

TACKLE IT





TACKLE IT

GOING FURTHER, FASTER

The murder of George Floyd in 2020 and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement saw Rugby League's match officials and players join athletes from across the sporting world in taking the knee as a gesture of support for anti-racism.

But the challenge for all of us was to go beyond the gesture, to look in the mirror and ask ourselves whether we wanted to be part of the problem or part of the solution. It meant listening and learning from the lived experience of Black players and coaches, volunteers, administrators, fans and external partners. There were difficult conversations and some home truths told. It was a real process of self-examination for everybody else involved.

In Rugby League we'd always been proud of our record on racial diversity and the outstanding contributions from players such as Clive Sullivan, who in 1972 became the first Black captain of any British national sporting side. Rugby League was born out of injustice. Wasn't social justice part of our DNA? Did we really have that much to learn? As a result of those difficult conversations the answer was a resounding 'yes'.

The reality was that our sport was still not fully representative of our communities – on professional or community pitches, in boardrooms and clubhouses, on the terraces and out in those communities. And this means that Rugby League misses out on immense talent, passion, skills and experience, as well as opportunities to connect, learn, grow, and expand.

The Rugby Football League and Rugby League Commercial are now wholeheartedly committed to equality, diversity and inclusion across our organisations and across the sport. EDI is embedded in the structure and strategy of Rugby League as part of our drive towards a more inclusive sport – one that is more representative of the communities in which it is played.

During Black History Month 2020 we launched TACKLE IT, a five-year action plan to make Rugby League a truly inclusive sport. Through TACKLE IT we aim to widen the reach and impact of Rugby League, diversify the game's talent pool, improve the culture of Rugby League and actively deal with all forms of discrimination.

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TACKLE IT is an action plan by the game, for the game. The goals and actions, which are periodically refreshed to reflect progress made since 2020, are informed by the lived experience and expertise of players, coaches, volunteers, administrators and the RFL Inclusion Board, which has also been refreshed for 2024. The plan sets out how Rugby League will extend its reach and appeal, diversify its talent pool, improve its culture, and actively deal with all forms of discrimination. Objectives are SMART; performance is monitored by the Inclusion Board.

Progress on TACKLE IT forms part of the objectives of the RFL Board, Executive and Inclusion Board, and is reported on at RFL Council, Rugby League's all-member forum which convenes twice each year. The action plan is an agile one, and will continue to flex and grow with continued input across the sport.

This refresh of TACKLE IT includes new actions and targets that reflect the current needs of the game, more accurate population data from the 2021 Census, Code for Sports Governance requirements for national governing bodies to

have a DIAP approved by Sport England and UK Sport, and independent baseline barometers such as the Race Representation Index.

As stated above, TACKLE IT objectives are SMART, the overall plan agile and progress subject to rigorous scrutiny from Inclusion Board members chosen on the basis of their knowledge and experience – and their ability to challenge.

TACKLE IT is published online alongside other RFL and RL Commercial strategies and reports that share our commitment to EDI: <https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/about-the-rfl/structure,-strategy-and-reports>. It is also shared with members at RFL Council verbally, in writing and by formal presentation. Individual TACKLE IT actions are shared directly with those responsible for progress against them.

The ambition of TACKLE IT is to drive standards across the game, aligned to the strategic goals, within the RFL and RL Commercial and across the sport, including at clubs in both the professional and community game. This will be supported

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by the RFL and RL Commercial through continuously improving our learning and development offer – a commitment that also applies internally within our organisations.

As stated above, the Rugby Football League and Rugby League Commercial are determinedly committed to equality, diversity and inclusion across our organisations and across the sport. Whilst resources are precious and sometimes scarce across many areas of our collective activities, EDI is increasingly embedded as BAU. Where additional resources are required, there is an expectation that individuals and organisations are agile enough to adapt. In 2023 the RFL appointed its first Director of People – evidence of the more strategic and high-level approach now taken to shaping organisational culture through learning and development opportunities, and through improved recruitment and retention processes. Those with line management responsibilities are clearer than ever on expectations; all employees are clear on personal expectations.

