



## RUGBY FOOTBALL LEAGUE GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The purpose of this document is for the Rugby Football League to report on its governance arrangements and performance during 2020.

The Rugby Football League is committed to good corporate governance and considers the publication of this statement to be an important part of its commitment to good governance.

This statement was approved by the RFL Board on 3 February 2021 and is up to date at that date.

### 1. SUMMARY OF KEY MATTERS

The key governance changes and matters for the Rugby Football League during 2020 were:

- Clare Balding OBE was appointed as President for the period to the AGM in 2022.
- Carl Hall's term as Vice President was extended to the Council Meeting in December 2020 and Mike Smith was appointed as Vice President for the period from the Council Meeting in December 2020 to the AGM in 2022 (and the Bye Laws of the RFL were temporarily amended to permit this).
- The Articles of Association were amended to (i) reflect changes in the composition of the Community Board and therefore Community Game representation on Council; and (ii) allow for flexibility in the length of each term of office of a Non-Executive Director (subject to the current overall maximum duration of office).
- The terms of office of Simon Johnson (as Chair) and Rimla Akhtar (as an NED) were extended to the AGM in 2023.

### 2. GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

The Mission of the Rugby Football League is to consistently deliver great rugby league experiences and the Vision is to be a growing, accessible and vibrant sport. The Rugby Football League is a values driven organisation with its Values being United, Respect, Excellence and Professional.

The current governance structure for the sport is contained within the Articles of Association of both RFL (Governing Body) Limited and SLE, and the RFL Operational Rules. Whilst each of these documents is independent of the other, they confirm an inter-related governance structure that defines and protects the rights and responsibilities of each component part of the sport.

[RFL ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION](#)

[RFL Operational Rules 2021](#)

[SLE Articles of Association](#)

The sport of Rugby League and the Rugby Football League have evolved over the past one and half decades so that the organisation has become one of the most respected National Governing Bodies in the United Kingdom. Throughout this period, the sport has built a positive reputation for good governance based upon the two fundamental ideals of an independent board and a unified structure for the whole of the sport. Whilst the governance structure of SLE changed in 2017 / 2018 and the relationship between the RFL and SLE has gone through a period of transition, the ambition is that the benefits of the above are retained.

#### 2.2 RFL Council

The RFL Council is made up of all UK based professional clubs and 7 representatives of the Community Game (British Amateur Rugby League Association (BARLA));



Combined Services Rugby League and representatives from Education rugby league settings; Higher Education rugby league settings; Tier Four Leagues; Tier Five and Tier Six Adult Leagues; and Tier Five Youth and Junior Leagues).

Each Member is entitled to attend and vote at all meetings of the Council and, in the case of Clubs, share in the profits of the RFL or any distribution of its funds and participate in RFL competitions.

Council Meetings must be held at least twice a year, with the Annual Council Meeting approving the accounts of the RFL, appointing/approving auditors and electing a Vice President and President. Changes to the Articles of Association of the RFL can only be made upon a Special Resolution approved by 75% of voting Members.

The Articles contain provisions such that, irrespective of the number of Clubs in the Super League, the Championship and League 1, the votes of the Super League Clubs (on the one hand) and the votes of the Championship and League 1 Clubs (on the other hand) carry equal weight. In addition, any resolution must be passed by at least 4 Super League Members and at least 4 Championship or League 1 Members.

Below are links to the Council Agendas for the 2020 Council meetings and the presentations delivered at those meeting.

[2020 Council Agendas / Presentations](#)

### **2.3 RFL Board**

The Board is the ultimate decision-making body and exercises the powers of the organisation. The Board is responsible for:

- setting the strategy of the organisation;
- approving the long-term financial plan and annual budget;
- monitoring delivery of the strategic plan and objectives;
- periodic review of the financial plan and performance against annual budget;
- periodic review of major risks;
- discussion of, and engagement with, stakeholder proposals and concerns.

Day to day management of the RFL is delegated by the Board to the management team under the leadership of the Chief Executive. Financial authorities are in place for each level of the Executive structure.

