

COMMUNITY BOARD – DECEMBER 2021

COMMUNITY RUGBY LEAGUE UPDATE

1. INTRODUCTION

To provide a comprehensive Community Game update including activities undertaken by the Development and Community Game Delivery Teams in 2021 which contribute to the RFL's emerging Community Strategy and Vision 2022-2030. In addition, we will update on relevant Talent programmes and work undertaken by the Match Officials Department.

2. COMMUNITY RL STRATEGY & VISION 21-30

The latest draft of the strategy will be uploaded to the Community Board SharePoint Folder ahead of the December Community Board Meeting. As per the July Community Board Meeting, we have followed the same layout and flow as in the Strategy in this Update which should make it easier for the Community Board to track progress.

This includes a focus on three key areas: -

- **Core Community**
- **Education**
- **Social Impact**

We will also update on progress in terms of **Communication, Digitisation, Insight** and **Sustainability** which underpin the work in the three key areas of work outlined above.

Core Community

The Community Game including our clubs, players and volunteers provide the foundation upon which the game is built and contributes significantly to society more widely. Ensuring the sustainability of the sport and maximising the potential for growth is a key priority. We will achieve this by delivering against five key principles: -

Sustain, Grow, Develop, Flexibility and Govern

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

Sky Try

The Sky Try programme has now come to the end of its 7-year lifespan. We will collate the final reporting figures to quantify the impact which has been made across the Rugby League Foundations and community clubs.

With regards to participation, we feel that Sky Try has delivered and surpassed the original goals set out in the programme. Unfortunately, the delay to the RLWC2021 limited the final planned project which would have allowed us to capitalise on opportunities presented by the tournament.

The Tackling Inequalities Fund (TIF)

Launched in 2020, the RFL has secured a total of £300,000 from Sport England's Tackling Inequalities Fund. This is an ongoing fund across two phases to support priority audiences and community clubs' return to play.

During phase one in 2020, the £150,000 budget was awarded to community clubs in the most deprived areas of the country and Wheelchair RL clubs. A total of 101 clubs were invited to complete an application. Phase two is in progress and the £150,000 budget will focus on Women & Girl's RL, PDRL, LDRL, smaller clubs who are in a deprived area and clubs who have players travelling from deprived areas. Over 90 clubs have been invited to apply for Phase Two funding so far with £100,000 worth of grants remaining to be awarded.

Rugby League Survival Fund

As part of the Government's support for Rugby League, the RFL received confirmation that £1.45m grant (as opposed to loan) funding would be made available to support the Community Game. The Survival Fund forms part of the wider Sport England support package and is a direct response to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, to support the survival of eligible community Rugby League clubs and Foundations. All clubs will need to demonstrate their financial need for support to survive because of the impact caused by restrictions during the pandemic. For Rugby League, this is a two-season impact with virtually the entire 2020 season lost and a delayed 2021 start. This is a targeted fund that has been designed to deal with the 'here and now' issues clubs are facing and aims to support clubs in becoming financially stable and sustainable.

The fund has launched, and all community clubs have been invited to apply for a minimum grant of £3,250. Sport England have recruited staff to support the RFL Development Team during the administration of this fund. Over £150,000 has been awarded to date, with the remaining funds to be awarded before March 2022.

Club Accreditation

The new club accreditation process has been trialled across four clubs which have fed back on the process. The intention is to simplify this process; currently clubs complete multiple forms such as CRF Forms, Club Personnel Forms amongst others. This is currently in a soft launch phase, however, any clubs that wish to undertake club accreditation will have the opportunity to do so.

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

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

RLWC 2021 Development Plans

Rugby League World Cup Development Plans have been ongoing since early 2020, however, they have been severely disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic with little if any activity, and targets have therefore been rolled forward. We are approaching normality in terms of schools' delivery, although there is still hesitancy in some areas.

In 2021 we lost all Quarter 1 delivery and in some cases all of Quarter 2 as well. The plans and targets have been revisited on a regular basis by the Development Team working with Foundations.

Targets from Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 have been positive across the board, and we have new teams, club offers and activity in almost every area. We are now starting to work with Foundations and RLWC2021 HTC areas who have paid staff in place to support the delivery of Development Plan work to ensure plans are in place for 2022. All other areas will be reviewed following the confirmation of Sport England funding, with those plans finalised for the start of the 2022 season.

Quarter 4 reporting is due on the 10th of December.

Targeted Growth Initiatives

Player Development Leagues

Below is a brief update of three Player Development Leagues:

Greater Manchester Rugby League

Brand new clubs have formed at Manchester Lions and Wythenshawe Community Rugby Club, Bolton Red Devils and Stockport Red Devils. Warrington Wolves have also developed a satellite club at U12s for brand new players who will play in the festivals and then transition to Ryland Sharks for 2022 at U13s (where they currently do not have a team) and enter the NWC. Potential new clubs/teams will also come from Rochdale.

The GMRL has been supported by Swinton Lions, Salford Red Devils, Rochdale Hornets, Manchester Rangers, and the Warrington Wolves Foundation.

It has been disappointing to hear feedback from some clubs that clubs in the NWC 7 - 12s have been told they are not allowed to play against teams in the GMRL. Hopefully, this will be allowed in 2022. However, the 13 - 15s League have been far more accommodating.

West of England Junior League

This new competition will see community open-age clubs across the West of England develop junior sections. Swindon St George, Oxford Cavaliers, and the West Oxfordshire Levellers are all leading the way. There is also fledging activity at All Golds and Worcester Jaguars.