TACKLE IT outlines three strategic commitments as part of the overarching goal to widen the reach and impact of Rugby League.

- *Diversify Rugby League's talent pool and workforce*
- *Improve the culture of Rugby League*
- *Clarify processes, instil confidence in – and encourage – the reporting of discrimination, and ensure appropriate sanctions are in place*



INCLUSION BOARD

The RFL Executive, who hold responsibility for the delivery of and engagement in Tackle It, are assisted by the RFL Inclusion Board, a formal sub-committee of the RFL Board who act as a critical friend on equality, diversity and inclusion.



JAMIE JONES-BUCHANAN

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

CHAIR



DAN CLARKE

Dan Clarke is an experienced ticketing and membership executive with experience in creating welcoming environments at prestigious UK sports stadia. As the former Disability Access Officer at AFC Bournemouth and a member of the Edgbaston Stadium Equality Steering Group, Dan is passionate about breaking down barriers within sports. His current role as the Head of Ticketing and Supporter Services at Edgbaston Stadium underscores his commitment to enhancing fan experiences and fostering inclusive environments.



JOHN HUGHES

Director of Partnerships and Communities at Community Integrated Care, one of Britain's biggest charities and Official Social Care Partner of the RFL. Has supported the development of inclusion through Rugby League and sport more widely. These include the Community Integrated Care Learning Disability Super League and, with RLWC2021, the first ever large-scale volunteering and personal development programme for people who have care and support needs at a major event.



DEBBIE BULLOCK

UK & Ireland Wellbeing Lead for Aviva. An experienced, strategic DEI and wellbeing practitioner, driven by the positive impact successful inclusion and wellbeing programmes can have on business results, individual outcomes, and society as a whole. Passionate rugby league supporter since teenage years.



KELSEY GENTLES

Kelsey Gentles is a member of the York Valkyrie, an England International, a 2019 Women of Steel Nominee. Recipient of the Leeds Legacy Award for work within the Sporting Community and more than 5+ years experience in working with children with Special Education Needs.



MICHAEL LAWRENCE

Professional rugby league player, Bradford Bulls captain. Jamaica international rugby league player. Also, teacher of sport and physical education at New College Bradford.



JAMES CHILD

Former professional Rugby League match official who refereed over 300 Super League games, Challenge Cup and Super League Grand Finals, and officiated at four consecutive World Cups. In 2021, James became the UK's first openly gay Rugby League referee when he spoke to the media about his sexuality. He continues to share his experiences through public speaking and his career in the real estate sector.



CHRIS GIBBONS

Chris is an inclusion and anti-discrimination consultant, working predominantly in the professional and grassroots football industries across the UK, Europe and North America. His work focuses on supporting sport leaders to make diversity, equity and inclusion central to sport governance and delivery. Chris is passionate about social change and the role that sport can play in helping individuals and communities fulfil their potential and to create cultures where everyone feels welcome, safe, valued and included.



HEATHER ROBINSON

Heather is a passionate rugby league fan and believer in access to sport and activity for all. She is the current Chair of EveryBodyMoves; a lived advisory board working with Paralympics GB to drive participation in sport amongst disabled people. She is also a qualified RL coach volunteering at Salford Red Devils Foundation working with the LDSL, PDRL and wheelchair rugby league teams as well as the disability lead on the Salford Red Devils CBS board. In 2023 Heather completed the Women's Leadership programme through the RFL which increased her passion and belief in driving diversity within the sport.

TACKLE IT

STRATEGIC GOALS

WIDEN THE REACH AND IMPACT OF RUGBY LEAGUE

DIVERSIFY RUGBY LEAGUE'S TALENT POOL AND WORKFORCE

IMPROVE THE CULTURE OF RUGBY LEAGUE

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

Widen the reach and impact of Rugby League is the overarching strategic goal, achieved through making progress against the other three strategic goals.