### **2.4 SLE**

Super League (Europe) Limited (“**SLE**”) is a separate legally entity.

As part of a wider suite of agreements between SLE and RFL, in October 2019, the SLE Articles were amended such that the SLE Board consists of the SLE Chief Executive, nominated representatives from each Super League Club and a nominated representative of the RFL. The RFL’s nominated director is Simon Johnson.

The Articles of Association of SLE specify which matters are determined by the Clubs, which matters are determined by the RFL and which are joint decisions.

During the course of 2018, the RFL and SLE discussed a revised deal between the parties relating to funding to the end of the current broadcast agreement (end of 2021); funding beyond 2021; competition structure and a number of other matters including the structure of the SLE Board. The RFL Board concluded that the deal was in the best interests of the RFL and the Game as a whole as, amongst other things, it:

- Provides financial certainty for the balance of the current broadcast contract;



- Enshrines an automatic promotion and relegation mechanism between Super League and the Championship relating to on-field performance whilst ensuring the equitable application of minimum standards and support for all its competitions. This in turn will ensure that the RFL and the competitions below Super League are able to attract investment from those with the ambition of getting to Super League;
- Dependent on the level of future broadcast income, includes a financial guarantee to the RFL from SLE beyond the current broadcast term;
- Is in line with the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the Super League Clubs who believe that the proposed deal gives them the best opportunity to create a strong and vibrant Super League that will stimulate growth in all areas of the Game;
- Allows the RFL to refocus on its primary assets of men's and women's England and Great Britain representative Rugby League, the Championship and League 1, the Community game and its membership scheme, Our League and supporting Rugby League World Cup 2021 Limited in delivering a successful World Cup.

The formal agreement(s) with SLE were completed in 2019.

## **2.5 Championship and League 1**

The Championship and League 1 competitions are owned, managed and operated by the Rugby Football League: there is no separate entity responsible for any aspect of the same.

The Championship and League 1 Chief Executives or Chairman meet 3 times a year. These meetings are chaired by an RFL Director. In addition, there are also a number of business area meetings held throughout the year.

## **2.6 Community Game**

The game competitions are a mixture of Affiliate Leagues (leagues run by separate legal entities – bound by the operational rules, with the provision of services by the RFL) and Member Leagues (leagues owned, managed and operated by the Rugby Football League).

The Community Board (a sub-committee of the Board) is accountable to the Board for the management and development of all aspects of the community, grassroots and amateur game of rugby league (see Section 5.5 below).

# **3. RFL BOARD**

## **3.1 Current Directors**

The current Non-Executive Directors of the RFL are Simon Johnson (Chair), Chris Brindley, Chris Hurst, Sandy Lindsay and Rimla Akhtar. The current Executive Directors are Ralph Rimmer and Karen Moorhouse.

Their biographies can be found [here](#)

Changes during 2020 were:

- Simon Johnson's term of office as Chair was extended to the AGM in 2023;
- Rimla Akhtar's term of office as an NED was extended to the AGM in 2023.

## **3.2 Composition**

The Articles of Association of the RFL provide that:



- the number of Directors shall be not less than three and not more than nine;
- the Directors shall be a minimum of two and a maximum of 4 Executive Directors and a maximum of five Non-Executive Directors;
- the majority of the Directors will be Non-Executive Directors.

### **3.3 Non-Executive Directors (including Chair and Senior Independent Director)**

At the December 2020 Council Meeting, the Articles of Association were amended to provide that - each Non-Executive Director (including the Chair) serves for a two, three or four-year term from the Annual Council Meeting at which he/she is elected or re-elected to the Annual Council Meeting in the last year of that term, provided that the maximum cumulative term of office shall be nine years.

Prior to this the Articles provided that NEDs served for a maximum of 3 three-year terms. The rationale for the change was to reduce the sports' exposure to multiple NEDs all having terms finishing at the same Council meeting.

