



RUGBY LEAGUE SPORT REVIEW PROPOSAL

PREPARED BY THE BUCS RUGBY LEAGUE SAG | October 2019

CYCLE TWO

SUMMARY

The remit of this proposal is to fully redesign and restructure the University Rugby League competition structure within BUCS providing a league competition that supports all Student Athlete types and fosters an excellent student experience.

It is expected that the new competition structure will have a positive effect on the playing experience of all Type 1-5 athletes within the BUCS Rugby League landscape as the current model has been judged as not 'fit for purpose', arching away from our overall aim of creating the best student Rugby League experience in the world.

An enabler to restructure the full competition would be the creation and introduction a 6 team National League at the Premier Tier of the BUCS Rugby League Competition structure to begin in the 2020-21 season. The current 6 team Premier North and South will sit underneath the National League, along with the current Tier 1 provision and a deregulated derivative of the game at Tier 2 and below.

The restructure of the leagues will be designed to provide competitive playing opportunities for all student-athlete types. Tier 2 and below will be deregulated Rugby League (player matching to a minimum of 9 a-side) to support growth and participation opportunities and matching the motivation of types 1-2/3. It is envisaged this will also support retention within University Rugby League providing more playing opportunities and removing one of the biggest causes of walkovers in the lower league of "not enough players" to field a team.

For the avoidance of doubt, this proposal does not set out to create a "super" league nor is it premised solely on performance but more on providing a structure that creates suitable playing opportunities that are safe, enjoyable and meets the motivations of all student athlete type.

The RL SAG has reviewed insight developed from BUCS and Rugby Football League (RFL) match data over the last three years, feedback from student players and member institutions, which has highlighted the following:

- The number of "blowout" games in Tier 1 and 2 in Rugby League are higher than the SAG would hope to see
- Students feel the league structure needs amending
 - 76% of survey respondents state changes were need to the current competition structure
- Leagues of more than 6 are not well liked, they are perceived to be unfair and do not provide a great student experience.
 - Tiers 2A & 2B both have more than 6 team:
 - 2B has the highest number of walk overs (10), with clubs struggling to field the full squads
 - 2A has 50% blowout rate, with team in this league not playing home and away
- Students like to play home and away (*Data collected at Student Forums*)
- The current competition format does not support or foster development of new clubs or additional teams.

This proposal has been developed by the BUCS Rugby League SAG, with support and direction from senior staff as the RFL to ensure it aligns and supports their strategic objectives, creating an excellent University Rugby League offer.

The RFL believe University Rugby League and the competitions that sit within BUCS form a key part of their Sport England contractual interventions. As part of the Rugby Football League's Reset and Strategic plan for 2019 onwards, there has been emphasis placed on Higher Education. **See Appendix A**

1. INTRODUCTION

This proposal has been prepared by the BUCS Rugby League SAG following a period of consultation with the Rugby League Higher Education Institutions across England and Wales (no Rugby League teams from Scotland or Northern Ireland presently) and in collaboration with the RFL. The SAG is composed of the following representatives:

- The Partnerships and Projects Manager (Sport) of Premier League Team University of Hull
- The Education Manager of the Rugby Football League
- A PHD Student Representative from Tier 2 University of Manchester
- An FE/HE Rugby League specific consultant
- The Head Coach of Northumbria University (Current Rugby League and Championship Winners since 2016-17)
- A BUCS representative

The current BUCS Rugby League competition structure has been in operation since 2012 when the competition entered BUCS following a complete programme handover from the Student Rugby League (a competition subsidy of the RFL). Under the Student Rugby League structure, University Rugby League had a National League called Super 6, which expanded to Super 8s in its final 2 years.

Currently there are 48 institution playing within the BUCS RL competition structure, comprising of 59 teams (48 first grade and 11 second grade) with 1700+ fully registered players (The RFL register their student players each season). **APPENDIX B** displays the structure for the upcoming 2019-20 season.

The Rugby League SAG developed informative surveys and questions to help develop insight from 4 stakeholder groups involved with University Rugby League:

1. Registered student players
2. AU/SU Sport Administrators
3. Directors/Head of Sports of current Premier League HE Institutions
4. Coaches within University Rugby League Club.