The push back of lockdown to 19th July meant we had to cancel the planned festivals, so these clubs arranged to play each other in friendly fixtures for the remainder of 2021.

David Raybould and Steve Guan met the clubs in the WoE on Saturday 13th November to begin planning what that region could look like in the coming years.

Midlands Junior League

The Midlands is the most established of the development leagues having run on and off for over ten years. However, there is a new enthusiasm across the region with new clubs forming and participating in activity. New clubs have formed in 2021 including Trinity Knights, Erdington Griffins, Coventry Alphas and Derby Elks, all of which have benefited from RLWC Legacy Funding. Coventry Bears have delivered 3 of these new clubs. There are currently over 548

junior players registered across 14 clubs. Again, the festivals have had to be cancelled but smaller events and friendlies have been arranged.

Depending on the outcome of the discussions with Sport England we have some ambitious plans to grow this concept further in 2022, with new activity planned in Lancashire and new girls' activity across Cumbria, North East, London, West Midlands, and the East of England. This activity would hopefully tie in to the WSL South clubs.

We will then continue to grow those competitions we have already established over the last 4 years.

Women & Girls

Girls RL

We have finished the year with 2,186 players registered, an increase from 2019 which finished with 1,662. All the early indicators are that the game will continue to grow in 2022, hopefully the bulk of Covid restrictions will be removed and clubs can recruit early in the new year. We already have expressions of interest from 10 new clubs, and we will send communication out through the boys' leagues to see if there are any more looking to form new girls' sections, particularly around the U11s age group.

Women's RL

Ahead of 2022 Leigh Miners Rangers and Barrow Ladies will move up to WSL. We will then backfill those spots in the Championship by promoting teams from League One.

We also have interest from new clubs, including Salford Red Devils and teams from Oldham.

Customer-Centric Competitions

Most of our Member League competitions concluded in October. It has been a difficult season given the additional challenges that Covid has presented, however, overall, the vast majority of teams across the country have been involved in competitive playing offers. Despite these challenges, several of our competitions have continued to experience growth in both the number of participants registered and the number of games that took place which is extremely positive and puts us in a good place looking ahead to 2022. As we do every year, we have conducted end of season reviews for our Member League competitions and supported our Affiliate Leagues in doing the same. Those reviews will be available on SharePoint before Christmas.

For our Member League competitions and the NCL below is a summary of the number of games that took place this season compared to both 2018 and 2019:

League	Games Played 2018	Games Played 2019	Games Played 2021	Increase/Decrease 2019 to 2021 (%)
Southern Conference League	N/A	80	59	-26%
National Conference League	537	615	365	-41%
North West Men's League	*478	*539	393	-27%
Yorkshire Men's League	449	437	582	+33%
Women's Rugby League	157	246	188	-24%
North-East Men's and Juniors	100	101	110	+9%
Midlands Men's League	37	31	29	-6%
West Cumbria Youth League	149	185	145	-22%
Barrow & District Youth League	93	101	77	-24%
Girls Rugby League	405	598	463	-23%
London Men's League	63	33	50	+52%
East RL	56	29	26	-10%
West of England	51	29	27	-7%
South West League	44	17	9	-47%
Total	2619	3041	2523	-17%

Covid did seem to be the reason behind the key issues faced this season, whether directly or indirectly. Positive cases and self-isolations were problematic in the first half of the season, leading to teams being stood down and fixtures being called off. However, as the season went on and restrictions began to lift, social occasions became more of a priority which again impacted player availability, particularly at Open Age, and meant teams found it difficult to raise a side on a consistent basis. In addition, the regular availability of Match Officials was a significant issue; at times Covid was a contributing factor, but there are certainly other issues at play and work needs to be done in this area to improve ahead of the 2022 season. Another contributing factor is likely to be behaviours, both on and off the field. Discipline cases have risen this year, and as highlighted by the recent summit on matchday environments and behaviours, various groups within the game need to come together to focus on solutions to address such issues.

For 2022 the aim for many competitions will be to try and return to 'normal' or as close to as possible. That would see the reintroduction of events, cup competitions, tours, and promotion and relegation amongst other things which all help to improve the quality of the playing offers provided. Outside of that, a wider organisational approach is needed to tackle poor behaviours and improve match day environments. Work in relation to that is already well underway. In addition, and linked to that point, better recruitment and retention of Match Officials is vitally important. For our Member League competitions, we have consulted with players and clubs to gain feedback to help shape both the structure and competition rules for 2022. This will continue over the coming weeks, The application process for some competitions will begin in early December, and for other competitions which start later in the year, the process will begin in the New Year. In advance of next season, we are looking to introduce Entry Criteria, which would be issued alongside the various application forms. We intend to use these to clearly outline what is expected of clubs as part of being a member of a competition. This will allow us to better enforce the various rules and policies and take a stronger stance on anything that falls below those expectations.

With an increase in the number of discipline cases and a worrying trend of Match Official abuse, the RFL convened a Touchline Behaviours Summit on Saturday 6th November. Following the event, a number of recommendations and actions are being developed to be introduced ahead of the 2022 season.

The summit was attended by over forty people representing clubs, match official societies, coaches, playing leagues and the RFL.

The full recommendations will be published once finalised by the end of the year.