The only exceptions to the above are that:

- in exceptional circumstances (for example to assist succession planning) a Non-Executive Director may hold office for a further year; and
- An existing Non-Executive Director may hold office for up to 12 years (i.e. 4 three-year terms) if he/she is appointed as chair of the RFL or as a director of the RLIF.

The Chair of the Board is now Simon Johnson. Whilst the role specification is different, the Chair is appointed in the same manner as all other Non-Executive Directors.

In accordance with the Sports Governance Code, the Directors resolved from August 17 that a further Non-Executive Director would be appointed as the Senior Independent Director and that this would usually be the longest serving of the other Non-Executive Directors. The additional responsibilities of the Senior Independent Director include:

- Providing a sounding board for the Chair;
- Serving as an intermediary for the other directors when necessary;
- Acting as an alternative contact for stakeholders to share any concerns if the normal channels of the Chair or the organisation's management fail to resolve the matter or in cases where such contact is inappropriate; and
- Leading on the process to appraise the Chair's performance.

The Senior Independent Director is Chris Brindley.

At all times all of the Non-Executive Directors were 'independent' as defined in the RFL Articles of Association and the Code for Sports Governance.

### **3.4 Executive Directors**

The Executive Directors are appointed by the Non-Executive Directors (by a simple majority vote). The NEDs have agreed that the Executive Directors should usually be the Chief Executive and Company Secretary.

### **3.5 Secretary**

The Secretary is appointed by the Board for such term, at such remuneration and upon such conditions as they may think fit and may be removed by the Board.

The current Secretary is Karen Moorhouse.



### 3.6 Code of Conduct

Each director is required to sign a Code of Conduct. In addition to setting out required standards of behaviour, it also details the mechanism which will be followed in relation to any breach. A copy of the Code of Conduct can be found [here](#).

## 4. BOARD MEETINGS

The Articles of Association provide that the Board must meet at least 4 times in a year and the quorum for meetings is 3 directors. During 2020 there were 7 formal Board Meetings. There was 100% attendance at these meetings by all directors (once formally appointed).

In addition, there was a significant number of Board meetings held virtually (over 35 during 2020) and further decisions made in writing. The significant number reflected the impact of Coronavirus on the sport and the number of decisions that consequentially had to be made.

Papers are circulated 7 days' in advance of all formal Board Meetings to ensure the Board have time to fully review them.

Below are links to the Board Agendas for the 2020 meetings.

[RFL Board Agendas](#)

## 5. BOARD SUB COMMITTEES

### 5.1 General

The Articles of Association provide that the Board may delegate any of their powers to any sub-committee consisting of such of other number and such other persons as they think fit. The current formal sub-committees and their current members are set out below. The Terms of Reference for each of the Sub-Committees (which include the structure and purpose of the Committee) can be found [here](#).

### 5.2 Audit and Risk

The purpose of the Audit and Risk Committee is to: (a) consider the appointment of the external auditors and their independence; (b) consider the appointment of the internal auditors and review the RFL's internal audit programme; (c) review the Group's financial statements; and (d) review the effectiveness of the internal control systems of the RFL including the process for managing risk.

The Audit and Risk Committee consists of at least 4 members, 2 of whom have to be Non-Executive Directors and one of whom has to be the RFL Executive who is the chief risk officer for the RFL (currently the Chief Operating Officer – Tony Sutton).

The Audit and Risk Committee is chaired by Non-Executive Director Rimla Akhtar and its director members are Rimla Akhtar and Chris Hurst.

The Audit and Risk Committee met on four occasions in 2020 and its members had the following attendance.

- Rimla Akhtar (chair) – (4)
- Chris Hurst (4)
- Tony Sutton – (4)
- Ian Roberts – (4)
- Rachel Hunt – (4)
- Richard Donlon – (1) Richard has been on furlough leave for much of 2020
- Jeremy Carr – (4)



### **5.3 Remuneration**

The purpose of the Remuneration Committee is to: (a) ensure that there is a formal and transparent policy on Board and Senior Executive remuneration; and (b) determine the remuneration packages of the Chairman, other directors and senior executives.

In 2020 the director members were Chris Brindley (chair), Chris Hurst, Rimla Akhtar and Sandy Lindsay.

