

# RUGBY IN UNION

ELITE GAME

INCLUSION & DIVERSITY PLAN



England  
Rugby



**PREMIERSHIP  
RUGBY**

RUGBY ———  
— PLAYERS —  
ASSOCIATION

Allianz   
**PREMIER 15s** 



# WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

- Rugby union has been and continues to be enjoyed by millions of people in England
- However, the experience of inclusion is varied across the game while representation of diverse groups is low
- Ensuring inclusivity is at the heart of everything we do is critical to our evolution and diversifying our sport
- It will enable greater access to our game, a more equitable experience all round and a greater diversity of talent being represented at the top of rugby union
- No single entity can do this alone. It requires environmental and behavioural changes, within a high challenge and high support system, underpinned by collective understanding, collaborative effort and transparency

## The RFU, PRL, RPA and P15s collective vision/commitment:

- Everyone feels respected, empowered and accountable; that speaking up in rugby is easy, and that unacceptable behaviour and language is removed from our sport
- Cultures in rugby are founded on inclusivity, embrace greater diversity and are a positive model for all sports
- Leaders in the game listen and learn from diverse voices and actively seek out more, recognising the power and opportunity which greater diversity can bring
- Educate ourselves to better understand the importance of inclusion, the detrimental impacts of discrimination, and the nuances of diversity
- Ensuring rugby union is made available to young people from all backgrounds and that we help them fall in love with the game and make the most of their talent
- That player voices are being listened to, and that support, mentoring and opportunities are afforded to under-represented groups wishing to be coaches, club leaders and board members
- Recruitment of players, coaches and leaders from a diverse range of backgrounds
- Fill our stadiums with a greater diversity of fans who have a more inclusive and enjoyable experience



# THE THINGS WE HAVE DONE SO FAR

This collaborative plan is in many ways a starting point, but a lot of activities and efforts have been made in advance of its creation. While we appreciate not all have had the desired affect, below are some highlights:

## Strategy

- The RFU established an I&D action plan in 2021 with four key focus areas - Game Play; Fans, Followers & Partners; Employees & Board; and Game Leadership; recruiting an I&D team to drive its delivery
- The 'Every Rose' action plan is designed to accelerate the growth of the game for women and girls
- The RPA D&I strategy, 2020-22. Successes have been reviewed and a new strategy is in development

## Governance

- The RFU's Inclusion and Diversity Advisory Board and Council Implementation Group
- A newly appointed RFU disciplinary panel which focuses on discriminatory behaviour
- Employee Staff Networks introduced
- The RPA's player chaired D&I board
- PRL adaptation of Minimum Standard Criteria, including the introduction of access audits and diversity data submissions

## Engagement

- Elite Rugby survey launched for the first time for Premiership, Championship and P15s players, coaches and staff
- The All Schools programme
- Project Rugby
- Rugby against Racism
- Rainbow Laces weekend
- Unacceptable Behaviour Policy

## Education

- In collaboration, a bespoke education and training module has been created for the elite game
- A bespoke Active Bystander training programme has already been delivered to the England Men's senior team, Premiership Academies, numerous clubs across the country and staff members at the RFU and RPA



# WHAT DO WE KNOW?

## Research undertaken in 2022 found that:

- Rugby is by its nature an inclusive sport: no matter what your size or build, there is a role on the pitch for you. That once you are on the pitch, no one cares about your background – the only important thing is how well you play
- However, discrimination and experiences of exclusion remain. For example, part of our qualitative research found that in every area of elite rugby – men's and women's, national team, clubs and academies – players had experienced some form of racism
- Additionally, a sense of belonging isn't universal while the perceived need to assimilate, as well as being stereotyped, exists, particularly for players of colour
- Classism; be it in terms of accessing and navigating through the pathways or personal experiences within elite environments is an issue which affects the game and fuels an elitist perception
- Reporting of incidents of discrimination is low across the elite game and it is felt that leaders are the cornerstone to driving change for the better

# RUGBY HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE A GREAT LEVELLER

- The burden to call out poor behaviour and discrimination tends to land on under-represented groups
- Efforts by the game to respond to discrimination to date, while well intended, have been either short-lived or perceived as performative
- Disparities and inequities between the men and women's game is the biggest inequality faced by women
- Microaggressions are mostly experienced or witnessed by women and ethnically diverse communities
- While there is a sense that discrimination is decreasing in the game broadly, this trend is moving at a slower pace for women and ethnically diverse communities





# WHAT WE'RE COMMITTED TO GOING FORWARD



## ENGAGING

- Under-represented voices and making them heard



## REVIEWING

- The cultures, processes and policies we have and taking actions to better them



## UNDERSTANDING

- The diversity we have and the diversity we should be reaching
- The experiences of others and the role and responsibilities we have to build a better and more inclusive environment