Diversify Rugby League's talent pool and workforce is about reflecting the communities where Rugby League is played, at all levels.

Improve the culture of Rugby League is about providing a positive experience for all where everyone can access the benefits of Rugby League.

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 is about challenging every act of discrimination and providing effective incident reporting and management processes that lead to fair and proportionate outcomes.



Diversify Rugby League's Talent Pool and Workforce

OBJECTIVE	TARGET	ACTIONS
Grow the diversity of players	Increase the representation of ethnically diverse players to 7% of the total playing population by 2025	<p>Diversify participation by supporting a minimum of 30 Community Clubs in Rugby League's most ethnically diverse areas to encourage more players from diverse backgrounds, with annual reporting on players numbers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review player numbers in identified areas and report change • Review demographics in identified areas and report change • Review player diversity in identified areas against local population diversity and report change • Set targets based on data
	Increase the number of women and girls participants in core community club settings to 9,000 by 2025	Community Strategy 2021
	Increase access to playing opportunities for disabled people by increasing the participation pool of PDRL, LDRL and Wheelchair RL to 3,000 players by 2030	<p>Community Strategy 2021</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To maintain a minimum of 66% disabled participants within PDRL, LDRL and Wheelchair RL player pools • Reporting on diversity
Grow the diversity of the coaching workforce	Create a coach development programme for current professional players from underrepresented groups in coaching by 2025 with a view to the diversity of professional coaches reflecting the diversity of professional players by 2030 (currently 12.1%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect data and insight from current players to better understand the player to coach transition, motivations and barriers • Work with RL Cares to establish which current professional players have coaching as a future career goal • Introduce programme aimed at players from groups that are underrepresented in coaching • Work with clubs and England teams to provide access to placement opportunities within Rugby League for coaches from underrepresented groups • Review how opportunities are promoted to ensure messaging is effective and wide reaching
	Increase the diversity of the coach tutor workforce to 50% women and 18.3% ethnically diverse coach tutors by 2030	Review diversity of coach tutor workforce and set targets to address underrepresentation
	Deliver a coach development programme aimed at ethnically diverse coaches	Following the success of the female coach development programme, deliver a coach development programme for coaches from ethnically diverse backgrounds
	Continue to deliver the female coach development programme with an added focus on intersectional diversity	Diversity of applicants to be reviewed and approved prior to programme start
Grow the diversity of the match officials	Increase the representation of ethnically diverse match officials to 7% by 2025	Match Officials Strategy & Vision 2023
	Increase the representation of ethnically diverse match officials to 10% of Super League match official appointments by 2025	<p>Match Officials Strategy & Vision 2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the performance of the national talent development pathway and report on the diversity of match official appointments in Super League each season from 2024
	Increase the representation of female match officials to 12% by 2025	Match Officials Strategy & Vision 2023
	Increase the representation of female match officials within the full-time match official group to 30% by 2030	<p>Match Officials Strategy & Vision 2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First appointment to be made by end of 2025 • Monitor the performance of the female talent development pathway and report on appointments in elite competitions each season from 2024



