

# BUCS RUGBY LEAGUE IMPACT REPORT

2025-26 Season



# FOREWARD

As we wrap up our latest strategy in the university sector, it is a good time to reflect on the growth and progress we have seen over the past four seasons. This journey began with the development of a stronger working relationship, which led to the creation of the Rugby League Coordinator role within BUCS. This gave us a greater opportunity to focus on improving the playing experience across the university game and ultimately led to the introduction of the National League within the Men's competition.

At the same time, we recognised the need to further develop and grow the Women's game. This has seen the successful delivery of the Winter League and, for the first time, the Women's 9s competition being recognised as an official BUCS sport.

As we reach this point, following what has been our most successful season to date, highlighted by an outstanding Men's 9s competition, which shows a stark difference since 2022, it is also a moment to look ahead. While we are proud of the progress made, we know there is still significant work to do to continue strengthening and growing the rugby league landscape within the university sector. It is also important at this point to put on the record our thanks to Abbie, Maz and the wider BUCS infrastructure for the support, effort, and work in delivering an outstanding four years of growth and progress.

As we develop our next strategy, our commitment to the development and growth of university rugby league for both men and women remains unwavering. The university game remains a strategically important part of the wider success and future growth of rugby league, and we are excited about the opportunities ahead.

*Tom Brindle*

*RFL Head of Growth and Women's Super League General Manager*

This report marks the conclusion of the current funding cycle and reflects a period of real progress across university Rugby League.

The funding of the Rugby League Coordinator role signalled a clear commitment to improving the experience of our higher education athletes. Working in close partnership with the RFL, we have delivered meaningful change, including the introduction of the Men's National League and the successful implementation of Women's 9s, helping to create greater parity within our events programme.

Just as importantly, we have reshaped the Men's competition structure to better reflect student need, placing insight, feedback and the student voice at the centre of our decision making. The collaborative, progressive and ambitious approach taken throughout this period has been fundamental to the progress achieved, and I would like to thank the RFL for their investment, time and strategic support.

This report celebrates the impact of the final season, but also the foundations built across the full funding period. It is something we should be proud of, and a strong platform for the future.

*Neal Kington*

*BUCS Head of Competitions*

# PARTICIPATION

## MALE

# 1500 PLAYERS

15% INCREASE

2022-23 1,300 MALE

2023-24 1,400 MALE

2024-25 1,400 MALE

2025-26 1,500 MALE



2022-23 84% FIXTURE COMPLETION RATE

2025-26 87% FIXTURE COMPLETION RATE



## 9s TOURNAMENTS

2022-23 1 TOURNAMENT WITH 9 TEAMS PARTICIPATING

2025-26 2 TOURNAMENTS WITH 20 TEAMS PARTICIPATING

## FEMALE

# 190 PLAYERS

63% INCREASE

2022-23 120 FEMALE

2023-24 150 FEMALE

2024-25 187 FEMALE

2025-26 200 FEMALE



## 2025-26 SEASON

54% DID NOT PLAY RL BEFORE UNIVERSITY

76% WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY RL NEXT YEAR

## 9s TOURNAMENTS

2022-23 NO 9s PROVISION

2023-24 1 TOURNAMENT

2024-25 2 TOURNAMENTS

2025-26 9s TOURNAMENT ADOPTED BY BUCS



# MEN'S DEVELOPMENT

## DEVELOPMENT FUND

**15** SUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

**£4,317** SPENT OVER TWO YEARS

### FOCUS AREAS:

**PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION**

**PROFILE AND ENGAGEMENT**

**IMPACT ON THE WIDER UNIVERSITY/LOCAL COMMUNITY**



## SUCCESS STORIES

### CARDIFF UNIVERSITY

Cardiff University Rugby League only began its journey in the 2023 - 24 season with the formation of the team.

In their debut season, they finished third in their league. Following league restructuring, they competed in Tier 2 South during the 2024 - 25 season, where they finished top of the table and earned promotion to Tier 1 South.

In the 2025–26 season, Cardiff finished second, narrowly missing out on the National League play-offs by just six points.

### UNIVERSITY OF HULL

University of Hull Rugby League have put significant work in behind the scenes, and their efforts have been rewarded with a hugely successful season.

