

GENDER PARTICIPATION POLICY

CREATED: 1 AUGUST 2022

NEXT REVIEW: 1 NOV 2024

1 COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

- 1.1 The RFL has a strategic objective to ensure Rugby League in England is inclusive to all at all levels and to diversify Rugby League's talent pool and workforce. For more information about our Tackle It Plan, please [Click](#) here.
- 1.2 The RFL also has a strategic objective to be player centric to protect and support the wellbeing and welfare of players. For more information about our player welfare initiatives, please click [here](#).
- 1.3 The RFL's core values of United, Professional, Excellence and Respect lie at the heart of what we do. **The RFL is committed to developing a culture which is as inclusive as possible, which lives and breathes the core values and where everyone feels safe and able to raise concerns about any unacceptable practice, language, behaviour, wrongdoing or misconduct.** Through the Enjoy the Game and Tackle It Policies we encourage participants of the game to speak up with the comfort and confidence that they will be listened to and their concerns will be handled sensitively. To report any concerns, please refer to the [TackleIt](#) Policy.

2 RFL POSITION ON GENDER PARTICIPATION IN RUGBY LEAGUE

- 2.1 There have been significant developments in this area over the last two years which have influenced and shaped the RFL's position for its own Gender Participation Policy, including the IRL's policy decision, other contact/collision sports policies and the Sports Councils' Equality Group's ("SCEG's") guidelines.
- 2.2 In addition, the RFL has concluded a wide-ranging consultation with interested parties, Government, stakeholders, participants and individuals who continue to engage with us on this complex area. We also greatly empathise with the personal journeys that individuals have experienced, in sport and in society, and we will continue to reach out to work with all those actively involved to help us in developing our future policies, research and work in this area to make sure Rugby League remains inclusive for all.
- 2.3 The RFL commits to engage with the SCEG, the IRL, other sports, Rugby League participants and other key stakeholders and specialists to keep this area under review. This includes facilitating, contributing to and/or learning from further research that may be instigated in this area as well as working with all to ensure we provide other inclusive formats of the game of Rugby League.

3 RFL POSITION ON GENDER PARTICIPATION IN RUGBY LEAGUE

- 3.1 Full details of the RFL's eligibility requirements for gender participation are set out in section 4 below.
- 3.2 The RFL is committed to providing and supporting opportunities for everyone to be actively involved in the sport. However, it is important that the playing opportunities provided are safe and fair for all participants. This means that, when determining the eligibility criteria, we have had to recognise that a precautionary approach needs to be adopted in some respects so that the considerations of safety and fairness are balanced against inclusion for the reasons explained below.

Contact Rugby League

- 3.3 Whilst undertaking our review and reaching our position on eligibility, the RFL has been mindful of the legislation in this area, including the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 ("the EA"). Under section 195(3) of the EA, contact Rugby League is a "gender-affected activity". Section 195 (2) of the EA states that "A person does not contravene section 29, 33, 34 or 35 [of the EA], so far as

relating to gender reassignment, only by doing anything in relation to the participation of a transsexual person as a competitor in a gender-affected activity if it is necessary to do so to secure in relation to the activity (a) fair competition, or (b) the safety of competitors”.

- 3.4 We are also mindful of the SCEG guidelines that emphasise that inclusion of trans people assigned male at birth in female contact sport cannot be balanced against considerations of safety and fairness. This is due to retained advantages in strength, stamina and physique between the average transgender woman assigned male at birth (who has passed through puberty and adolescence), and the average cisgender woman. Recent research has shown that this advantage is retained even with testosterone suppression.
- 3.5 This means that with regards to playing and training in contact Rugby League, a precautionary approach needs to be applied in order to ensure fair competition and the safety of participants (whether that be risks to the safety of the transgender participant or risks to the safety of other participants). Therefore, due to developmental changes brought about by male puberty, it is appropriate and necessary to maintain a female only category of contact Rugby League as well as certain eligibility requirements for male categories from the Under 12 years age grade upwards and continuing into the adult game. The latter is intended to ensure that transgender people wishing to play male contact Rugby League have the appropriate experience and competence to participate safely.

Non-Contact Rugby League

- 3.6 Non-contact Rugby League is not a gender-affected sport and as such “Touch”, “Tag”, X-League and Learning Disability Rugby League (“LDRL”) are mixed-gender and are available for all without any gender-based eligibility criteria. The same is true for age grade Rugby League up to and including Under 11s.

4 ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR GENDER PARTICIPATION IN RUGBY LEAGUE

4.1 NON-CONTACT RL

The RFL’s non-contact forms of Rugby League which include “Touch” “Tag” and X-league and LDRL are mixed-gender and are available for all without any gender-based eligibility categories. Players may participate in the gender with which they identify although for non-RFL activity, please check the specific eligibility requirements that may apply to those competitions

4.2 CONTACT RUGBY LEAGUE

The following eligibility requirements apply with regards to gender participation in contact Rugby League in England and these apply throughout the entire domestic game in England (but excluding international matches).