Covid-19 Protocols

We have amended the Test and Trace Protocols and guidance for community clubs which covers training sessions, matches and any other Rugby League activity events. We have set out the processes and procedures they should have in place to monitor any Covid-19 reported cases relating to participants within the Community Game. The guidance can be found on the RFL website [HERE](#).

The 2022 season will see the reintroduction of scrums within the Community Game.

Develop – An update on Player and Coach engagement, development, and education.

Player Development Steering Group:

Throughout 2021 a new group was set up internally with the specific remit to bring cross-departmental work and issues together with a more joined-up approach. The collaboration of Coaching, Development, Operations, and Performance has begun to drive change linking into the focus in the new strategy on Player Development.

The group brings together key RFL personnel who deliver projects around junior player development within the Community Game setting (namely Coaching, Development, Operations and Performance). This should ensure that all the departments are aware of each other's projects and priorities and identify projects where cross-department collaboration can occur.

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

The group will identify areas where an intervention may require the support of colleagues. For example, within Player Development Leagues; how could we ensure coaches can be qualified/licensed to the appropriate level given that some of these teams will be based in developing regions? How could these players access further development opportunities?

Examples of the projects the group will collaborate on include.

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

Player Engagement

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

Video content has been captured for all boys aged from U7 – U16, further content is to be captured for U18s and adult males along with the female game. Consideration will be given to social and inclusion variants and how this can be serviced.

The app will sit within Our League as the entry point and using API technology to transport the user into their app. Within the development section will sit Skill to Play, Move to Play, Live to Play and Think to Play. This will directly feed their own digitised profile.

Coach Engagement Development and Education

Coach Registrations – In the 2021 season, a total of 3,683 coaches registered. From these registrations, records show that 2,204 coaches registered had completed their UKCC Level 1 or Level 2 coaching qualification and there were 1,479 registered coaches on GameDay that had not completed either their Level 1 or Level 2 coaching qualification. The discrepancy in numbers is usually because of incorrect registration by the individual i.e., operating in non-coaching roles within the sport but registering as coaches. We will be following up via a CRM to these individuals prior to the 2022 season to signpost non-qualified coaches to complete their coaching qualification and the non-coaches to register using the correct identifier. This should then provide a more accurate view of the coaching landscape.

Coach Education Programme – The 2021-22 Coach Education programme has commenced, and we are starting to see the recovery back to normal pre-Covid levels. Upon resumption of the 20-21 programme after the Covid restrictions were lifted there were a total of 131 coaches qualified, clearing the backlog of coaches who were already on courses when the restrictions were implemented. Currently, 23 coach education courses have been delivered or planned at UKCC Level 1 and Level 2 for the 21-22 programme. We are currently working on further delivery for the 21-22 programme.

CoachRight 2021 Mandatory CPD Education

In the 2021 season, there were 4,461 completions across all versions (Adult – 1,356, Youth – 1,653, Primary – 1,452). This is more than the number of registered coaches as some coaches have completed more than one version of the course due to coaching in more than one environment.

The Coaching and Community Operations team should be congratulated for achieving this level of compliance in year one.

CoachRight 2022 Mandatory CPD Education – The design of the new 2022 version of the mandatory annual coach CPD, which again will be a requirement for the 2022 coach licence, is currently being undertaken. There will be three different versions of the course to complete dependant on the environment coached in. Primary (U6-U11) Youth (U12-U18) & Adult (Open Age). The 2022 version of the course will consist of sections on:

- Inclusion & Diversity (**New for 2022**)
- Rules & Regs
- Safeguarding
- Player Welfare
- Coaching
- Behaviours and Influencing Touchlines (**New for 2022**)
- Anti-doping & Betting (Adult course only)

Coach Development Group – Work is currently ongoing to expand the resources within this group ready for the 2022 season. A warm-up resource for ages 14+ is being finalised and will be available for the start of 2022.

Age-specific skill development resources will be produced. These will work alongside skill development content on the player engagement app.

Currently, there are 833 coaches in the group; work will be done to increase this number alongside the release of new resources.

Primary Rugby League Working Group – The group has produced a list of actions for the 2022 season to support the game at this level and help improve participant experiences.

- **Coach Education**
 - Coach Handbook to be updated and refreshed – emailed directly to all Primary age coaches prior to the 2022 season through CRM.
 - PRL Coach Workshop – Delivered across the game by RFL Staff & Foundations prior to the 2022 season commencing.
- **Parent Education**
 - Parent Information Sheet to be produced with information of what they should expect to see at PRL and what behaviours are expected from them. This will be emailed to all PRL parents via CRM before the start of the 2022 season.
- **Promotion & Visibility**
 - Positive PRL stories/examples to be shared through RFL media streams & OurLeague
 - Current players & coaches to promote PRL through videos/interviews.
 - Rewards for clubs/coaches who demonstrate positive PRL experiences.

Women's Leadership and Performance Coach Development Programme – We are in month six of the programme and have currently completed work on the Understanding Self and Understanding Individual Athletes modules. Over the next 3 months, we will collaborate with UK Coaching Solutions to create a series of podcasts to highlight the programme and the work being done by the female participants which will be broadcast on UK Coaching and RFL media channels.

This programme lasts for 12 months, with further support after transitioning from the programme.

Flexibility

At the end of 2020 we recorded 8,000 players in social settings, this number is now tracking at 12,500 to date in 2021. This is 25% growth on 2020 numbers.