They won the Men's Trophy 9s, becoming the first university outside of Northumbria to claim the title, and also secured promotion to the National League.

Alongside their on-field success, Hull have successfully launched their scholarship programme ahead of the 2026-27 season.

# MEN'S PERFORMANCE - NATIONAL LEAGUE

## 2023-2024

### PREMIER LEAGUE NORTH AND SOUTH

6 TEAMS IN BOTH LEAGUES

88% COMPLETION RATE



The introduction of the National League has already increased the overall competitiveness of the competition. It's been great to see some of the Southern teams really challenging.

Jason Payne, Head Coach at Northumbria University



## 2024-2025

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE

6 TEAMS: EXETER, LEEDS, LEEDS

BECKETT, LOUGHBOROUGH,

NEWCASTLE, NORTHUMBRIA

100% FIXTURE COMPLETION RATE

LEEDS BECKETT WON LEAGUE AND

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

## 2025-2026

### SECOND SEASON OF THE

### NATIONAL LEAGUE

EXETER, LEEDS, LEEDS BECKETT,

LOUGHBOROUGH, NOTTINGHAM,

NORTHUMBRIA

97% FIXTURE COMPLETION RATE

NORTHUMBRIA WON LEAGUE AND

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP



I think the set up right now is perfect and shows real progression for lower league teams.

Student



# WOMEN'S - DEVELOPMENT

## 2022-2023

The first Women's Development Day took place

First ever inter-varsity competition took place during BUCS Big Wednesday

## 2023-2024

The first Rugby League 9s tournament took place at Loughborough with 65 students attending  
Women's Winter League began, with the final taking place at Featherstone Rovers

## 2024-2025

The second season of WWL saw a 47% fixture increase  
2 x 9s tournaments took place

## 2025-2026

Women's Rugby League 9s officially adopted into BUCS  
Women's 9s in October had 85 students competing from 7 institutions

I love the sport, there's a great community and I am passionate about its growth, especially for women and girls. Everyone belongs. It's the first sport I've played that has had this positive of an atmosphere from the people in it.

*Student*

If I weren't graduating, you wouldn't be able to drag me away from my team and the sport. It's the best decision I've made in 3 years.

*Student*

# WOMEN'S PERFORMANCE - NORTHUMBRIA UNIVERSITY



**2023 - 2024**

**6 PLAYERS AT THEIR FIRST TRAINING SESSION**

**1ST TEAM ESTABLISHED**

**WON THE FIRST EVER WOMEN'S WINTER LEAGUE**



**2024 - 2025**

**WOMEN'S RL SCHOLARSHIPS INTRODUCED**

**2S TEAM CREATED**

**WON BOTH 9S TOURNAMENTS**

**WON THE WOMEN'S WINTER LEAGUE**



**2025 - 2026**

**46 PLAYERS**

**WON 9S TOURNAMENTS**

**WON THE WOMEN'S WINTER LEAGUE FOR THE THIRD CONSECUTIVE YEAR**

**JOINT TEAM WITH NEWCASTLE THUNDER IN RFL 9S**

**SONI KIULKARNI**

Soni moved from India to study at Northumbria University and had never heard of Rugby League before arriving in the UK. After attending a taster session, she quickly developed a passion for the sport and has not looked back since. Rugby League has become a significant part of her university experience, and she has chosen to remain at Northumbria for an additional year to continue playing and developing within the game.

