduced to £2,284k from £3,208k. As above this is driven by the level of programme activity throughout the cycle.

Payments to or on behalf of clubs and other member organisations is £5,724k in 2024 (2023: £5,885k). There has been a small reduction in the cost of the match official department due to effective cost management with regards to travel and referee communication equipment. Awards to clubs has fallen from £2,162k to £2,072k, driven by the reduction in profitability in RL Commercial as a result of the renegotiation of the Sky contract at a lower value.

In 2024, Administrative Costs decreased slightly to £4,849k from £5,043k in 2023.

Group Staff Costs are £4,750k (2023: £4,774k). In 2024 a small restructure took place, the savings of which have not yet been realised in 2024. Within total staff costs, directors' remuneration has reduced slightly from £293k in 2023 to £272k in 2024.

Costs of the Non-Executive Board have decreased from £116k in 2023 to £95k in 2024 due to timing of Non-Executive Directors movements in 2024, as well as further reduction in costs relating to the Board of RLWC2021.

Interest receivable by the RFL in 2024 is made up of two elements. The first is the RFL Group's interest receivable on bank deposits (£173k) and the second is the interest receivable by RFL Investments 2020 Ltd on behalf of DCMS of £310k (which is subsequently paid over to DCMS). Total interest receivable was £482k (2023: £492k) owing predominantly to reduced interest rates on treasury deposits.

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

Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income
For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

	Note	2024 £	2023 £
Turnover	4	13,515,639	15,034,560
Cost of sales	5	(3,537,888)	(4,344,180)
Gross profit		9,977,751	10,690,380
Payments to or on behalf of clubs and other member organisations	6	(5,724,466)	(5,884,537)
Administrative expenses		(4,849,585)	(5,043,009)
Other operating income	7	-	76,031
Operating loss	8	(596,300)	(161,135)
Interest receivable and similar income	12	482,498	491,555
Interest payable and similar expenses	13	(393,491)	(383,574)
Impairment of investment property	17	-	(499,000)
Loss before taxation		(507,293)	(552,154)
Tax on loss	14	(56)	(32)
Loss for the financial year		(507,349)	(552,186)

There was no other comprehensive income for 2024 (2023:£NIL).

The notes on pages 25 to 48 form part of these financial statements.

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

Consolidated Statement of Financial Position
As at 31 December 2024

	Note	2024 £	2023 £
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	15	556,388	595,440
Investments	16	50	50
Investment property	17	251,000	251,000
		<u>807,438</u>	<u>846,490</u>
Current assets			
Debtors	18	18,293,198	21,387,322
Cash at bank and in hand	19	6,117,666	5,910,702
		<u>24,410,864</u>	<u>27,298,024</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	20	(8,763,622)	(9,522,954)
Net current assets		<u>15,647,242</u>	<u>17,775,070</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>16,454,680</u>	<u>18,621,560</u>
Creditors: amounts falling due after more than one year	21	(17,491,642)	(19,151,173)
Net liabilities		<u>(1,036,962)</u>	<u>(529,613)</u>
Capital and reserves			
Revaluation reserve	24	118,993	118,993
Profit and loss account	24	(1,155,955)	(648,606)
Equity attributable to owners of the parent Company		<u>(1,036,962)</u>	<u>(529,613)</u>

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

Mr A N Sutton
Director

Date:

The notes on pages 25 to 48 form part of these financial statements.

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

Company Statement of Financial Position
As at 31 December 2024

	Note	2024 £	2023 £
Fixed assets			
Tangible assets	15	340,000	340,000
Investments	16	389,912	389,911
Investment Property	17	251,000	251,000
		<u>980,912</u>	<u>980,911</u>
Current assets			
Debtors	18	1,422,332	1,645,145
Creditors: amounts falling due within one year	20	(51)	(6,700)
Net current assets		<u>1,422,281</u>	<u>1,638,445</u>
Total assets less current liabilities		<u>2,403,193</u>	<u>2,619,356</u>
Provisions for liabilities			
Deferred taxation	23	(22,609)	(22,609)
Net assets		<u><u>2,380,584</u></u>	<u><u>2,596,747</u></u>
Capital and reserves			
Revaluation reserve	24	118,993	118,993
Profit and loss account brought forward		2,477,754	3,180,164
Loss for the year		(216,163)	(702,410)
Profit and loss account carried forward	24	2,261,591	2,477,754
		<u><u>2,380,584</u></u>	<u><u>2,596,747</u></u>

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

Mr A N Sutton
Director

Date:

The notes on pages 25 to 48 form part of these financial statements.