The Remuneration Committee met on six occasions in 2020 and all members had 100% attendance.

### **5.4 Nominations**

The purpose of the Nominations Committee is to: (a) ensure that there is a formal and transparent procedure for appointing new directors, re-appointing directors to the Board of Directors and appointing senior executives (being the Chief Executive Officer and any executive it is envisaged will have a basic salary of £100,000 or more); and (b) keep under review the composition of the Board and Board sub-committees and make recommendations to the Board in relation to the same.

In 2020 the director members were Simon Johnson, Chris Brindley, Chris Hurst, Rimla Akhtar and Sandy Lindsay.

During 2020 there were no appointments to roles that fall within the remit of the Nominations Committee; however, it still met two times.

### **5.5 Community Board**

By virtue of Article 79 of the Articles of Association, the Board has established a Community Board. This Board is accountable to the RFL Board for the management and development of all aspects of the community, grassroots and amateur game of Rugby League. The role of the Community Board is to assist in the organisation and management structure of the RFL, and to bring together all areas of the British Rugby League community, grassroots and amateur game under the governance of the RFL.

The Community Board is made up of representatives of the various sectors of the community game being BARLA; Combined Services Rugby League; Education rugby league settings; Higher Education rugby league settings; Tier Four Leagues; Tier Five and Tier Six Adult Leagues; Tier Five Youth and Junior Leagues and Foundations. The RFL nominates 1 Director to act as Chair, a person to represent Active Participants and 2 other Independent representatives. The current Chair is Sandy Lindsay (who assumed the Chair in September 2020).

At the start of 2020, Neil Kelly joined the Community Board to represent Foundations. Steve Curtis replaced Pat Crawshaw as the Higher Education setting representative. Stuart Prior replaced Stuart Sheard as the Tier Five Adult representative.

The Community Board met on four occasions during 2020 and members had the following attendance:

- Sandy Lindsay (Chair for part of the year) – 3
- Ralph Rimmer (Chair for part of the year) - 2
- Trevor Hunt (Tier 4 Adult) – 4
- Stuart Prior (Tier 5 Adult) – 4
- Jan Robinson (Tier 5 Y&J) – 4
- Sue Taylor (BARLA) – 4
- Damian Clayton (Armed Forces) – 3



- Neil Ashton (Schools) – 2
- Steve Curtis (Universities) – 3
- Lois Forsell (Participants) – 2
- Neil Kelly (Foundations) - 1
- Peter Moran (Independent) – 3
- Fred Baker (Independent) – 4

[https://www.rugby-league.com/the\\_rfl/community\\_board](https://www.rugby-league.com/the_rfl/community_board)

#### **5.6 Laws Committee**

The purpose of the Laws Committee is to review the current laws of the game whilst also fully considering the potential impact of the introduction of new laws based on criteria such as; game spectacle, player safety and also the international landscape.

Its membership is made up of representatives of all different stakeholders and is chaired by the RFL CEO.

The Committee met three times in 2020.

#### **5.7 Whole Game Board (formerly Professional Game Board)**

A new Board sub-committee was established in late 2019.

The purpose being to consider and make non-binding recommendations to the Board in relation to the regulation and operation of the Game on matters that directly or indirectly have impact on rugby league clubs who play in: (i) the Super League; and (ii) the Championship and League 1 and which may have a whole game impact (including potentially on the Community Game). The overriding aim being to drive the Game's objectives.

Its membership is made up of representatives of the RFL, the Super League Clubs, the Championship and League 1 Clubs and the Community Game.

The Committee met twice in 2020.

#### **5.8 Inclusion and Diversity Board**

In November 2020 the Inclusion and Diversity Advisory Group was formally made a Board sub-committee.

Its purpose is to provide guidance on all equality matters and to monitor the delivery of the RFL's Rugby League versus Discrimination Tackle It-Action Plan (the plan). In addition, the Inclusion Board will provide support to the Executive in delivering programmes within the plan and seek to promote a culture of respect for Inclusion, Equality and Anti-Discrimination across Rugby League.