## UPLIFTING

- Mentoring diverse groups and providing opportunities for them to grow into coaching, business and board-level roles



## OPENING DOORS

- Seeking talent from outside of our norms and widening access for under-represented groups



## BUILDING

- Better governance and processes
- Targets to hold ourselves accountable and change the levels of representation within our game

# ROAD MAPPING



UNDERSTAND



EDUCATE



CHANGE

## IMMEDIATE ACTIONS (6-12 MONTHS)

- **Game-wide I&D education =** Greater awareness/ understanding of inclusive cultures and the value of diversity in rugby
- **Active Bystander training =** Greater confidence to call out unacceptable behaviours, including racism, and build allyship
- **Development of a Leadership Forum =** strengthen and equip leaders across the game to understand the importance of diverse Boards, Exec and Leaders, and drive change
- **Data Capture =** Understanding of game-wide and localised demographics
- **People Systems Review =** Understanding of the problems that exist, engagement challenges, process reviews as well as effective feedback loops
- **Engagement programmes =** Outreach to under-represented groups through targeted programmes

## FOLLOW ON ACTIONS

- **Club specific I&D Action Plans developed =** Ownership, accountability and sustained/ strategic actions
- **Academy specific I&D Action Plans =** Specific and tailored focus on the pathways and broadening routes into them, specifically for those from under-represented groups
- **Reporting campaign =** Improved culture of reporting within clubs and confidence in the process
- **Mentoring programmes =** Allyship, talent pipeline development including specific focus on under-represented groups
- **Boosting of player specific forums =** Player voices being heard more consistently at all levels

## LONGER TERM ACTIONS/ OUTCOMES

- **Developing greater access, through structural reforms =** Inclusive pathways, greater diversity, reflective of society
- **Goal/ Target Setting =** Reflecting the data we have, the talent that exists, and being targeted in our approach
- **Collective annual reporting =** Transparency, accountability and impact



# RACIAL EQUALITY FOCUS

## Actions against racism (*I&D Education, Bystander training, People systems review*)

- Promotion of specialist support, facilitated by the RPA, which already exists for victims of racism – including wellbeing, social media and legal
- Building confidence in reporting incidents of racism, while ensuring confidentiality and establishing psychological safety
- RFU appointment of diverse disciplinary panels for cases of discrimination
- Collectively delivering game-wide education on the impacts of racism/exclusion, providing tools on how to respond to and call out unacceptable behaviour, and on becoming a good ally

## Access & Pathways (*Engagement programmes, Academy specific I&D plans*)

- Through the RFU, developing a long-term systemic and cultural approach to:
  - Delivering Black and ethnically diverse community projects such as Rugby United
  - Assessing and improving access to the game for players from under-represented groups, communities, and schools
  - Identifying, engaging and nurturing Black and ethnically diverse talent

**THE ELITE GAME I&D PLAN HAS A BROAD FOCUS ON DIVERSITY, BUT GIVEN THE INSIGHTS GATHERED, IT IS IMPORTANT TO SPECIFY WHERE WE WILL BE DRIVING RACIAL EQUALITY AS PART OF THIS.**

**THE FOLLOWING AREAS OF THE ACTION PLAN, AND EXISTING SUPPORT AND ACTIVITIES, SPECIFY SOME OF THE WAYS WE WILL SUPPORT BLACK AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE GROUPS WITHIN THE GAME.**

## Talent Retention in the Game (*Mentoring programmes, Boosting of player specific forums*)

- Retaining Black, ethnically diverse and under-represented talent through the creation of mentoring programmes for current and retired players, developing opportunities for them to grow into coaching and leadership roles
- Establishing forums for Black, ethnically diverse and under-represented players to be heard

## Leadership & Representation (*Leadership Forums, Goal/ Target setting*)

- Strengthening and equipping leaders to drive change through the creation of inclusive and anti-racist cultures
- Being targeted in our approach to increasing Black and ethnically diverse representation in leadership positions across the elite game and in time, establishing goals/ targets to hold ourselves to account





# APPENDIX

## Inclusive Rugby: research into experiences of racism and classism in elite rugby in England – *Executive Summary, Part 1*

PURPOSE  
UNION

### BACKGROUND

Purpose Union was commissioned by the Rugby Football Union (RFU), Premiership Rugby (PRL), the Rugby Players' Association (RPA) and the Premier 15s (P15s) to conduct a series of interviews across the elite game in England to understand experiences of classism and racism within the game. From September to December 2022, a total of 27 interviews with 29 participants were conducted, the majority with players but also members of staff and parents of academy players.