Try Tag:

We are continuing our relationship with Try Tag Rugby (TTR) and have seen approximately 10,000 playing per week. They delivered our first mass participation event: 'TagFest London.' This festival included 1,000 participants on the day, with full Covid-19 compliance and Local Authority backing. We have continued to see growth through an increase in men's and women's leagues and an increased profile via Facebook, Twitter and Instagram with promotional videos including player videos with Lois Forsell and Luke Gale. We have continued to work closely with TTR to better shape their franchise model and develop a more rounded offer, more attractive to Foundations – Bradford piloted this in 2021. We have embarked on monthly operational meetings to steer through the new Strategy and review the MOU in place.

Touch RL:

We now have 40 sites up and running with all registrations via GameDay and notification of activity centrally reported to the RFL. This included 10 Foundations delivering a Foundation Touch series throughout 2021 to follow the models of Physical Disability RL (PDRL), Learning Disability Super League (LDL) and Women's Super League (WSL). This saw 9 men's and 8 women's teams participate in the competition delivered through Foundations. The proposed boys and girls offer will feature in 2022 planning. All delivery has been Covid-19 compliant, and clubs/teams have followed the adaptive protocols required for activity to return.

Touch RL has a steering group to shape the offer through the 2021-25 cycle. Following meetings that have taken place with England Touch Association, we will enter an official partnership that replicates the Try Tag model and create an MOU that will deliver some of our key strategic objectives.

Masters RL:

This format returned fully in 2021 and saw sixty clubs training and playing. All teams followed return to play (RTP) guidance such as mandatory registrations, notification of activity, Covid Officer etc. In agreement with the Management Group, we ran pilot activity March-May with all fixtures subject to central approval and in line with RTP guidance. The Masters Management Group meet weekly and have delivered some mass participation events, (including 400+ players in Blackpool) and have some international festivals due in November. This is worked into a regular playing calendar that sees approximately 600 players involved per week. The Management Group report registrations this season are at 1,900 a growth of approximately +14%.

X-League:

Twelve new clubs have been set up in the last year. Monthly webinars and improved social media presence have seen an uplift in activity, most recently from Nottingham and Harrogate. The activity has a trend to operate from a Community Club setting and has seen mandatory registrations, notification of activity, Covid Officer etc to comply with RTP protocols. Registrations are at 200 with a Monthly Management meeting now in place. X-League has also delivered mass participation events including Beach X-League and has an international festival due in November. X-League was used as a key piece in the RFL RTP action plan and is growing sustainably.

Govern

One of the key themes which emerged from the Game Wide Review was around the control and influence of the RFL. Following on from this a steering group was established to develop solutions and suggestions on recommendations of the steps the sport needs to take.

Competition Logistics and NGB Control and Influence Steering Group Recommendations

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

These recommendations then led to the key aspiration to “Build and develop a ‘One Game’ structure.”

Regional Development Forum

To achieve this the RFL will create a series of Regional Development Forums (RDF's) which consist of key stakeholders across those regions, to ensure that the recommendations above can be met and that the game can continue to flourish in that region by working collaboratively to deliver the key strategies of both the RFL and the Region across the Community Game (core community, education, social and coaching).

RDF's will allow the collaboration of resources to support delivery and maximise outcomes. They will also ensure a level of sustainability is incorporated into each region. Examples of stakeholders that could be included are Open Age, Youth and Junior, Women and Girls, Foundations, Professional Clubs, Schools, Universities, Armed Forces, etc. The makeup of each group will be individual to meet the needs of that region, but there should be an attempt to keep roles generic where possible. These groups would operate with Terms of Reference and Volunteer Agreements.

In 2021 we have run a pilot with the Southern Regions. The initial group is formed and includes RFL Executives, Four Regional chairs (London and South East, Midlands, West of England, and South West), and 2 independent members. Due to the size of the Southern Regions, there will then be four RDF's formed on the back of this group with the aim to have these groups up and running by January 2022. All will operate with Terms of Reference and Volunteer Agreements. The Southern Regional Group has met twice and is meeting again in December and will help with the creation of the Regional Development Plans that are aligned to the strategy and the Southern Regions Strategic Frameworks.

It is worth noting that these will not be competition focused so the group make-up will differ within each region.

In addition, we are looking to create an overarching Competition Management Group for the Southern Regions to oversee the competition structures and support the day to day running of the competitions. This group will be a subgroup of the Southern Regional Development Forum.

Sports Code of Good Governance

The RFL has a long and proud history of excellent sports governance and continues to comply with the 2016 Code of Sports Governance (“the Code”) as set out by the Government and Sport England. As part of its strategic aims, the RFL states that it wants excellent governance not only at National Governing Body level but also for all constituent parts of the sport in both the professional and Community Game.

In 2017, the RFL undertook a governance review of the Community Game. The initial phase saw key changes to the Community Board to ensure that it was compliant with the Code. It further went on to review the wider Community Game in an attempt to make the game more representative of its participants and to make it easier for people not only to be represented within the game but understand how they could become involved and contribute to the decision making of it.

Further work has been undertaken with professional clubs and a consultation has been undertaken with the various bodies that manage competitions within the Community Game.

In the 21-25 Community Strategy we have committed to create and issue guidance and codes of good practice that will be written in accordance and compliant with the Code of Sports Governance for all competitions and clubs.