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

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

	Revaluation reserve £	Profit and loss account £	Total equity £
At 1 January 2024	118,993	(648,606)	(529,613)
Comprehensive income for the year			
Loss for the year	-	(507,349)	(507,349)
Total comprehensive income for the year	-	(507,349)	(507,349)
At 31 December 2024	118,993	(1,155,955)	(1,036,962)

The notes on pages 25 to 48 form part of these financial statements.

Consolidated Statement of Changes in Equity
For the Year Ended 31 December 2023

	Revaluation reserve £	Profit and loss account £	Total equity £
At 1 January 2023	118,993	(96,420)	22,573
Comprehensive income for the year			
Loss for the year	-	(552,186)	(552,186)
Total comprehensive income for the year	-	(552,186)	(552,186)
At 31 December 2023	118,993	(648,606)	(529,613)

The notes on pages 25 to 48 form part of these financial statements.

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

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

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

The notes on pages 25 to 48 form part of these financial statements.

Company Statement of Changes in Equity
For the Year Ended 31 December 2023

	Revaluation reserve	Profit and loss account	Total equity
	£	£	£
At 1 January 2023	118,993	3,180,164	3,299,157
Comprehensive income for the year			
Loss for the year	-	(702,410)	(702,410)
	-	(702,410)	(702,410)
Total comprehensive income for the year			
	118,993	2,477,754	2,596,747
At 31 December 2023	118,993	2,477,754	2,596,747

The notes on pages 25 to 48 form part of these financial statements.

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

Consolidated Statement of Cash Flows
For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

	2024	<i>2023</i>
	£	<i>£</i>
Cash flows from operating activities		
Loss for the financial year	(507,349)	<i>(552,186)</i>
Adjustments for:		
Depreciation of tangible assets	85,569	<i>95,871</i>
Loss on disposal of tangible assets	13,214	<i>-</i>
Interest paid	393,491	<i>383,574</i>
Interest received	(482,498)	<i>(491,555)</i>
Taxation charge	56	<i>32</i>
Decrease in debtors	2,687,007	<i>8,551,031</i>
Decrease in amounts owed by joint ventures	407,061	<i>-</i>
Increase/(decrease) in creditors	784,827	<i>(10,132,550)</i>
Increase in amounts owed to joint ventures	44,058	<i>-</i>
Fair value loss on investment property	-	<i>499,000</i>
Corporation tax (paid)/received	(11)	<i>26</i>
Net cash generated from operating activities	3,425,425	<i>(1,646,757)</i>

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

Consolidated Statement of Cash Flows (continued)
For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

	2024	2023
	£	£
Cash flows from investing activities		
Purchase of tangible fixed assets	(59,731)	(30,067)
Sale of tangible fixed assets	-	2,366
Interest received	482,498	491,555
Income taxes paid	-	(58)
Net cash from investing activities	422,767	463,796
Cash flows from financing activities		
Repayment of other loans	(3,247,737)	(402,150)
Interest paid	(393,491)	(383,574)
Net cash used in financing activities	(3,641,228)	(785,724)
Net increase/(decrease) in cash and cash equivalents	206,964	(1,968,685)
Cash and cash equivalents at beginning of year	5,910,702	7,879,387
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of year	6,117,666	5,910,702
Cash and cash equivalents at the end of year comprise:		
Cash at bank and in hand	6,117,666	5,910,702

The notes on pages 25 to 48 form part of these financial statements.

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

Consolidated Analysis of Net Debt
For the Year Ended 31 December 2024

	At 1 January 2024 £	Cash flows £	At 31 December 2024 £
Cash at bank and in hand	5,910,702	206,964	6,117,666
Debt due after 1 year	(19,151,173)	1,659,531	(17,491,642)
Debt due within 1 year	(4,623,887)	1,588,206	(3,035,681)
	<u>(17,864,358)</u>	<u>3,454,701</u>	<u>(14,409,657)</u>

The notes on pages 25 to 48 form part of these financial statements.

