



THE RUGBY FOOTBALL LEAGUE INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY UPDATE 2021

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 has an action plan 'TACKLE IT – Rugby League versus Discrimination' 2020-2025 in place.

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 objectives of the UK Sport 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**, people from African-Caribbean, South Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds, and people with disabilities.*
- 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.*

The RFL is in the process of carrying out a review against the new Code of Sports Governance and is committed to full compliance.

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 other national governing bodies, the RFL is an Executive-led organisation. The Executive team, including the two Executive Board members, is a team of 8 men and 2 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. In 2021, the Leadership Group's composition was 54% male and 46% female. Further reviews of the make-up of the group will continue.

From 2018 the RFL had in place an Inclusion and Diversity Advisory Group. This 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 – Rugby League versus Discrimination' action plan, the RFL have appointed an Inclusion Board (IB). Interviews were held during December 2020 for roles on the new Board, and it consists of nine external members and one internal member of staff. All members have a wealth of experience in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion. The Board, chaired by Dr Rimla Akhtar MBE (Non-Executive Director), meets on a quarterly basis.

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.

In December 2021, the RFL appointed an Inclusion Lead to further enhance its work in this area.

'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 assigned to stakeholders across 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- EQUALITY STATEMENT

The RFL's Equality Statement, 'Rugby League for All', is published online at <https://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. From 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 continues to progress Inclusion and Diversity internally and across the wider game. Below is a list of successes both on and off the field achieved in 2021.

INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY- SUCCESSES

While the Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect the game, the RFL and partners continue to make progress against the TACKLE IT plan objectives.

- The Inclusion Board met four times during 2021, monitoring progress against the TACKLE IT plan, and offering strategic advice and expertise.
- The RFL Internal I&D Working group with representatives from all departments has met on a monthly basis throughout 2021 and contributed to the practical delivery of TACKLE IT.
- The RFL has appointed an experienced Inclusion Lead, Ben Abberstein, who commences in December 2021 and will coordinate and drive policy in this area.
- The RFL has commenced a number of initiatives to make performance pathways more inclusive, such as the launch of a 'talent project' in Manchester, talent and development officers ambassadors at each professional club, and the launch of the TACKLE IT Academy. CoachRight, the compulsory online educational module that all coaches must undertake on an annual basis to be able to maintain their licence, now includes an I&D module. Introduction to Equality & Diversity and Unconscious Bias education modules have been provided to professional players.
- A demonstrable commitment to inclusion is an objective for all RFL staff as part of the organisation's performance management process.
- The profile of Women's and Wheelchair Rugby League continues to grow, with both the BBC and Sky Sports broadcasting live domestic and international matches. In addition, variations such as physical and learning disability Rugby League have featured regularly on the RFL's Our League app (204,000 subscribers), website and social channels.
- Similarly, RL media – including RFL/Our League, Sky Sports and BBC – continued to utilise diverse voices during the 2021 season, for example Kyle Walker who hosted the Our League end-of-season awards programme.
- Dedicated fitness and wellbeing resources developed with national social care partner Community Integrated Care helped ensure a successful return to play in 2021 for players with autism and other learning difficulties.
- The RFL continued to work with a range of equity and campaigning partners including Sporting Equals, Women in Sport, the Activity Alliance, Sport England and the Sport & Recreation Alliance, as well as actively supporting key national external campaigns such as This Girl Can.
- The RFL continues to ensure that promotional imagery reflects diversity
- Many clubs continue to make progress in the I&D space, among them Featherstone Rovers, Keighley Cougars, Swinton Lions and Wakefield Trinity to name but a few.



- Participation in learning disability (LDRL) and physical disability (PDRL) variations continues to grow, surpassing pre-Covid numbers both in terms of the number of teams and registered players.
- Rugby League broke new ground with the sport's first ever 'classification day' for disability rugby league players - part of the selection process for next years' PDRL World Cup. This brought governance of PDRL into line with Paralympic sport and international disability competition and paved the way for the first-ever England PDRL squad get-together in December.
- Girl's RL has seen an increase from 1,642 participants in 2019 to 2,186 in 2021, and 20 new teams
- Women's RL has seen an increase from 1,140 participants in 2019 to 1,521 in 2021, with the development of new competitions including the Betfred Women's Super League South.
- The RFL, in conjunction with UK Coaching, is running a Leadership and Performance Programme for female coaches, with 13 on the first cohort, to support the diversification of coaching on the talent pathways.
- Many players and clubs across all competitions - Men's, Women's and Wheelchair - continued to visibly demonstrate their support for anti-discrimination during the allotted 13-second pre-kick off period through gestures such as taking the knee agreed within playing groups.
- 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.