Its composition is 7 external and 3 internal members, and it is chaired by Rimla Akhtar.

### **6. CODE OF SPORTS GOVERNANCE**

In December 2017 Sport England confirmed that the RFL complies with the Code of Sports Governance. The RFL carries out regular reviews of its compliance with the Code (at least twice a year) and believes that it remains fully compliant.

### **7. INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY**

The RFL is committed to Inclusion and Diversity throughout the organisation and the sport. The RFL has an I&D Action Plan which is regularly updated. The RFL I&D Action Plan for 2020 –



Tackle It: Rugby League versus Discrimination is published on the RFL website [here](#). I&D is a formal Board agenda item at least twice a year.

## **8. BOARD EVALUATION**

In line with the Sports Governance Code the Board is committed to having the Board externally evaluated at least every 3 years. In October 2018 Value Alpha carried out an external evaluation of the RFL Board. This was completed in early 2019 and the report circulated to all Members and published on the RFL Website - [RFL Board Evaluation](#)

ValueAlpha made a number of recommendations designed to move the Board from being 'fit for purpose' to being 'fit for the future'. These recommendations have been built into an action plan which is an agenda item at appropriate Board meetings and is also reported on to Council members.

In line with the Code of Sports Governance, the Board undertook an internal evaluation of its own skills and performance and of individual directors in early 2020 and will carry out a further evaluation in early 2021. Any additional points that arise from this process will be built into the action plan and/or individual development plans.

## **9. BOARD INDUCTION AND TRAINING**

Any new Director is subject to a comprehensive induction process meeting with the existing Board, Executives and stakeholders. In addition, all Board members have access to a Board Induction Pack.

## **10. RISK**

The RFL has a comprehensive departmental Risk Register which is updated regularly by each Risk Register owner and reported to the Audit and Risk Committee and in turn to the RFL Board. Each risk is rated (based on probability and severity) and mitigation and/or appropriate actions are logged and reported.

The Board report on its Internal Control frameworks or systems annually via the Directors Report contained in the company's Financial Statements. A link to the report can be found [here](#).

As part of its annual work plan the Audit and Risk Committee review the annual draft Financial Statements and meet with the external auditors with and without the Executive present, to discuss the annual audit and its results. Those results cover the findings of the external auditors work on both financial and internal control matters. The external auditor is reappointed at each Annual General Meeting following the discussions held by the Audit and Risk Committee which cover the effectiveness of the external audit process.

The external auditors are selected periodically by holding a tender process, the last tender was held to cover the provision of external audit services for 2019 year end onwards. Garbutt and Elliott were successful in this tender.

The current external auditors also provide taxation compliance services. This service is provided by a completely separate department than audit services with separate management structures and reporting staff members.

The Board also runs an internal audit programme which reports to the Audit and Risk Committee with a rolling programme of internal audit work based on three areas of focus each year as recommended by the external provider of internal audit services.



## **11. INTERNATIONAL RUGBY LEAGUE**

### **11.1 IRL (FORMERLY RLIF)**

The RFL was a founding member of the Rugby League International Federation (“RLIF” and now renamed International Rugby League), the international governing body of the sport. Along with the Australian Rugby League Commission (“ARLC”) and the New Zealand Rugby League (“NZRL”) it is currently entitled to appoint two directors to the Board of the RLIF.

IRL controls the broadcast and commercial rights to the Rugby League World Cup. It has traditionally used the commercial revenues generated by this tournament, with levies on gate receipts at other international matches, to fund its activities (including grants to developing nations).

### **11.2 RLEF**

The RFL was also a founding member of the Rugby League European Foundation (“RLEF”). The RLEF is the governing body for Rugby League in Europe and the Northern Hemisphere. It oversees and co-ordinates the development of the sport in all its Member and affiliated countries and territories, as well as neighbouring organisations that choose to link to the RLEF. The RLEF is an Associate Member of the RLIF and is therefore entitled to appoint two directors to the Board of the RLIF.