There are several advantages of trying to improve the Governance of both Community Game competitions but also clubs, these include:

1. Better decision making.
2. Ensuring the decision-making forums within organisations represent the communities in which they are based. This in turn will inspire greater inclusivity and diversity within that organisation.
3. Increasing accountability of the people making decisions.
4. Improving communication with stakeholders which will in turn increase the profile of the organisation and increase the relevance of that organisation within the wider community that it serves.
5. Reducing exposure to risk and liability.
6. Protecting all involved in the sport and ensuring that participants feel engaged and can make a difference when it comes to making changes to the sport.

By undertaking all the above this will ensure that clubs have the ability to attract more members, understand their community and the positive social impact they can have.

We are working on 13 principles of good governance and will look to share these with the Community Board at the next meeting.

Education Resilience and Pathways

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

School

- In-person delivery of Introduction to Teaching Rugby League courses with PGCE students has fully recommenced, with delivery completed or planned across 9 institutions to 12 cohorts of students. After a successful pilot using Foundations to deliver CPD to teachers already in the profession, we will deliver further sessions and look to engage additional Foundations.
- The school-specific beginners' scheme of work has been shared widely and well-received. An intermediate teaching resource with more progressive activities will be added.
- Resources created originally for virtual sessions have been adapted for delivery to pupils with additional learning needs and for wheelchair users, to ensure our education resources match our playing offers more closely. The Education Resource group on Our Learning Zone now has over 300 members and alongside sharing teaching and learning resources and online courses for both staff and pupils, we are using the platform to share Champion Schools competition results and updates.
- Local and regional Champion Schools qualifying fixtures are back underway, with a full programme of local qualifiers completed during the first half term across Yorkshire and North West. Activity in Cumbria, North East, Wales, and London & SE is planned for this half term. The national rounds will start in January/February 2022. As expected there has been a slight reduction in participating teams reported by local co-ordinators, but their feeling is that this is continuing anxiety about inter-school mixing and will not lead to a long-term loss of those schools from the competition.
- RLWC School Games 9s festivals will begin early in summer term 2022 culminating in a finals event in July. This will be expanded across all KS3 boys age groups and will also include a Y7/8 girls' competition for the first time.

Colleges

- The College leagues are now back up and running and as anticipated we have needed to show flexibility in the league structures as, with the considerable break in activity, we have needed to amend leagues as teams were not sure of their playing ability.
- We have seen some teams drop out of the leagues they were entered in to, this is mainly down to lack of recruitment. Speaking with AoC Sport this is a general trend across most sports. We will continue to work with these Colleges to re-engage them for the next academic year. We have delivered 9 Tag Leaders Awards this year, they have been at Priestley College (Warrington) Sheffield College, Barnsley College, Thomas Rotherham College, MK College, Peterborough College, Stoke-on-Trent College, Preston's College and Moulton College (Northampton). This project has been alongside AoC Sport, and we have identified 6 Colleges still to engage in the Leaders Award.
- Girls' activity is back up and running this academic year and we have a fixtures schedule of 7 festivals, and we have engaged 7 Colleges so far in the activity. As the season has started with the rules in place for the 2021 community season, these rules will stay in place for the full academic year i.e., no scrums.

Universities

- BUCS leagues are back up and running for the 2021/22 academic year.
- We have seen some drop outs from institutions from their playing leagues, these teams are Bath, Coventry, Cardiff Met, Leeds Trinity, and Aberystwyth. Work is ongoing with these institutions to put club development plans in place to get the clubs back into BUCS for the 2022/23 season.
- Loughborough 2s and Exeter 2s are new teams for the 2021/22 academic season.
- As the season has started with the rules in place for the 2021 community season, these rules will stay in place for the full academic year i.e., no scrums. We have appointed a new Student representative to the Sports Advisory Group (SAG), Lewis Flack from Loughborough University.
- England Universities Regional programme is back up and running with the trials in all regions having taken place between the 30th of October and 13th November. Regional Games will be played on the 27th of November at the University of Birmingham, we had 292 sign-ups for the regional programme from 54 Universities. Origin will be the 6th of February at Loughborough University, and we are planning for the Four Nations to be in Ireland on the 18th – 26th June.
- England Students have their trials on the 13th and 20th November, we had 141 expressions of interest and to date 102 have registered for the trials.

Women's University Rugby League is gathering some momentum again as we work towards a league structure within BUCS. There are currently 6 universities that are engaged with Rugby League. University of Leeds, Manchester, and Liverpool (all playing WRLA) played in a 9s festival on Sunday 17th October. Loughborough, University of Hull, and Sheffield are taking part in a development event on Sunday 14th November in Sheffield.

Social Impact

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

Tackling Inequalities – A summary of our inclusion and diversification work.

With the return to play of our core Community Game continuing there has been a focus on ensuring all the different formats of the game have also been able to return. This was challenging for our disabled participants given the identification of many vulnerable/at-risk participants from our disability variants.

Our participants involved in the Learning Disability offers were identified as most at risk, and as such, were cautiously and safely returned incrementally over the entire 2021 season. The season began with remotely delivered coaching sessions, then socially distanced outdoor face to face coaching and intra-club activity, progressing to one-to-one games. This further increased to regionalised festival activity with reduced numbers of teams, followed by county-wide festivals and finally the traditional national festival format. This slow and measured return allowed participants to engage safely and gradually thus limiting the impact of Covid-19 as well as mitigating individuals' social anxieties around emerging from isolation and shielding. Through this response, we found a significant increase in participation of both team and participant numbers engaging in the sport. The final nationwide festival saw 20 teams from 13 Foundations engage with the event, totalling over 200 participants with learning disabilities playing throughout the season. This growth is unprecedented and a tribute to the work our Foundations and RFL staff have done in the area during the global pandemic.

