

RUGBY UNION SAG MEETING 1 MINUTES

Date 10/10/2025
Time 12:30
Location Microsoft Teams

ATTENDEES

Chris Campbell
Dan Roberts
Charlie Mucklow
Erin Simmonds
Katy Young
Darren Fearn
Katy Storie

ORGANISATION

SAG Chair
BUCS
BUCS
BUCS
RFU
Newcastle University
SRFU

Item	Action*
1. Minutes & Matters Arising Player Registration KY reported that player registration remains ongoing and must include all players, not just first teams. Sector-wide communications have been issued. The RFU and SRFU will contact those institutions directly once BUCS fixtures start next week. Women's Rugby Calendar DR outlined ongoing issues with fixture clashes involving the Women's U20s window and the Celtic Challenge. Discussions with NGBs continue to find a solution. Options include delaying the finals to avoid clashes or restructuring the season to front-load knockout fixtures before Christmas. CC noted that the current structure may not be sustainable but that changes must consider the wider player base. Hosting separate men's and women's finals was discussed but deemed resource-heavy and potentially detrimental to event quality. The group agreed this will remain an annual discussion as the women's game evolves. Collision Sport Applications Two applications (Surrey Women's 2s and Brunel Women's 2s) were accepted into Premier South, creating a 6/8 split between Premier North and South. Premier South teams will play twice, with additional relegations at season's end. BSR Finals 2026 DR confirmed a verbal agreement with Rodney Parade for a two-year hosting deal, with contracts being finalised. The financial model will be performance-based, potentially allowing BUCS to break even or profit from ticket sales and commercial income. MBSR Promotion and Relegation CC confirmed that the 10th-placed MBSR team will be automatically relegated, and the North 1 vs South 1 playoff winner promoted. While some teams expressed concerns over consultation, the Competitions Group approved the change. The model could inform future WBSR structures. The possibility of hosting playoffs alongside the BSR Finals was considered but ruled out for now due to logistical challenges. Action: BUCS to have ongoing discussion with stakeholders of WBSR and come up with solutions / statement regarding the calendar for next season.	BUCS

2. BUCS 7s 2026 Proposed Eligibility Changes

ES presented BUCS' new annual Event Review process, designed to evaluate each event's performance, sustainability, and student experience in line with the BUCS 2030 strategy. Events are rated red (<65%), amber (65–74%), or green (75%+), with improvement plans required for lower scores. Removal from the programme would only occur if an event remained red for three consecutive years.

The 2024 Rugby Sevens event scored 75% (green) - a strong result for its first year under third-party delivery by Joe Burns. Three development areas were identified: improving communication between BUCS and the provider, increasing student feedback responses, and reversing a small decline in entries and institutional diversity.

ES represented Joe's proposal that restricts BSR players from entering the Trophy competition to make it more appealing for lower-tier universities. ES clarified that this restriction already exists but is difficult to monitor.

KY questioned the need for change, as no eligibility issues had been raised. DF and KS agreed, warning that extra restrictions might discourage entries rather than support inclusivity. DR noted that barriers to entry are more likely logistical or financial rather than eligibility related. He suggested exploring additional or social Sevens events to attract smaller institutions. The group emphasised the importance of clarifying the purpose of BUCS Sevens, whether it is a performance event or a participation festival.

CC summarised that there is no current evidence to justify rule changes. The June scheduling already limits team availability, and restricting player eligibility could reduce participation further. He also noted that Sevens and Fifteens demand different skill sets, making comparisons inappropriate.

ES highlighted that Joe further proposed that lower-ranked BSR teams be moved into the Trophy competition if the Championship oversubscribes. The group agreed the current reserve-list process works well and should remain unchanged.

Outcome Summary:

- No changes to eligibility or qualification rules.
- Continue the event review process and address identified improvements in communication, feedback collection, and participation growth.

3. BUCS Update

General BUCS Rugby Updates

DR reported growth across both men's and women's BUCS Rugby teams, exceeding the overall BUCS average. Affiliations were strong, with all 91 teams now completed and 96.3% of MBSR players registered in the first week. Automatic relegation has been introduced in MBSR, while consultation continues on WBSR expansion.

Two Behaviour Charter webinars were held with around 38 attendees each. Follow-up is ongoing for non-attendees, and BUCS plans to enhance the Protect Our Game campaign with a dedicated BSR round and refreshed branding.

HERUDG has a new chair, Andy Speed, and is recruiting a student representative. Communication processes are being improved following IT issues.

LMC Updates

CC summarised recent LMC discussions, including continued debate on promotion/relegation and Welsh institutions' concerns over limited WRU engagement. The WRU has since held a productive consultation with Welsh universities.

Refereeing costs and streaming schedules have been confirmed. Concerns were also raised about institutions making unsolicited offers to students on results day, which may breach UCAS rules. CC clarified this is a UCAS matter, and relevant guidance will be linked in the minutes ([here](#)).

WBSR LMC Highlights

The group noted balanced streaming coverage and strong early-season engagement. Concerns over WRU attendance remain, and discussions on expansion, eligibility, and calendar alignment will continue later in the agenda.

4. 2026-27 WBSR Expansion Criteria

DR presented a detailed proposal outlining the framework for expanding WBSR from seven to eight teams in the 2026/27 season. The criteria was developed following the previous year's decision not to expand after Durham's mid-season withdrawal, aiming to ensure future growth is sustainable, competitive, and data led. The WBSR LMC has been consulted and approved this criteria. The approach is built around three key stages: league sustainability, competitiveness, and promotion viability.