AGE GRADE CONTACT RL (TRAINING & PLAYING)		
	RL CATEGORY	ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
(a)	Under 11 years age grade and below – mixed categories	Mixed-gender contact Rugby League is permitted. Players can play without approval irrespective of the gender with which they identify.
(b)	Under 12s to Under 18s age grade – male and female categories	Players are only permitted to play in the gender category of the sex that was originally recorded at birth, unless otherwise permitted under this policy. See point (c) and (d) below.
(c)	Age grade male category (under 12s and above)	<p>Players are permitted to play in this category if the player’s sex recorded at birth is male.</p> <p>If the player’s sex recorded at birth is female and the player identifies as transgender, non-binary or gender fluid, the player may play if:</p>

		<p>i) their parent or guardian (or such other appropriate adult) provides their written consent in the form requested by the RFL to the relevant club or school; and</p> <p>ii) an appropriate risk assessment is carried out by the club or school which the player is representing in the form prescribed by the RFL; and</p> <p>the RFL is notified prior to the player participating in the contact Rugby League activity.</p>
(d)	Age grade female category (under 12s and above)	Players are only permitted to play in the female category if the sex that was originally recorded at birth is female.
ADULT CONTACT RL (TRAINING AND PLAYING)		
(e)	Adult male category	<p>Players are permitted to play in this category if the player's sex recorded at birth is male.</p> <p>If the player's sex recorded at birth is female and the player identifies as transgender, non-binary or gender fluid, the player may play if:</p> <p>i) the player provides written consent in the form requested by the RFL to the relevant club; and</p> <p>ii) an appropriate risk assessment is carried out by the club or school which the player is representing in the form prescribed by the RFL; and</p> <p>iii) the RFL is notified prior to the player participating in the contact Rugby League activity; and</p> <p>iv) the player has obtained a Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE) if required in accordance with the UK Anti-Doping Rules.</p>
(f)	Adult female category	Players are only permitted to play in the female category if the sex that was originally recorded at birth was female and are not undergoing hormone treatment (for example, a transgender man may continue to play in the women's category of Rugby League provided no hormone treatment has commenced).
(g)	Wheelchair category	Mixed-gender contact Rugby League is permitted. Players can play without approval irrespective of the gender with which they identify. However, a player may need to obtain a Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE) if required in accordance with the UK Anti-Doping Rules.
(h)	Physical Disability Rugby League (PDRL)	Mixed-gender Rugby League that is a hybrid of contact and non-contact. Players can play without approval irrespective of the gender with which they identify. However, players will need to play in accordance with the Eligibility Rules of the PDRL competition and ensure the player obtains a Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE) if required in accordance with the UK Anti-Doping Rules.
(i)	Retrospective approvals	All approvals provided under the previous RFL transgender policy will continue to apply for the 2023 season. Thereafter, all players must comply with this Policy.

4.3 VOLUNTEERING/COACHING/OFFICIATING

Rugby League welcomes all who wish to be actively involved in the sport. There should be no barrier to involvement and people can hold any role without approval irrespective of the gender with which they identify.

4.4 NOTIFICATIONS

Unless specifically required and stipulated in this Policy, no additional notifications are required to be made to the constituent body or opposition club. The player (and parent/guardian in respect of an age grade player) may choose whom they notify.

4.5 RISK ASSESSMENTS

A risk assessment should be carried out in respect of all transgender players participating in contact Rugby League. In respect of transgender men (age grade and adult) wanting to participate in the category that is different to the sex recorded at birth, a risk assessment must be undertaken to determine that the risks of playing Rugby League for that individual have been considered and suitable safeguards put in place to ensure the reasonable safety of the player. All players accept that Rugby League is a highspeed collision sport and there are risks associated with participating in training and matches. Specifically in the male category, factors such as physical development, technical ability and Rugby League competency should all be taken into consideration. Rugby League Transgender Application Form (<https://www.rugby-league.com/uploads/docs/TransgenderApplicationForm.docx>).

4.6 COMPLIANCE WITH THE OPERATIONAL RULES AND THIS POLICY

Should there be any questions or concerns with regard to any application of this Policy, please contact Ben.Abberstein@rfl.co.uk and the RFL will advise accordingly.

The RFL has the power to undertake its own analysis and investigation into any application of this Policy (including any potential breach) and may, in its absolute discretion determine that a player is not eligible to or should not participate in their selected gender category due to reasons of player welfare, non-compliance with the process or such other reasons as determined by the RFL. This applies regardless of whether or not the RFL has received the requisite notification set out above.

In addition to complying with this Policy, all participation in Rugby League is also subject to such other rules, regulations and policies that may apply in respect of a person's participation. For more information on our regulations click [here](#). Non-compliance with this Policy and any other regulations may constitute Misconduct and will be dealt with in accordance with the Operational Rules.

5 CONFIDENTIALITY

All personal information provided to the RFL under this Policy will be dealt with in strict confidence at all times and will be handled in accordance with the RFL's Privacy Policy which is available [Here](#).

6 CONTACT INFORMATION

For any questions on the Policy please contact our Inclusion Lead, Ben Abberstein on Ben.Abberstein@rfl.co.uk.