Student Feedback

An e-mail survey was sent to the 1700+ registered University players from the RFL database with a 2-week consultation period. 176 students (10%) participated in the survey, which is a good response for this format of data collection.

Prior to the 2019 season the RFL Education Team held 6 regional forums with club committees (97 attendees from 43 University student clubs) and took this opportunity to gather some student insight on the current University Rugby league format and draft proposal.

Headlines from the forums included:

- 6-8 teams leagues were preferred, playing both home and away games
- All players were keen to see a well-balanced league structure that supported a quality student experience
- The potential to link with professional clubs to raise profile and standard of RL in their University was seen as an exciting opportunity by all attendees.
- 35 clubs stated they would be interested in 9's and it would support player retention and expansion
 - Students suggested a more informal structure would be beneficial

To support the need for 9s/deregulated:

- The majority of clubs mentioned concerns of introducing new players to contact in a full league structure
 - Comments were made this has caused players to leave the club/sport

Coupled with the data collection, a complete analysis of the results from 2018-19 season shows that across all divisions the 'blow-out' score line was 35% (recognised by the NGB as 30+ points margin of victory). In the Premier North and Premier South, the percentage blowout rate was 50% and 29% respectively.

The current season also saw 39 walkovers conceded and 10 voided game totalling 49 out of 306 scheduled games not taking place (16%).

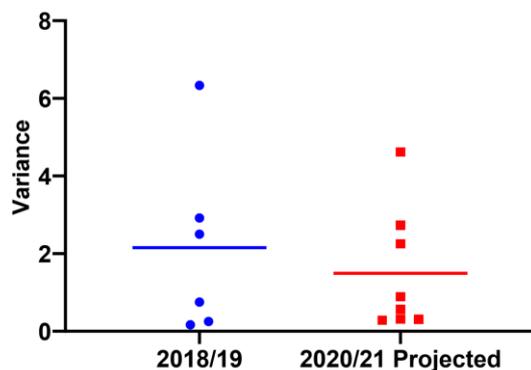
Across the University competition 92 games were also recorded as 'blow out' score lines (30+ points), but most significantly, 141 games this season were either a blow-out and or not played at all. This totals nearly 50% of the programme and reflects the current structure is not fit for purpose.

Restructuring to improve completion- Reducing Blowouts

In an attempt to articulate the impact a competition restructure would have on the number of blowouts an analysis of blowouts from the 2018/2019 season vs a projected competition structure for 2020/21.

The diagram below shows that the SAG would expect to see an reduction in the number of blowouts, a view supported by University Club coaches currently involved in the game based on their knowledge of teams and programmes.

Team Strength Variance across Premier & Tier 1 Leagues



Methodology:

- Each league was assigned a relative strength score on a scale from 0 to 5.
- The net number of blowout scores was then calculated for each team in each league (blowout wins - blowout losses)
- This was then combined with the strength score for the league to give a strength score for each individual team, and the variance of these scores calculated within each league.
- The teams and their current strength score were then rearranged into the proposed new structure, and the variances in strength scores calculated within each of these leagues.
- The distribution and mean of these variances between the two structure were then compared.

In simple terms, the lower the number, the more closely matched the teams in a league are. The lower the mean, the more closely matched all the leagues are.

The RL SAG recognised this is not definitive, and acknowledges that the University Sport landscape is cyclic and needs the correct structures in place. This piece of statistic modelling is intended to highlight the level of thought, consideration this proposal is built on, underpinning the ethos of improved competition.

With the correct guidance and support from the RFL and monitoring from the BUCS RL SAG, the competition structure can and will create a more competitive playing competition.