### **11.3 Rugby League World Cup (2021) Limited**

RLWC21 is a wholly owned subsidiary of the RFL which is responsible for arranging and running the 2021 Rugby League World Cup. The Board of RLWC is made up of:

- A Chairman nominated by the RFL;
- 3 independent directors appointed by an open recruitment process;
- 5 nominated directors appointed by each of HM Government, UK Sport, the RFL, RLIF and RLWC21.

Since July 2019, the RFL nominated directors have been Chris Brindley (Chair) and Karen Moorhouse.

## **12. RUGBY LEAGUE CHARITIES**

### **12.1 GENERAL**

The RFL works closely with a number of Rugby League Charities.

### **12.2 RUGBY LEAGUE CARES**

RL Cares mission is to enhance and enrich people’s lives through the power and positive influence of Rugby League. The charity seek to ensure the sport’s most important stakeholders, its playing community, get the most out of their involvement in the game, both during their careers and post-retirement.

Karen Moorhouse is the RFL’s nominated trustee.

### **12.3 RFL BENEVOLENT FUND**

The RL Benevolent Fund is a charity that provides assistance to players and the families of players who have suffered life-changing injuries playing Rugby League.

Karen Moorhouse is the RFL’s nominated trustee.



#### **12.4 RFL FACILITIES TRUST**

The RFL Facilities Trust is a charity whose principal activity is to provide such financial and other assistance as the Trustees shall deem fit for the provision, establishment, development and improvement of facilities for the playing of Rugby League or Rugby League in conjunction with other sports.

Tony Sutton, Kelly Barrett and Matthew Barnes are the RFL's nominated trustees and Robert Graham is the secretary.



## THE RUGBY FOOTBALL LEAGUE INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY UPDATE 2020

The Rugby Football League, “RFL”, is the National Governing Body for the sport of Rugby League. We are committed to Inclusion and Diversity in both the workplace and across the sport itself. To underline this commitment, the RFL had in place an Inclusion and Diversity plan (“the plan”) 2017-2020. The plan came to an end this year and a new action plan ‘TACKLE IT – Rugby League versus Discrimination’ 2020-2025 has now been created and approved by the Board.

Further information is provided below. Links to both plans are also provided below and on our website.

[https://secure.rugby-league.com/ign\\_docs/Equality%20&%20Diversity%20Plan%20May18.pdf](https://secure.rugby-league.com/ign_docs/Equality%20&%20Diversity%20Plan%20May18.pdf)

[https://www.rugby-league.com/tackle\\_it](https://www.rugby-league.com/tackle_it)

The ‘TACKLE IT – Rugby League versus Discrimination’ action plan continues to support the work we do in relation to the Tier 3 objectives and beyond as set out by Sport England and the UK Sports Council in their document, A Code for Sports Governance, “the Code”. These objectives also form part of the Desired Outcomes in the plan and are linked to actions.

The objectives are:

In accordance with Tier 3 Mandatory requirements, section 2 (2.1 to 2.3) of the Code, the RFL will:

- 2.1 *(A) adopt a target of, and take all appropriate actions to encourage, a minimum 30% of each gender on its Board; and*
- 2.1 *(B) demonstrate a strong and public commitment to progressing towards achieving gender parity and greater diversity generally on its Board, including, but not limited to, Black, Asian, minority ethnic (BAME) diversity, and disability.*
- 2.2 *Identify proportionate and appropriate actions to be taken to support and/or maintain (as appropriate) the diversity targets set out in Requirement 2.1.*
- 2.3 *Ensure that information approved by the Board is published on our website about our work to foster all aspects of diversity within our leadership and decision making, including an annual update in progress against the actions in 2.2.*

In addition, under section 3.1 of the code, the RFL will publish the following as standing information:

- *A statement of intent about its commitment to Equality (Inclusion) and Diversity goals, and*
- *Policies and procedures relating to Equality (Inclusion) and Diversity.*

### INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY - RFL BOARD

The diversity of the RFL Board is monitored on an ongoing basis. As part of Board recruitment, the RFL Nominations Committee agree areas of underrepresentation on the Board and seek out ways of addressing this. This has previously included taking positive action to encourage applicants from underrepresented groups including women and people from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Specialist recruitment media e.g., Women on Boards, Sporting Equals has previously been used to encourage applications from underrepresented groups.