Throughout the 2021 season, we have seen our Physical Disability Rugby League offer continue to grow, expanding to six teams and an increased number of player registrations. The season saw a change from the traditional format of festivals to one-on-one games to mitigate the risk of gathering in large groups. This also meant that participants played more Rugby League than in any other season with further opportunities to play exhibition games. To facilitate this, we have created a pool of referees with PDRL experience and ensure games could go ahead and be appropriately managed. Wider than the regular national season, work has been ongoing with the development of a classification structure for representative PDRL competition. The first Physical Disability RL Classification Day took place on 12th June 2021. The International Rugby League (IRL) has now formally adopted new eligibility and classification criteria for selection for international matches ahead of the PDRL World Cup and the work of Chris Godfrey, the RFL's Inclusion Manager, in putting in place the eligibility criteria subsequently adopted by the IRL should be acknowledged. Classification will be used at elite international level and will bring about more equitable, safer standardisation and international recognition to the game of PDRL. This will also give more confidence to participants with varying degrees of disability to play PDRL and grow the game to its potential through the aspirational playing offers. This system was adopted and trialled through an East Vs West Origin game where two teams of classified players played in the world's first classified Disability Rugby League game. During the year, we have classified over 40 players in England who opted to be part of the programme. With the postponement of the PDRL World Cup, an England development day has been arranged where an extended squad of 24 players will meet and begin the process of creating a winning international PDRL team.

With the England Wheelchair Rugby League team competing in the RLWC2021, there has been a continued focus on increasing playing opportunities and capacity ahead of the tournament. We have increased capacity by adding 69 new wheelchairs to the sport and now have 22 clubs with around 30 teams. This number will increase ahead of the RLWC2021 with the RLWC2021 Small Grants programme due to reopen in 2022.

Within the new RFL 2021 to 2030 strategy, we will be focusing on U18s growth with festivals and taster opportunities.

Match Official recruitment and development are continually supported and promoted, with an increase in the need for MO's across all-inclusive formats. We have developed a specialised group of Wheelchair Rugby League (WhRL) referees that lead international appointments.

Our League Life - Maximising Rugby League's ability to deliver positive social impact beyond sport

Inspiring Futures

This project is financed by the Youth Endowment Fund (YEF). We have created a specifically designed programme to provide education and early intervention initiatives to prevent children and young people from becoming involved in violence. We have received an initial funding award of £500,000 which has enabled us to commission seven foundations to deliver the project in local schools.

The Foundations completed feasibility studies with numerous schools during the summer term of 2021. The results of this are currently being analysed by Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) who are our evaluation partners. This period also allowed us to assess the resources and methods of delivery and make improvements as required in preparation for the next phase of delivery.

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

Street Games

A partnership is currently being developed with Street Games to link in with their Doorstep Sport offers. This will act as an entry point for youngsters from Lower Socio-Economic Groups (LSEG) communities and link with the new player development league in Greater Manchester and associated talent inclusion work in the region. This partnership is part of a wider piece of work addressing the barriers that people from less affluent areas face when accessing sport.

Inclusive Volunteering Programme

A key component of the RLWC2021 Social Impact Programme is the Inclusive Volunteering Programme delivered in conjunction with Community Integrated Care. Given the RLWC2021 has now been delayed until 2022 we have been collaborating with colleagues from RLWC2021 and Community Integrated Care to provide assisted volunteering opportunities at some of our key events, including the BWSL Grand Final.

Club Wellbeing Hubs Project

Club Wellbeing Hubs are being investigated and will be the 'one-stop shop' for people from the community to access services to improve their physical and mental wellbeing through their local community club. Two clubs (Shevington Sharks and Shaw Cross) are taking part in a pilot project, investigating the possibility of bringing local partners to the table to maximise the opportunity to reach the whole community via the Club Wellbeing Hub. We have engaged a consultant who has worked for Senior Government to ensure that the process is not only clinically but also socially proven so outcomes can be measured.

Shevington have progressed a number of meetings online and face to face with Local Council, education, medical professionals, and community organisations.

During the recovery phase of Covid, we have been seen as leaders to activate and engage partners to provide improved access and facilities for the people of Shevington.

Benefits gained so far;

- Club has created an opportunity to increase its visibility & profile.
- Accessed small grants specific to activities they are planning (£6k).
- Created new relationships with health and professional networks and improved the community.
- Scheduled a Rugby Memories Christmas dinner in partnership with Wigan Warriors.
- Local High School is delivering AOTG mental health workshops to all pupils that need additional support.
- Providing residents in care with accessible shower and bathroom facilities.
- Setting up a local business breakfast meeting.
- Arranged a club open day for the community to see the facilities.
- Arranged commercial opportunities with Sure Start and early years.
- Supporting community police to engage and reduce anti-social behaviours.
- Working with Shevington Community Association, care coordinators community link workers, Primary Care network and GP's.

The above is in addition to current facility users in Rugby League and Football clubs based at the venue, with over 500 active participants and 100 active volunteers.

Medium to long term plans are to embed the Shevington Community Wellbeing Hub into the heart of the whole community and consolidate a community and sports club which links sport, health, and physical and mental well-being as a measured milestone in business development plans for long-term sustainability.