As 80% (taken from RFL player data) of our student playing population use HE as an entry point into Rugby League we need to address the level of provision for each student athlete type. The 3-year analysis of fixtures and result provision can be seen below:

Men's Rugby League Competition Breakdown			
Component	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Scheduled Games (Inc. BYES)	393	349	336
Scheduled BYES (Competitions)	31	27	27
Scheduled Games (No BYES)	362	322	309
Walkovers	33	32	39
Void	18	14	10
Total Games Played	311	276	260
Total Games Not Played	51	46	49
Total % Not Played	14	14	16
Blowouts (30 points +)	145	121	92
Blowout %	47	44	35

2. PURPOSE

The aim of the proposal will be to use the data generated so far, future member consultation and the review of the HE Rugby League offer since the 2016-17 season to inform the new Rugby League structures. The evidence leans towards the contention that the competition is not fit for purpose due to the imbalance in performances across the structure including the Premier North & South. This has a negative impact on the student experience and raises apprehensions of player safety. A review of match data has highlighted concerns in relation to the current leagues structures and the impact these have match completion, player retention and growth.

The BUCS RL SAG is suggesting a full competition redesign to tackle these challenges, below is a suggested league format for the 2020-21 season:

League Format

2020-21 League Format				
Competition	Leagues	Games	Teams	Promotion & Relegation
National League	1 (National)	10 total: 5 home 5 away	6	Promotion: None Relegation: None in year 1 & 2* Playoff with Winner of Premier North V Premier South
Premier	1 (Premier North)	10 total: 5 home 5 away	6	Promotion: Winner of Premier North V Winner of Premier South V bottom placing of National League Relegation: Play off with Tier 1 Winners
Premier	1 (Premier South)	10 total: 5 home 5 away	6	Promotion: Winner of Premier North V Winner of Premier South V bottom placing of National League Relegation: Play off with Tier 1 Play-off round robin between Midlands 1A/Western 1A / South Eastern 1A
Tier 1	5 (Northern 1A/ Northern 1B / Midlands 1A / Western 1A / South Eastern 1A)	10 total: 5 home 5 away	30	Promotion: Play off with bottom placing of Premier North and Premier South

				Relegation: Automatic to Tier 2 with winner / s of Tier 2
Tier 2	3 (Northern 2A / Northern 2B & Midlands 2A)	10 total: 5 home 5 away	18	Promotion: Automatic with bottom placing of Tier 1 Relegation: None

* **Notes on relegation/promotion in National League:**

- Universities will have the option of elected relegation if concerns raised over health and safety and student experience

Rational for No relegation in National League in years 1 & 2:

- Sustainability- Allow the University to develop their programmes
- Allow premier tier clubs to develop programmes that create competitive teams

Possible expansion of National League:- A Fluid Completion

- If there is clear evidence of performance and a need to expand
- If minimum standards are met (to be agreed- See Selection Criteria section)
- Evidence of performance (Grading games can be played)
- Definite promotion and relegation in Year 3

Tier 1- 2 x Northern Leagues (1A & 1B)

This proposal recommend the new competition structure has 2 x Northern Leagues, referred to in this proposal as Northern 1A & Northern 1B. The rationale for this is the strength of teams in this area with 12 very similar matched teams in the geographical area. This will provide competitive matches for the teams in these leagues, reduce blowouts, reduce travel and match the motivations of the students in the teams, enhancing their University rugby League experience.

Deregulation Tier 2 and below- Minimum of 9 A-Side

This proposal is recommending the introduction of deregulated Rugby League at Tier 2 and below in the format of player matched Rugby League to a minimum of 9 a-side. The initial plan would be to introduce this at Tier 2 with the aspiration to introduce a fully deregulated Tier 3 to the competition framework.

The main rationale for the introduction is as follows:

- Allow growth in current club who can submit entries for extra teams as the academic year starts, this means we are giving universities and clubs the opportunity to capitalise on strong recruitment drives.
 - An example of a strong recruitment drive can be seen with the University of Manchester (September 2019) who had 52 players at their first session.
 - They only have 1 x team, so there is a real risk of player drop out.
 - With a deregulated offer and a late entry point we could provide more opportunities for students wanting to participate to be involved in a club.
 - This may also help to reduce the number of walkovers later in the season if more students have been retained by the club
- Allow Type 1 and 2 athletes the opportunity to be involved in a competitive playing opportunity with less commitment than the leagues higher up the tiered structure.
- Allow students to experience more than one sport during their time at University, some students will be driven to try multiple sports, clubs and societies. The current structure only really allows you to participate in one Wednesday afternoon sporting opportunity.