Under league sustainability, BUCS will analyse WBSR walkovers, player availability, and front-row fulfilment to ensure existing teams can consistently field sides. If significant issues persist, expansion will not go ahead. The competitiveness stage evaluates match balance using average score differentials. If the mean score difference across all fixtures falls below 25 points, expansion is supported; 25–35 points triggers SAG review; and above 35 points indicates the league is not yet ready. Finally, promotion viability assesses the strength of potential teams from Premier North / South. A team winning over 60% of games by more than 35 points would justify expansion; 40–60% would prompt further SAG review; and below 40% would pause the process. This ensures expansion only occurs when both the current BSR and the feeder leagues are robust.

The timeline for decision-making is 18th February 2026 when Premier North/South competition finish, and WBSR concludes on 11th March 2026, and a provisional SAG meeting on 13th March 2026 will confirm whether expansion proceeds or if a playoff will determine entry.

CC and the group supported the framework, describing it as logical, transparent, and evidence-based. The group also stressed the need for clear communication once the decision is made, to prevent confusion similar to previous men's league changes.

The group then discussed the potential of "ring-fencing" the league for a year post-expansion to allow new teams to stabilise. However, it was argued that maintaining open competition was vital for performance progression and avoiding stagnation. They also warned that sustained blowouts damage player experience and institutional buy-in. BUCS agreed, noting that BUCS Rugby should remain adaptable rather than locked into fixed multi-year cycles.

The SAG approved the expansion criteria and process, recognising its balance of competitive integrity and flexibility. DR will finalise the written framework and communicate the framework with the membership.

Action: BUCS to put in a meeting on 13th March for SAG to potentially review expansion if required.

Action: BUCS to finalise expansion framework and communicate with membership.

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5. Regulation Change Proposal (July 2025)

The discussion began with CC outlining the proposal, regarding the inclusion of external players to establish normality for eligibility in knockout fixtures. The proposal allows players who compete in external leagues (e.g., National League teams) to count their games toward BUCS eligibility, particularly if they are part of a university's second or lower-ranked teams. The intent is to ensure that players unavailable due to injury or other commitments can still contribute to end-of-season championships without undermining team competitiveness. Approximately 70% of teams in BSR and Premier 1 expressed general support for the concept, highlighting benefits for player experience and team consistency.

DR clarified that the existing regulation safeguards university resources and maintains alignment with professional club partnerships. Feedback from representatives at Bath and Exeter indicated that removing the eligibility regulation entirely could negatively affect some universities, suggesting that any changes must be carefully considered. The discussion explored options: maintain current regulations, adapt them to allow external participation, or remove them entirely.

Concerns were raised regarding practical implementation. DF emphasised challenges around defining lower-ranked teams, managing player caps, and tracking eligibility. DR responded that coordination with relevant NGBs could help define institutional and club alignment, and that a clear boundary (e.g., RFU Level 4 or below) would distinguish eligible teams. Both agreed that the proposal would only affect knockout eligibility, not broader player movement or league participation.

KS raised concerns regarding integrity and precedent. She argued that allowing external players to participate late in the competition could undermine the BUCS programme, particularly for smaller institutions that invest heavily in their student rugby pathways. She suggested a possible compromise where players could be included from the start of the championship rather than for playoffs, preserving fairness and limiting disruption. DR acknowledged these concerns and reinforced that the intent was not to draft players opportunistically but to fill unavoidable gaps due to unavailability.

KY supported a player-centred approach, emphasising that students should have maximum opportunity to play rugby. However, highlighted the difficulty in creating regulations that achieve the intended benefit without being open to abuse. The discussion recognised that championship and playoff competitions differ in nature, with playoffs tied to season-long performance and championship games potentially more flexible for external player inclusion.

The group concluded that the proposed regulation change is not currently practical and could not be approved as written. The preferred course of action is to consult the LMC and competitions group, presenting three options: maintain current regulations, adaptation of the relation, or to remove it entirely.

Action: BUCS to finalise wording and present at Competitions Group for discussion.

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6. HERUDG The conversation moved to the Higher Education Rugby Union Disciplinary Group (HERUDG) and its relationship with the SAG. KY highlighted that HERUDG has evolved over three seasons, but currently functions in relative isolation, despite informal connections through shared members. She queried whether there should be a more formal link between SAG and the disciplinary group. CC and DR discussed the need for a designated liaison, ideally someone without other responsibilities, to sit on both groups and ensure continuity, rather than relying on current members who already have multiple commitments. KY agreed that formalising the liaison role in the disciplinary group's terms of reference would be beneficial.	
7. SAG Representatives CC noted the absence of active student representation and stressed its importance. The group agreed to reach out to former student representatives and consider re-advertising vacant positions. Attendance from WRU and SRU representatives was also flagged as inconsistent. The SAG's connection to the BSR LMCs was considered, with flexibility around whether the chair or a designated member would attend LMC meetings to maintain the link. Attention shifted to sevens representation within the SAG. CC identified a vacant competition sevens role. The group agreed to confirm ongoing engagement and recruitment for the vacant role to maintain effective representation. Action: BUCS to reach out to student representatives and readvertise the vacant positions. Action: BUCS to reach out to current sevens representative and readvertise the position if required.	BUCS BUCS
8. AOB Finally, the conversation addressed cardiac screening in university rugby. KY and KS raised the issue in light of recent initiatives at the University of Ulster. DF highlighted existing practices in Championship and Premiership squads, which involve one-day screenings with on-site medical staff. Challenges for wider adoption were identified as cost, logistical feasibility, and determining which players would be offered screening. CC noted that many top-level players already receive screening via professional pathways, limiting the need for additional university-led programmes, though there remains interest in exploring opportunities where feasible. KY concluded that further discussion with the LMCS and pathway programmes would help clarify potential for support and implementation. Action: BUCS to ensure discussions around cardiac screening are on the next BSR LMC agendas.	BUCS