The most recent recruitment to the RFL Board was in 2019 which saw an increase in the number of women board members. This now means that the sex composition of the Board is 57% male/ 43% female.

We will continue to monitor this over the next 12 months and beyond.



## **INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY - LEADERSHIP**

In common with most national governing bodies, the RFL is an Executive-led organisation. The Executive team, including the two Executive Board members, is a team of 7 men and 3 women.

In terms of Leadership, the RFL has a Leadership Group comprising of senior members of staff within the organisation. The make-up of the group is monitored on an ongoing basis and in 2020 was in line with the male/female ratio of the RFL workforce. In 2021, the Leadership Group's composition will be 54% male and 46% female. Further reviews of the make-up of the group will continue.

Since 2018, the RFL has had in place an Inclusion and Diversity Advisory Group. The group was comprised of a both internal and external members to help to support the delivery of the Inclusion and Delivery Plan 2017-2020.

To provide strategic input to the TACKLE IT action plan, the RFL commenced recruitment to an Inclusion Board (IB). During December 2020, interviews were held for roles on the new Board and seven external members have now been recruited all of whom have a wealth of experience in the area of equity, diversity and inclusion. The Inclusion Board will be chaired by Dr Rimla Akhtar MBE (Non-Executive Director).

To further strengthen this area, the RFL Inclusion Working Group has been revised. The new group is made up of key influencers from within the organisation who lead on the delivery of the TACKLE IT action plan. The plan is divided into sections with each one of the leads responsible for achieving objectives within their area and collectively for the organisation and the wider sport.

## **'TACKLE IT - RUGBY LEAGUE VERSUS DISCRIMINATION' – THE ACTION PLAN**

As referenced, in 2020, the RFL launched 'TACKLE IT- Rugby League versus Discrimination' a sport-wide action plan to continue to make Rugby League a truly inclusive sport by actively tackling discrimination and breaking down any barriers to involvement. The plan sets out four strategic goals and, crucially, the specific and measurable actions that will be taken to achieve them. TACKLE IT marks a firm and tangible sport-wide commitment to inclusion, diversity, and anti-discrimination, which aims to:

- 1 - Widen the reach and impact of Rugby League.
- 2 - Diversify the game's talent pool.
- 3 - Improve the culture of Rugby League.
- 4 - Clarify processes, instil confidence in and encourage reporting of discrimination, and ensure that appropriate sanctions are in place.

The sport-wide TACKLE IT action plan is supported by the RFL, Super League (Europe); Championship and League 1; Rugby League Cares and RLWC2021, with actions on all stakeholders in the sport.

To support this work, the Board has a nominated lead person for Inclusion and Diversity (Dr Rimla Akhtar- Non-Executive Director) and receives a detailed report on progress against the plan twice a year.

## **INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY- STATEMENT OF INTENT**

The RFL's Statement of Intent in relation to Inclusion and Diversity is published on our website. See link below.

<https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/inclusion-&-diversity>



## **INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY- POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

The RFL has in place an Inclusion and Diversity policy which is available to all staff. The policy and its contents form part of the induction programme for new starters.

Inclusion and Diversity training is also provided to staff and stakeholders on an ongoing basis, using a mix of online platforms and face to face delivery. In 2020, Inclusion and Diversity training was rolled out to professional players as well.

In 2020, the RFL Board of Directors also received Inclusion and Diversity training to support them in their roles.

As previously outlined, to support this work, the organisation has established an Inclusion Board, comprised of both internal and external members.

Despite the many challenges the game has faced this year, the RFL has continued to progress Inclusion and Diversity internally and in the wider game. Below is a list of successes both on and off the field achieved in 2020.