As part of the deregulation model we would look to amend the BUCS rules and regulations but also create an RFL handout for Institutions, Players, Clubs and Match Officials to explain the deregulated offer (See **APPENDIX C**)

It is important to stress this would be an addition offer for existing clubs, new clubs and would allow students with different motivations to participate the opportunity to get involved.

As part of the consultation around the deregulated offer Adam Hughes of the RFL met with Ryan Amos of the Rugby Union SAG to discuss the ideas around the Rugby League proposal and this was supported, and advice was given about the journey Rugby Union has gone through and are still finalising.

The main regulations we would be looking to amend are as follows: (Indicative resource outlined in **APPENDIX C**)

Recommendations:

- Played at a minimum of 9 a side, number matching could happen up to 13 a-side
- Played on a Rugby League Pitch with posts (narrower touch lines, marked with cones)
- Full Length x 40m wide
- Simplified version of the game
 - No kicking until the 5th and last
- Regional competition
 - Fortnightly / Monthly events. For example;
 - 5 North West Universities would play 5 events throughout the year.
 - These team could be made up of new clubs, new teams in existing clubs or clubs who cannot fulfil a 13 a side weekly league competition.
 - Each institution would host 1 event (minimal impact on facility hire cost)
 - If one team cannot make one event the other teams can still play, this cuts down on the number of walkovers as there would still be other teams to play against.
 - Consideration to be given to BUCS points and recognition that support participation based on attendance and participation.

Exceptions:

- Can be played on a safe grassed area
- Minimum pitch sizes 60 x 40 to 100 x 40
- No posts needed
- No conversions

Current 9' Events:

These will be review in the 2019/20 & 2020/21 season to develop an understanding how these would fit with a deregulated offer.

Opportunities to review this include:

- BUCS play will allow for data collection of players across the season and can show:
 - Players playing 13 A-side only
 - Playing both 13 & 9
 - 9's only
- Preferred time of year will be surveyed

Suggestion for Future 9's events can use the new data to:

- Foster transparency with RL 9's Events for competition integrity:
 - Championship Event- 1st Team players only
 - Trophy- Lower Tier players/mixed of 1st and 2nd teams
 - Shield- Comp aimed at growth and new players (No player who have played at Tier 1 or above)

The National League

The design and introduction of a National League is a mechanism to elevate 6 teams to create a balanced competition from National League through to Tier 2 (and Tier 3 in the future). Naturally, there will be concerns on the selection of teams included and the resource attached. To reiterate an earlier point, this is not a proposal to create a "Super" league. The National League is of course a platform for performance and will be

the pinnacle of the University Competition but it must be sustainable, student focused and match the needs of the student and HEIs.

The RFL is committed to support the creation of the National League as it aligns with wider performance changes in the RL landscape including the reintroduction of the reserve grade for the Betfred Super League.

Selection Process for National League

Having consulted with Head/Directors of Sport from the current premier leagues, it became apparent there is a natural assumption in the sector to focus on “super” league and geography at the initial mention of a national league. The RL SAG has also consulted with colleagues at BUCS and those sector colleagues involved in the creation of National League in other BUCS sports who have provided useful insight and guidance from recent experiences.

Following guidance from the BUCS Office and the Sport Review Implementation Group, we will be following a three-stage process to populate the new league structure.

- Firstly we would invite members to evaluate this proposal on its merits, and the benefits to student-athletes that are outlined within this document.
- If following member feedback, the proposal is approved to move to implementation by National Competitions Group, we would like to invite all teams in the current Premier and Tier 1 leagues to express whether they would like to be considered for the new National League. Teams expressing an interest will then be invited to a league meeting, hosted by BUCS, to discuss in further detail the structure and potential requirements associated to the league.
- Finally, if there is expression of interest from enough teams to facilitate the new league, then the BUCS Office and the Rugby League SAG will utilise a framework of criteria, based on discussions at the league meeting, to select teams for the new league. This criteria will be presented at the initial league meeting, and there will be an opportunity for all interested parties to provide feedback on these. Please note, in line with the aims of creating a competitive structure, a prominent part of the selection criteria will be performance-based.

After the selection process has concluded, a League Management Committee (LMC) will be formed to support the delivery of the league; our preference is that this is named the RL National League Development Group (RLNLDG).