BOARD PROFILE



A portrait of Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP, an older man with white hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue suit, a white shirt, and a striped tie. A gold chain with a large medallion is draped over his shoulder. The background is a blurred stadium with red seating.

PRESIDENT

SIR LINDSAY HOYLE MP

Sir Lindsay Hoyle, the Speaker of the House of Commons and MP for Chorley, continued as the 32nd President of the Rugby Football League in 2024.

A lifelong Warrington supporter – his late father, Lord Doug Hoyle was the Cheshire club's Chair between 1999 and 2009 – Sir Lindsay also spent time as Chair of the now defunct Chorley Borough club in the 1980s.

On his appointment, Sir Lindsay said: "I have been a Rugby League fan all my life – I think it's an absolutely fantastic sport – so it is a real honour to be asked to be RFL President. Since my father introduced me to the game, I have loved the fast pace, high collision nature of rugby league, but also its vital role in bringing communities together and developing upcoming talent."

Sir Lindsay remained as RFL President until December 31, 2024, when he was succeeded by TV presenter Adam Hills MBE.

A photograph of Trevor Hunt, Vice-President, smiling and wearing a dark suit, a purple striped tie, and a gold chain of office. He is standing behind a blue podium. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a stadium setting.

VICE-PRESIDENT

TREVOR HUNT

Trevor Hunt has over 50 years' experience at all levels within the sport, particularly in the Community Game, but also as a journalist and broadcaster of the professional international and domestic competitions.

Trevor played Rugby League with student pioneers Leeds University in 1971 and acted as Secretary before he went to Leigh Miners as a player and committee member from 1974 to 1999. He served on the National Conference League committee as a club representative from 1986 to 1997 before becoming Vice-chair in 1997 until 2006 when he was elected Chairman – role he holds to the present day.

Trevor served on the various Lancashire County Committees throughout the 1980s and was the BARLA Great Britain Media Manager from 1982 to 1997, during which time he was a member of the first-ever Open Age Tours to the South Pacific in 1990 and 1994, as well as to South Africa in 1995.

Trevor has been a key broadcaster and presenter with BBC Radio Manchester since 1986, commentating on matches and co-presenting the award-winning RL Extra programme since 1996.

Trevor is the Chair of the Rugby League Writers and Broadcasters Association, having been elected to the post in 2009, after acting as its secretary from 1997.

A portrait of Simon Johnson, a middle-aged man with grey hair, smiling. He is wearing a dark suit, a white shirt, and a blue striped tie. The background is a blurred green wall with a large white circular logo.

BOARD

SIMON JOHNSON

Previously the Rugby Football League's Senior Non-Executive Director having joined the Board in July 2014, Simon became the Chair of the RFL in October 2019. He oversaw a restructure of the Board and a refreshment of its membership. Simon is also Chair of SIS, a 24-7 supplier of live betting content to global operators, and is an Entrepreneur in Residence at the University of Lancaster Management School. He is the Chair of Camp Simcha, a charity which provides respite care for the families of children with life-threatening illnesses and is a Trustee of a family philanthropic foundation. His Executive career saw him spend seven years as Chief Executive of the Jewish Leadership Council. Before that, he had a 20-year career operating at the highest levels of the sports and media industries. After a period as senior lawyer at the Premier League, Simon spent 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, Joanna, and is an active participant in Jewish community and charitable activity. Simon resigned from the Board in March 2025.

A portrait of Sandy Lindsay MBE, a woman with long blonde hair, smiling. She is wearing a black and white zebra-print top and has her glasses perched on her head. The background is a blurred green wall with a white circular architectural element.

BOARD

SANDY LINDSAY MBE

Sandy is Chair of Tangerine, the multi award-winning specialist creative communications agency she founded in Manchester in 2002 and which she put into employee ownership in 2017. In 2015 she was awarded an MBE for services to business and young people, and in the same year 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 since created jobs for more than 600 young people in the North West and across the UK.

In 2023, she sold The Academy and, with the proceeds of the sale, created The Bright Futures fund with the charity, Forever Manchester. The fund will run for three years and donate £125,000 per year to community groups which support social mobility, a cause Sandy is especially passionate about. Sandy resigned from the Board in January 2025.

A portrait of Dr Cherrie Daley, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, smiling slightly. She is wearing a dark top and a light-colored jacket. The background is a blurred green wall with large white letters, possibly part of a logo.