## **INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY- SUCCESSES**

Due to Covid-19, much of the game has been suspended in 2020. Despite this, a number of achievements have been recorded. There have been many off-field achievements in relation to Inclusion and Diversity. These include:

- An Inclusion Board has been established with external members from both the sport and wider industry.
- TACKLE IT – Rugby League versus Discrimination – a sport-wide action plan was launched in October 2020. This received considerable media coverage across Rugby League and the wider sports sector.
- TACKLE IT was visible at both the Challenge Cup Final and Super League Grand Final.
- To support implementation of the plan, the RFL revised its internal Working group with representatives from RFL Departments.
- The RFL recruited a Talent Inclusion Officer to support improved diversity and inclusion in the performance pathway.
- Introduction to Equality and Diversity and Unconscious Bias training has been provided to professional players.
- Inclusion is an objective for all RFL staff as part of the organisation's performance Management system.
- News stories on women's RL, wheelchair RL, and all disability RL programmes have featured regularly on the RFL website and social channels.
- Dedicated resources were developed with national social care partner Community Integrated Care to ensure fitness and wellbeing resources in lockdown were also available to people with autism and/or learning difficulties.
- The RFL has worked with a range of equity and campaigning partners including Sporting Equals, Women in Sport, the Activity Alliance, Sport England and the Sport and Recreation Alliance as well as actively supporting key national external campaigns including This Girl Can, and the Rainbow Laces activity.
- Imagery and the use of language is constantly reviewed to ensure diversity is considered as part of all visual, digital and written campaigns. Imagery is constantly reviewed to ensure diversity is considered as part of all campaigns.
- The RFL revised its Youth Board comprising of twelve 18-to-21-year-olds and is currently advertising for new members for 2021.
- The RFL has continued to work with professional clubs to support their inclusion projects. Despite the restrictions caused by the pandemic, progress was made with Featherstone and Swinton.
- The RFL delivered Wheelchair RL 4s for 20 clubs to attend and trial for England 2020 Performance squad. This was held at Robin Park Indoor Sport Centre in Wigan March 2020.



- The number of players registered to play Wheelchair, PDRL and LDRL has increased in 2020 despite significant restrictions due to the pandemic.
- Along with regular online meetings and webinars to keep clubs informed, the RFL provided a full suite of free-to-use training and skills resources for all clubs and players, as well as virtual training sessions, and promoted the mental health and wellbeing sessions for players, fans and volunteers provided in partnership with RL Cares and RLWC2021.
- A review of Girls' RL has taken place with proposal to introduce two new age groups to grow the offer within clubs.
- The BBC have confirmed that they will broadcast the Wheelchair RL Challenge Cup for the first time while continuing to broadcast the Women's RL Challenge Cup Final.
- The RFL, with the support of the wider sport, held a series of 'listening sessions' with Black Rugby League players, coaches and participants. The focus of the sessions was to understand lived experience, concerns and issues, and also ideas on practical improvements – which helped inform the sport's support of the Black lives matter campaign against racism, and the TACKLE IT Action Plan and anti-discrimination campaigning activity.
- The RFL, held 'listening sessions' with LGBTQ stakeholders, to understand issues faced within the sport and how these could be overcome. Work here helped to check and challenge actions in the plan and suggest further anti-discrimination campaigning activity.
- The RFL held a well-attended session (which will be repeated each season) with key media to share details on TACKLE IT, and on anti-discrimination campaigning in Rugby League and the role of all stakeholders in that.
- The RFL represented the sport in sector-wide discussions with Government and funding partners around the role all sports can play in actively challenging discrimination – in particular in clubs, schools and on terraces.
- The RFL makes regular contributions on behalf of the Sport to Sport England forums and consultations on inclusion and on anti-discrimination.
- The RFL has kept the APPG on RL and other parliamentarians and officials informed of and engaged in all aspects of this work.

It is hoped that throughout 2021 and beyond, the RFL will continue to work to progress even further to embrace and embed Inclusion and Diversity, and that Rugby League goes further and achieves its ambition of becoming an anti-discrimination campaigning sport.