We have also started dialogue with West Hull Community Club who are interested in the benefits of creating a framework for social prescription and signposting to the correct medical services.

The small grants element of CreatedBy is currently paused and expects to re-open in March 2022. No more applications for large grants are being accepted given the number of projects already in the pipeline awaiting a Stage 2 decision. All awards must be made by March 2022 and a full update including final large grant awards will be given at the next Community Board meeting.

Facilitated by:

The three main pillars of our work focussed on Core Community, Education and Social Impact will be underpinned by regular communication, digitisation, insight and driving sustainability across the sport. Progress in these areas is set out below.

Communications (Stakeholder Engagement)

We continue to communicate with clubs and leagues on a fortnightly basis (depending on content). This has provided a good mechanism for us to support and engage with clubs and we will continue to do this in 2022.

Digitisation

GameDay (LeagueNet)

All players are now registered on GameDay (with the exception of schools). From a competition perspective, the Pennine League and North West Youth and Junior Leagues run their Competitions through separate systems. The Community Board has previously requested that all competitions are run via GameDay however we have not progressed this further to the relevant leagues.

Match Official appointments are also run through GameDay and Schedules where applicable.

A significant amount of work has been undertaken to ensure that the system is ready for Our League Active.

Our Learning Zone

We continue to develop a positive partnership with Hive Learning which has been developed over the past 2 ½ years. The work which was collectively put in over the first 18 months to build an ecosystem of learning networks to connect & support volunteers from across different roles and levels across the game is now beginning to build momentum on the platform.

To put this into context, Our Learning Zone is used across the Community Game for coaches, volunteers, and match officials with approximately 9,000 people from the Community Game engaging with the platform across 142 groups. 656,000 views of learning resources and 712,000 learning interactions have taken place on the platform to date. Also, over 60% of all users access the system on their mobile devices.

We have been in negotiations with Hive Learning regarding renewing our contract once the current contract expires in December 2021. We have managed to broker in principle another 3-year deal on the same financial terms, platform features and access for unlimited users. In addition to securing the same financial terms, we have also agreed that Hive Learning will transition all Our Learning Zone pages to the most updated version of their software and provide 3 half-day training sessions for RFL staff per annum to increase confidence and competence on the system.

Insight

With 2021 being a transition year, we are working with Sport England around reporting and evaluation ahead of 2022. Whilst we will still be reporting on the numbers of active participants as we have through the 2017-2021 funding cycle, there will be a much greater emphasis on learnings that can be shared across sports.

We reported to Sport England on the headline numbers of participants registered mid-year at the end of August with full year reporting due by 7th January 2022.

The overall numbers of active participants reported at the end of 2021 will remain substantially down on pre-Covid levels due to the loss of virtually the entire education programme during the last season.

Headline numbers of active participants

End 2019 – 109,536

End 2020 – 80,701

Mid 2021 – 69,254

The 2020 figures reflect the first season impact of Covid. The timing of the first lockdown meant the majority of the activity within education settings had taken place, but activity in the core Community Game was badly hit. The opposite is true in 2021 with the core Community Game returning after a delayed start but activity in the education settings being badly affected.

The indications are that the 2021 figures will be around those registered in 2020. Recent reporting indicates that activity in the Primary, Junior and Youth community settings have surpassed the end of year reporting for 2019. The number of open age players registered at the end of 2021 is expected to be slightly down on 2019 levels.

It is anticipated that the reporting at the end of 2022 will show numbers of active participants at similar levels to those registered pre-pandemic although it may be 2023 before the 2019 figure is surpassed.

Sustainability

Our League Active

Signification progress has taken place since we last met on Our League Active and the Community Board has been updated fully during the meeting which took place on 18th November 2021.

3. TALENT PROGRAMMES

The Talent and Inclusion Programmes are funded separately by Sport England, are delivered by the Talent and Inclusion Team, and will have a separate Strategy. However, for completeness and to ensure the Community Board has an overview of all activity that impacts the Community Game, we will update on relevant Talent Programmes as a regular part of these updates.

Talent Development Under-12 to Under-14

ETP 12 - 14

- All clubs have started to deliver programmes.
- Salford, Huddersfield & Bradford – trying some joint days which will include small-sided games based on the principles of the events run successfully by Newcastle Thunder.

ETP14+

- Due to community leagues continuing to run over the summer, clubs moved back their ETP14+ activity.
- This autumn programmes being run by Leeds, Bradford, Salford, Swinton, Saints, Wigan, Warrington.
- New enquiry from Keighley to run a programme.

Talent Inclusion

- 5 Schools to take part in the project in a pilot phase in Manchester just commenced due to schools limiting access due to Covid.
- Tackle IT Academy (like Girls DiSE) – 12 places per annum, performance programme alongside the DiSE qualification – Talent Identification Day on Saturday 6th November.
- Tackle It Ambassadors to be appointed in December at each Super League club and those with an Elite Academy.

Academies

Licensed Academies –The three Academy licences awarded on a probationary period of 2 years have been working through each of their original applications with the RFL in order to meet their improvement plans, as part of that agreed licence.

All Academies will receive an accreditation inspection and visit in the Spring of 2022, with a newly adopted format of criteria and expectations which need to be met as part of the new licencing.

The format for the U18 Games programme in 2022 has been agreed to be interspersed with the Reserves games programme. This is to make sure that there is a limiting effect upon the clubs needing to increase player recruitment numbers in 2022.