Diversify Rugby League's Talent Pool and Workforce

OBJECTIVE	TARGET	ACTIONS
Attract and retain a diverse RFL workforce	Increase the representation of women at the RFL to 28% by 2024 and 50% by 2030	People Plan
	Increase the representation of Black, Asian, mixed and other ethnic backgrounds at the RFL to 10% by 2024 and 18.3% by 2030	People Plan
	RFL Executive to be 43% women by 2024 and 50% women by 2030	People Plan
	RFL Executive to be 13% other than white by 2024 and 18.3% other than white by 2030	People Plan
England staffing structure to reflect the diversity of professional players	England staffing structure to mirror the ethnic diversity of the professional playing population (currently 12.1%) by 2025	England Performance Strategy (staffing) Audit of current Professional game staff for each job role. CPD and qualifications to upskill an ethnic diverse workforce at the Elite end of the game (Clubs as employers support is vital).
	Increase the representation of women in senior coaching within England Women and men to represent 50% of England Women staff by 2025	Continue Women into Coaching & Leadership programme Encourage more Women in the Club game to access the UKCC Level 3 coaching programme. England Performance Strategy (staffing)
	Increase the representation of disabled people within England Wheelchair staff to 20% by 2025	Identify disabled staff within the wider game of RL Identify their training needs
Improve data and insight	Increase diversity monitoring completion rates across the sport to 50% or higher for players, coaches and match officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity monitoring questions at participant registration to be made mandatory completion from 2024 (with 'prefer not to answer' option provided) Review and address causes for low completion rates amongst professional coaches and match officials by 2024
	Increase diversity monitoring completion rate for RFL and RL Commercial staff to 75% by 2025	Collected and reported on as part of annual People Survey
	Monitor and report on the diversity of RFL Board sub-committees, working and advisory groups, and other independent groups	Monitoring data to be collected and reported on as part of annual evaluation process, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RFL Board sub-committees Working and advisory groups ORT function (Match Review Panel, investigations, tribunal)



Improve the Culture of Rugby League

OBJECTIVE	TARGET	ACTIONS
EDI impact to be assessed as part of decision-making process	All programmes, initiatives and polices to be EDI impact assessed	EDI impact assessment as part of board decision process
Provide a bespoke programme of continuous learning and development across Rugby League	All professional players to engage in EDI training annually	Bespoke online education module delivered as part of Player Education Week on OuRLearning Zone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Content informed by previous season incidents Mandatory with stand down policy to ensure completion
	All coaches to engage in EDI training annually	Content included in Coach Right course <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requirement of coaching qualification
	All full-time match officials to receive bespoke training for the first time in 2024 then annually	Training to be delivered from 2024 season <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designed to be interactive and informed by previous season incidents Guidance to be provided to Community Game match officials
	New learning and development opportunities to be provided to meet identified needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hive Learning Inclusion pathways to be promoted to Clubs Club Board Diversity Project Toolkit to be promoted to Clubs Ramadan training for match officials to be delivered in 2024
Good governance and strong leadership	Compliance with the Code for Sports Governance	RFL Board and RL Commercial Board to comply with diversity requirements set out in the Revised Code for Sports Governance which is - <p>Each organisation shall publish clear ambitions to ensure its leadership represents and reflects the diversity of the local and/or national community (as appropriate)</p>
	Clubs to comply with the Professional Club Code for Sports Governance	RFL to provide central support, including Rugby League Club Board Diversity Project
	Annual reporting on talent and performance pathways	Reporting using Sport England framework
	RFL Board to be supported by an Inclusion Board	Inclusion Board membership to be refreshed every two years to ensure representation
	Community Board to appoint a Community Board Champion for Inclusion by 2024	EDI to be a standing item on Community Board agendas with updates and discussion on progress against Tackle It
	RFL to achieve Grade C in Race Representation Index by 2025	Grading can be improved by any combination of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board membership \geq 20.1% Senior leadership teams \geq 4.0% Senior coaching \geq 8.1% Officiating staff \geq 4.0% Players (England) \geq 12.1% Annual reporting via Sporting Equals
	RFL to achieve Advanced Level of Equality Standard for Sport and support clubs to achieve Preliminary Level	Awaiting revised Equality Standard for Sport to be published
	To have a Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) signed off by Sport England and UK Sport	Work with partners to progress DIAP to be signed off by March 2024