### KEY FINDINGS

The interviews found experiences of racism in every area of elite rugby covered - men's and women's game, national team, clubs and academies. Very often these took the form of inappropriate or discriminatory comments and jokes from teammates, opposition players and coaches. In the majority of experiences, these were described as repeated occurrences rather than one-off incidents. Participants also gave experiences of being stereotyped - for example being placed on the wing because of a perception that black players are faster. These incidents were often attributed to ignorance rather than malice, the understanding being that they were a result of unconscious bias. Microaggressions such as these made some players of colour feel that they were not welcome in the game, and that they had to conform to a whiter and more middle class culture in order to be accepted. Participants spoke of changing how they spoke, altering their behaviour and hiding part of their identity. Those that remained in the game often credited their thick skin rather than finding an inclusive culture. The research found instances where the club culture led to people of colour and working class people leaving the game.





# APPENDIX

## Inclusive Rugby: research into experiences of racism and classism in elite rugby in England – *Executive Summary, Part 2*

PURPOSE  
UNION

### KEY FINDINGS

Experiences of classism were reported far more in the men's game than the women's. In the men's game, the perception amongst participants was that having gone to an independent school would make it far more likely for a player to reach professional levels and generally more likely to stay in the game past age 11. This was attributed to the historic association of the game with independent schools; the ability of independent schools to coach and play rugby due to their resources and timetable flexibility; and the current relationship between clubs and their local independent schools, particularly around coaching and selection.

The interviews suggested that this led to an overrepresentation of independent school graduates in the men's game, which in turn may give rise to a culture that can be perceived as elitist and exclusive. Access to the game was discussed in both men's and women's game interviews. For those who did not play rugby at school - the majority of state schools - access was via the local clubs.

Participants from the women's game raised the question of safety when attending these local clubs, as well as practical considerations such as transport links and kit requirements. These were perceived to be barriers to entry for families from working class backgrounds. Rates of reporting incidents of discrimination or microaggressions were low among participants. Two fears were cited as preventing reporting: firstly, that the report would have repercussions on their career (for example the coach would perceive the reporting player as a trouble maker and leave them off the team sheet). Secondly, there was fear that leaders would not take incidents seriously. This was attributed in part to the idea that leaders were largely white and would not understand the impact of some of these microaggressions.





# APPENDIX

## Inclusive Rugby: research into experiences of racism and classism in elite rugby in England – *Executive Summary, Part 3*

PURPOSE  
UNION

### KEY FINDINGS

The interviews suggest that leadership from non-players plays a crucial role in creating inclusive - or otherwise - environments. Participants felt that there was a lack of diversity in the leadership, and that there was an absence of role models of colour. This was linked to, but not seen as the only cause of, a perceived lack of accountability and support in issues of race- or class-based discrimination.

This is linked again to a common issue raised by senior players of colour: they felt that the twin burdens of educating people about race and racism and calling out racist or inappropriate behaviour all too often fell to them. Stronger, pro-active leadership by coaches and club staff in these areas would help to relieve this burden.

When asked about how they felt about the response of the governing bodies to racism and classism, participants in the main felt that it tended towards the performative. Participants could cite visible initiatives such as Rugby Against Racism, but could not point towards impact on the ground or in their experience. While racism and classism were experienced in both the men's and women's game, classism was felt more in the logistical and financial barriers to entry for girls looking to get involved with the game. Many female players also felt that the most prominent way they were discriminated against was in the difference in treatment between men and women.





# APPENDIX

## Inclusive Rugby: research into experiences of racism and classism in elite rugby in England – *Executive Summary, Part 4*

PURPOSE  
UNION

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Our research suggests that English rugby is not immune to systemic racism, and has a specific problem with classism due to the historic associations of the men's game with independent schools. Purpose Union highlights six areas where the governing bodies should work together to drive change. It's important that any efforts to drive change are holistic and aim to create environments where all players and staff can thrive.

- 1) Strengthen and equip leaders to drive change** - educate and equip non-players to build inclusive team environments, and hold them accountable
- 2) Revise and strengthen reporting procedures** - make current procedures clearer, define what can be reported, and humanise the procedures
- 3) Improve access to the game for players outside of the independent school system** - for boys and girls, consider expanding current outreach initiatives and building relationships with state schools
- 4) Strengthen the women's game** - learn from the growth of the women's game, consider specific outreach to girls of colour, and build gender parity into inclusion work
- 5) Build new audiences** - empower existing players of colour and working class players to be visible role models, and build relationships with unreached communities around clubs
- 6) Build consistency across the game** - use data to hold leaders accountable, work collaboratively between the governing bodies and the clubs, and include the players - but don't burden them with driving change