The U16 games programme is to be midweek again for 2022 (except potential London fixtures) to avoid any clashes with the Community Game. It has been agreed at a maximum of 8 playing opportunities. A format of options has been sent out to the clubs, which has mandated weeks for Champion Schools' fixtures.

Development Academies - All Development Academies are back playing and being met individually.

Current Development Academies – Wakefield Trinity/Wakefield College, Hull FC/ Hull Foundation Sports College, Hull KR/Archbishop Sentamu/Hull College, Salford Red

Devils/Eccles Sixth Form, Halifax Panthers/Calderdale College, Bradford Bulls/Bradford New College, Warrington Wolves/Priestley College, Widnes Vikings/Cronton College, London Broncos/Sigma Academy, York City Knights/York College, Wales RL/Coleg Cymoedd, Huddersfield Giants/ Huddersfield Giants Foundation College/Greenhead College.

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

We are working towards a “Development Academy League” – for those in areas which are more remote for regular college opponents – West Cumbria, London, North East.

Girls Talent Pathways

Talent Hubs – The Regional Talent Hubs will be suspended in 2021, allowing players to focus on their Community RL. This programme will return in 2022.

Some of the funding will be used to support activity in new areas (or those with limited activity) including London, South West, and North East.

DiSE – The DiSE programme has had its first athletes' graduate including Keira Bennett who played in the WSL Grand Final for Leeds Rhinos. 30 new athletes start this month, joining the 30 players who have moved into the second year of the programme.

4. MATCH OFFICIALS

Recruitment – Following on from the huge success we have had with the online virtual courses, we have recently started to reintegrate a selection of the traditional face to face courses. The strategy going forward is to gradually reintroduce the traditional courses, however maintaining a selection of virtual courses throughout the year.

In 2021, we have recruited 356 new officials so far which is remarkable given the challenges with Covid-19, with the vast majority of these coming from the virtual courses. In terms of retention, 122 of those have gone on to join a society equating to a 34.27% retention rate. *

*Note- we still have two more confirmed courses taking place in 2021, with several more also being planned for January.

2021	Date	Attended	Male	Female	Joined society?	Retain %
St.Helens, VIRTUAL (TRIAL COURSE)	30/02/2021	7	7	0	0	N/A
St.Helens & Wigan, VIRTUAL	20/02/2021	24	19	5	9	37.50%
Huddersfield & Bradford, VIRTUAL	06/03/2021	43	39	4	24	55.80%
Midlands, NE & South, VIRTUAL	17/03/2021	106	95	11	23	21.70%
Barrow & Cumbria, VIRTUAL	30/03/2021	19	14	5	7	36.80%
Wales, VIRTUAL	24/05/2021	35	35	0	11	31.40%
St.Helens, VIRTUAL	27/05/2021	24	11	13	9	37.50%
Cumbria/Cumberland, VIRTUAL	02/06/2021	7	7	0	4	57.10%
Central, VIRTUAL	21/06/2021	20	20	0	4	20%
Widnes, VIRTUAL	03/07/2021	20	17	3	15	75%
Central, VIRTUAL	20/07/2021	8	5	3	3	60%
Cumbria, Barrow Island ARLFC	27/07/2021	2	2	0	2	100%
Cumbria, Barrow Island ARLFC	11/08/2021	3	3	0	3	100%
Central, VIRTUAL	23/08/2021	22	14	8	8	36.36%
Widnes, VIRTUAL	23/10/2021	16	11	5	TBC	TBC
Yorkshire, Normanton (2 Part)	24/11/2021	TBC				
Cumbria, Cavendish Park Hub	21/11/2021	TBC				
Rochdale, Rochdale Mayfield ARLFC	15/01/2022	TBC				
Total:		356	299	57	122	34.27%

Development – Aaryn Belafonte and Freddie Lincoln, two of our younger developing officials, took charge of matches at the NCL Finals Day at Featherstone. Both performed very well with Aaryn also being awarded NCL Referee of the Year.

The RFL has agreed an exciting new partnership with ACME Whistles, the leading whistle manufacturer in the UK. ACME will support officials on development projects and help get more officials onto the pathway up and down the country, particularly in the Community Game. This partnership will also see all officials who join a society supplied with a free whistle to use when on their first appointment.

<https://www.rugby-league.com/article/35957/acme-brought-in-to-help-keep-more-rugby-referees-on-the-pitch>

Match Official Abuse – A lot of work has gone into tackling this issue from Steve Ganson and Liam Moore over the last few years, including presenting at several Community Boards. On Saturday 6th November, the Touchline Behaviours Summit took place at Rochdale Mayfield. Liam Moore presented on a need for change to include stronger sanctions from disciplinary panels and further support for officials. The Summit was successful in listening to the views of the relevant leagues, clubs and societies and proposing changes to the Operational Rules.

- 1 Agreement that Match Official Abuse in any match under the age of 18 will now be treated as a Safeguarding Issue, as a matter of course.
- 2 Confirmation that the current Operational Rules have sanctions in them that leagues can use, highlighting particularly the ability to suspend touchlines from attending matches for poor touchline behaviour.
- 3 Recommendation to add to the Operational Rules the ability for leagues to deduct points as a result of poor touchline behaviour.
- 4 Agreement that all leagues must provide the RFL with details of all disciplinary sanctions.

This mandate is a big step forward in tackling this issue, it is crucial this is now delivered.