**ABI TURNER**

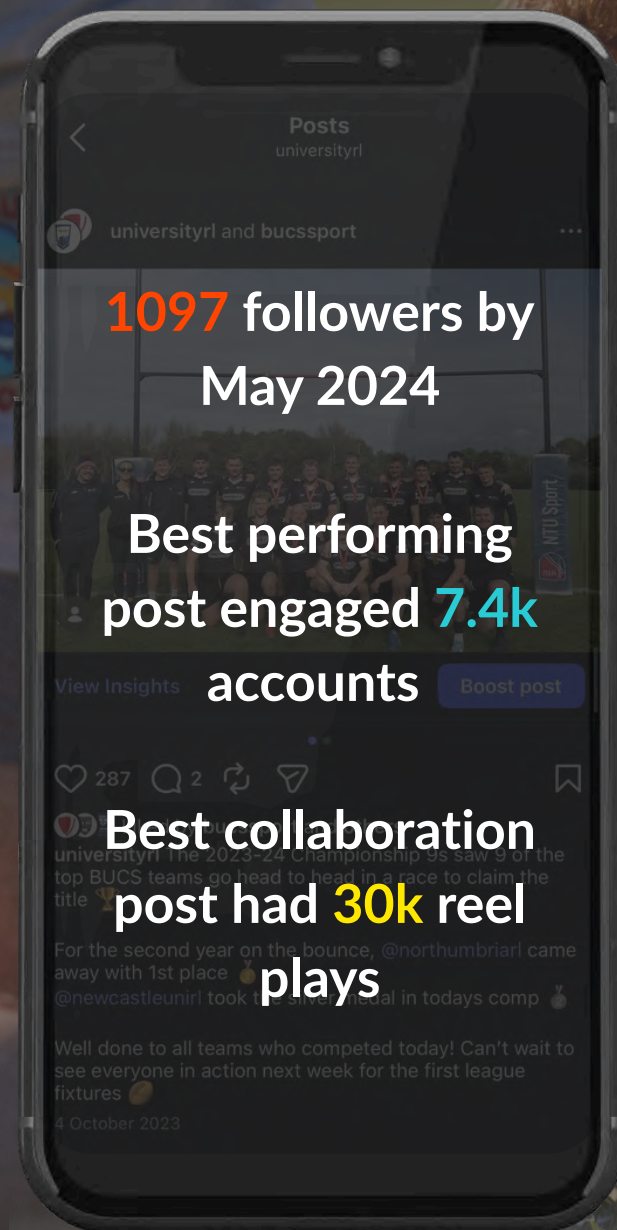
Abi discovered Rugby League after spending many years as a hockey goalkeeper and had no prior experience of the sport. Since joining Northumbria University's Rugby League programme, she has embraced the game and continued her development beyond the university setting. She now plays regularly in the community game for a local women's team, demonstrating the important role university sport can play in introducing new participants to Rugby League and supporting long-term involvement in the sport.

# DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT

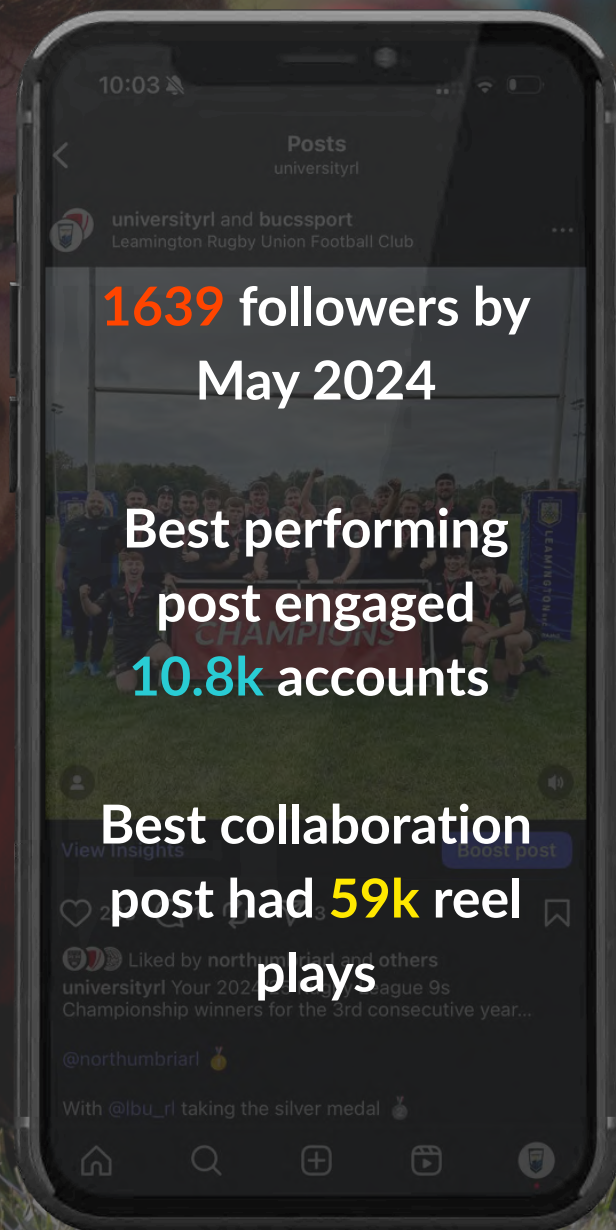
2022-2023



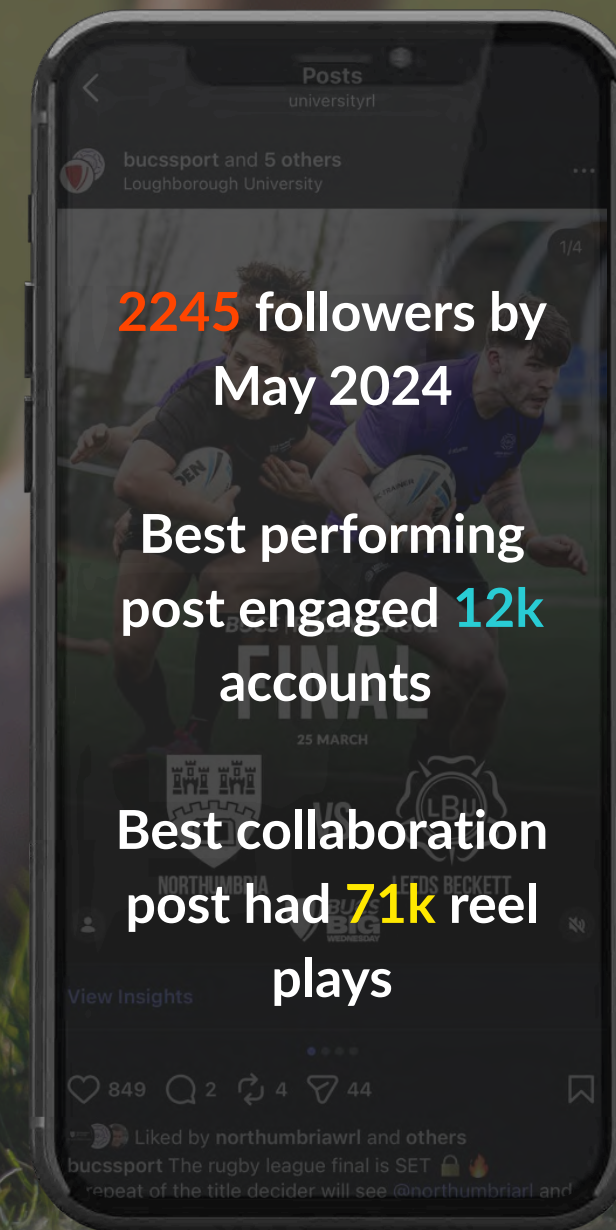
2023-2024



2024-2025



2025-2026



**392% FOLLOWER INCREASE FROM 2023 - 2026**



The past 4 years have been a significant period of growth and development for Rugby League within BUCS. With a dedicated coordinator role focused on growing the men's and women's game, the sport has strengthened its presence in higher education and created new pathways for participation and competition.

The report demonstrates the value of sustained investment in the university game, supported through the strong partnership between BUCS and the RFL. This collaboration has established a stronger foundation for Rugby League within the Higher Education sector.

On behalf of myself and Maz, my predecessor who served in the role for the first two and a half years, I would like to thank the RFL, BUCS and member institutions for their continued support and commitment to grow the game. We are incredibly proud of what has been achieved collectively. There are many highlights over the last 4 years, in particular the successful implementation of Women's 9s into the BUCS programme. As well as the launch and continued success of the Men's National League.

While this role comes to an end, the progress over the last four years shows a strong foundation of Rugby League to continue in higher education.

*Abbie Diskin*  
*Rugby League Coordinator*



RUGBY FOOTBALL LEAGUE  
1895  
LEAGUE MATCH

RUGBY FOOTBALL LEAGUE  
1895  
CLASSIC TRAINER

RUGBY FOOTBALL LEAGUE  
1895