Improve the Culture of Rugby League

OBJECTIVE	TARGET	ACTIONS
Promote and champion EDI in the promotion (marketing, media and PR, social and digital media, matchday presentation) of all levels of professional Rugby League	EDI to be a standing item on all creative briefs (including as a sense-check when considering personalities for promotion)	Develop a suite of creative brief templates to be the starting point for any creative project (graphic design, videography, etc.)
	EDI to be recommended to clubs as a standing item on all creative briefs (including as a sense-check when considering personalities for promotion)	Share RL Commercial creative brief templates with clubs as leading practice
	Communicate and engage with fans on a frequent basis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop an inclusion calendar of promotional opportunities and share with clubs for interest and own use Support clubs with assets to celebrate and amplify Rugby League's successes
	EDI 'perception' questions to be asked in annual fans' survey	Develop EDI 'perception' questions to be included in annual fans' survey (e.g. do you think inclusion and diversity are positively promoted in Rugby League? Have you heard about RL Together? What does RL Together mean to you?)
	Empower players to be role models	Work with 7League and clubs to identify potential role models and develop plans with clubs for player promotion
	Deliver an inclusion fixture at 80% of Super League clubs in 2023 under the RL Together banner	Share best practice with clubs, support with digital assets and guidance on club activation, liaise with broadcasters where applicable
	Deliver an inclusion fixture at 80% of Tiers 1 and 2 clubs in 2024, including all Super League clubs, Tier 3 clubs to be supported to deliver inclusion fixtures	Review RL Together in 2023 and agree actions to develop and evolve campaign
	RL Together activations at England Internationals and Challenge Cup Finals	Produce assets for England and Challenge Cup activations, communicate with stakeholders including broadcast partners
Deliver positive match experiences for all Rugby League fans	Understand and improve access and disabled fan experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote Level Playing Field Annual Fan Survey on RFL channels to better understand disabled supporter experience across Rugby League Conduct a Facility Standards audit of professional clubs to understand access and experience for disabled fans across Rugby League grounds and inform Facility Standards from 2025
	Use data and insight to identify areas for development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use RL Annual Fans' Survey to identify areas and agree actions Respond to needs communicated by the game



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

OBJECTIVE	TARGET	ACTIONS
Challenge and prevent discrimination	Encourage reporting, including at all central events and on all platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated page on RFL website Establish reporting process for all central events (ticketing, programmes, PA scripts, website, etc.) from 2024 Communicate reporting process to attendees in advance of event
	Increase awareness within the sport of what constitutes Unacceptable Language and Behaviour	Share relevant case details with stakeholders
	Reinvest misconduct fines back into the game	Monetary investment in preventative and restorative action
Robust incident management	Increased confidence within the ORT function to deal with Unacceptable Language and Behaviour cases	Annual briefings with ORT function that include learnings from cases
	Support clubs to manage incidents	Provide advice and guidance to clubs
	Education to form part of incident management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education to be part of any first offence sanction Safeguarding Case Management Group to require clubs to complete a Tackle It Workshop where appropriate Stand down policy to be applied to professional game sanctions to ensure education is completed as a condition of suspension being lifted
	Education is periodically reviewed to ensure relevance and impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tackle It Workshop to be reviewed every two seasons RFL approval on education to be undertaken as part of sanction



TACKLE IT

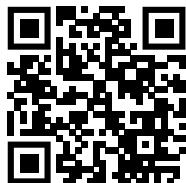
REPORT DISCRIMINATION

Rugby League has a zero tolerance approach to discrimination. This means every act of discrimination should be challenged, leading to an outcome that is fair and proportionate. If you've experienced or encountered discrimination in Rugby League – online or in person – tell us, we'll tackle it. If you tell us about something, we will act promptly and respond appropriately.

**You can make a report by using the form on our website or
contacting compliance@rfl.co.uk.**

REPORTING DISCRIMINATION

(RUGBY-LEAGUE.COM)



If you are a spectator and witness discriminatory behaviour at a match or around a ground, we advise you to report it to the nearest steward or police officer in the first instance. This can enable an immediate response and assist in perpetrator identification and evidence gathering.

Some clubs also offer fans at their stadium a confidential text service during the match. When using these services, it is recommended to include your seat location and as much detail of the incident as possible, including its location, to guide the appropriate response.

If you see a post on social media that you believe is discriminatory, you can also report it to the site or platform where it was posted.