BOARD

DR CHERRIE DALEY

Dr Cherrie Daley is a Chartered Psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society (AFBPsS), with almost two decades of experience in high performance sport. Having worked across a wide variety of elite sports settings in both practitioner and leadership roles, Cherrie has a strong appreciation for the challenges involved.

Cherrie was a technical lead for the English Institute of Sport (EIS) supporting Olympic and Paralympic athletes, coaches, and practitioners during both the London 2012 and Rio 2016 Olympic/Paralympic cycles. From 2014 until 2022 Cherrie held several positions for City Football Group (CFG) serving latterly as a director, overseeing central performance support Services (including coaching, human performance, sports medicine and applied research) for 10 clubs across the world. Cherrie has made contributions to the fields of leadership, sport psychology, youth development and athlete well-being, and is currently engaged in consultancy projects and advisory roles across both sport and corporate contexts, specialising in strategic, organisation and leadership development.

Cherrie was appointed the Welfare and Safety and Anti-Doping Lead for the Board in January 2023. In 2024 Cherrie successfully established the RFL's first Performance and Coaching sub-committee, recruiting a wide range of expertise from elite sport to support and develop these dimensions within the organisation, Cherrie acted as Chair and worked closely with the new Talent and Performance Director. Cherrie resigned from the Board in March 2025.

A close-up portrait of Julia Newton, a woman with blonde hair pulled back, smiling slightly. The image is partially obscured by a dark grey rectangular box on the left side, which contains text.

BOARD

JULIA NEWTON

Julia joined the Board as a Non-Executive Director in July 2024 and is chair of the RFL's Audit and Risk Committee. She is Chair of national sport body GB Taekwondo and Chair of the UK charity, Women in Sport.

Starting her career with NIKE, Julia co-founded Shine Communications, helping it to grow into a multiple award-winning agency with a team of 80 and turnover in excess of £10m. She has founded three charities and has a portfolio of board roles across the sports and communities' sectors. Julia set up the charity, the Rural Refugee Network, which has worked both regionally and nationally to resettle refugees from Syria and other war-torn regions in rural parts of the UK.

A portrait of Tony Sutton, a middle-aged man with a shaved head and light blue eyes, wearing a grey herringbone blazer over a white shirt. He is standing outdoors with a green wall and a white circular architectural element in the background.

BOARD

TONY SUTTON

Tony Sutton was appointed Chief Executive Officer following the departure of Ralph Rimmer in December 2022. Previously, Tony had been the RFL's Chief Operating Officer from January 2019, having joined the governing body as Director of Finance and Facilities in February 2017.

His previous roles include Group Finance Director and Chief Operating Officer of Hull College Group, a large further education college group with sites across Yorkshire, and prior to that 13 years with Hull FC during a period in which the club moved from the Boulevard to the then newly-built KC Stadium, as well as make their first Super League Grand Final appearance in 2006, following a memorable Challenge Cup win in Cardiff in 2005.

Tony is also a director of Rugby League World Cup 2021 Ltd, a Trustee of the RFL Facilities Trust and Chair of Trustees at Fitmums & Friends, a charity that supports participation in running, walking, cycling and athletics across Yorkshire.

A portrait of Robert Hicks, a man with short brown hair, a beard, and glasses, smiling. He is wearing a dark blue blazer over a light-colored shirt. The background is a blurred green wall with a large white circular logo.

BOARD

ROBERT HICKS

Robert Hicks was appointed Company Secretary in January 2023. He worked in Rugby League within the Legal and Operations Department since February 2011, becoming the Director of Operations and Legal in October 2021. He had overall responsibility for the administration and regulatory framework across all sectors of the sport including player welfare, match officials and safeguarding.

Robert is a former international match official having officiated at three World Cups. He refereed two Challenge Cup finals, two Super League Grand Finals, two World Club Challenges and numerous international matches, whilst officiating at more than 500 first team matches, including over 300 in Super League.

A qualified lawyer, Robert was admitted to the Roll in February 2008 (having previously been called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn in July 2004). He previously worked in private practice before joining the RFL where he was responsible for the drafting of the sport's first set of Operational Rules for Tiers 4-6 as well as being the lead legal person on the 2013 World Cup.

Robert has been actively involved in the sport for most of his life, including in several volunteer roles within the community game at Saddleworth Rangers and latterly at Batley Boys.