

Community Rugby League MORE THAN A SPORT REVIEW 2022



A woman with long brown hair, wearing a blue suit jacket and a red scarf, is smiling warmly at a group of children. She is holding a black umbrella over them. The scene is outdoors in the rain, with water droplets visible in the air. In the background, other people and a blurred crowd can be seen.

**Welcome to the latest Community Rugby League
More Than a Sport Update.**

**This update summarises the activity undertaken
by the Development Team and the Community
Game Delivery Team contributing to the RFL
Strategy and Vision 2022-2030.**

**In addition to covering activity since the last
update was published at the end of August 2022
this update will also review the year as a whole.**

Participant reporting

We report to Sport England twice yearly on numbers of active participants. This reporting takes place at the end of August and the end of December each year. The mid-year reporting in August focuses on the numbers of our participants in core community club settings with other settings such as education and social activity reported in full at the end of each year, together with final core community numbers.

Activity within education settings such as schools, colleges and universities takes place within academic years. The education activity reported at the end of 2022 will be activity that took place between the start of the autumn term in 2021 continuing through until the end of the summer term in 2022.

The graphic below illustrates the periods and settings which our reporting covers:-



There were genuine fears during the early stages of the pandemic that sports could see a collapse in participation numbers. The mid-year reporting summarised in the August More Than a Sport Update gave some comfort that this would not be the case in Rugby League and the key indicators at that time suggested the sport had bounced back strongly, particularly within the younger age groups. We were also continuing to see strong growth in the women and girl's game.

The early optimism outlined in the mid-season reporting has been tempered to a degree by the final year end reporting. Whilst the picture is not as bad as feared during the pandemic, the sport has not bounced back quite as strongly as the mid-year reporting indicated it would. This is particularly the case at open age.

Executive Summary

- The sport has not bounced back as strongly as the mid-year participant reporting figures suggested it would particularly male open age.
- We are continuing to see accelerated growth amongst the numbers of women and girls playing rugby league.
- Expansion of girl's Futures Hubs continues and piloting of new girls 7-11's programme is underway.
- Continued expansion and broadcast coverage of Women's Super League and increased regional activity.
- Culture change and improvement in touchline environments remain a priority.
- Ongoing delivery of a comprehensive coach education programme.
- We continue to monitor and adapt our playing offers to ensure they are fit for purpose post pandemic.
- Analysis of data and introduction of new programmes designed to address the retention and transition challenges particularly between youth and open age.
- Match official abuse continues to be a barrier to retention with the introduction of headcams a proactive step to improving environments.
- Work ongoing to improve conversion rates from those taking a refereeing course to officiating in a community setting.
- Maintaining strong relationships with professional club foundations remains fundamental to our ability to deliver growth across all settings.
- Progress in establishing Player Development League ethos and principles within existing junior leagues via Lions Development Programme.
- On field success for England Community Lions with the U19's successful in the European Championship and PDRL team winning the inaugural PDRL World Cup.
- Work continues to support community clubs achieve good governance.
- Successful launch of our participant membership scheme 'Our League Active'
- Positive partnership with Try Tag Rugby continues encouraging more participants to try social versions of the sport.
- Cautious return to activity following the pandemic across educational settings.
- Over 4,500 participants took part in localised 9's activity targeting schools new to rugby league including a new tournament for girls years 7 and 8.
- Specific Rugby League Coordinator employed for the first time by British Universities and Colleges.
- Our Inclusion rugby league offers Learning Disability RL, Physical Disability RL and Wheelchair RL continue to see significant growth.
- We have secured supported and administered five significant grant funding schemes delivering substantial investment into the community game.
- Piloted five community wellbeing hubs as part of a project to recognise the role rugby league club's play at the heart of communities.
- Strong ongoing partnerships with Community Integrated Care, Street Games and Access Sport.
- Development of new RFL Facilities Strategy underway.



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