Suggested New Structure:

The new National League and further structures can be found in **APPENDIX D** which displays how the implementation of the competition would look in the 2020-21 season.

If the proposal the RLNLDG investigate the promotion and relegation ideas and define how this will work in the short to medium term of implementation.

Championship, Vase, Trophy & Conference Knockout Competitions

Below are the proposed knockout competitions for the 2020-21 season:

2020-21 Knockout Structures			
Competition	Teams	Rounds	Final
Championship	6 (National)	3	Stand Alone- Betfred Super League Ground
Vase	12 (Premier)	4	Big Wednesday
Trophy	30 (Tier 1)	5	Big Wednesday
Cup	18 (Tiers 2 and below)	4	Conference Cup Final

3. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The SAG feels the proposal aligns with several strands of the BUCS Strategy, the contributions and expected impact are highlighted below:

Inter University Sport

The implementation of a National League will support an enhanced student experience for Student-athlete Types 5 and 4, through delivering a more competitive league with higher quality games in every fixture. There are no domestic / community opportunities for these student-athletes during the academic year of this standard, this will provide a platform to represent their University at a standard with matches their need to perform.

The restructuring of the leagues allows a rebalancing of the weaker teams in the Premier Leagues with the stronger teams in the Tier 1 competition and similarly in Tier 2, as this cascades down the offers structure. This will provide leagues that are more competitive in context and well balanced. The restructure still guarantees there is a progressive route to higher levels should an institution identify a motivational shift in the ambitions of their student-athletes.

The deregulation of the lower tiers provides an appropriate level of Inter University Sport to a group of students seeking an enjoyable, less regular competition.

Performance Sport

From the group of students surveyed 30% are seeking to or are already playing at an elite / semi-professional level. For this group of type 4 and 5 student-athlete sporting performance is of a very high priority.

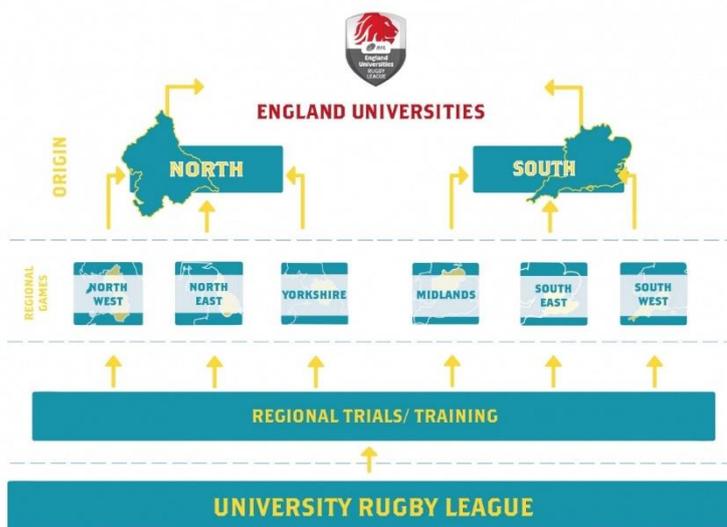
The creation of a National League will deliver a high quality, competitive playing environment for these players within a University setting. Grouping the 6 strongest teams to regularly compete ensures the highest quality of fixture in each match, providing the students more opportunities at a higher level matching their needs and supporting their development.

The National League will also allow those Student-Athletes seeking dual careers especially those who have received the RFL Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme (TASS) support.

Representative Programmes – Performance Sport section

England Universities Programme
(please see diagram)

- This is a well-established and comprehensive representative programme that runs from Regionals to Origin to England
- The Representative programme is open to all University players even those who are on University courses at an institution not playing in the current BUCS Structure.
- In the England Universities Origin squads there were 31 institutions were represented.
 - All players and institutions can be seen in the news article [here](#) (also see **APPENDIX E**)
- The England Universities squad was made up of players from 14 Institutions and 3 of these do not have a current Rugby League programme.
- The England Universities take part in the President's Cup where they play the UK Armed Forces, GB Teachers and GB Police.
- The England Universities main competition is the Student Four Nations which takes place annually against Wales, Scotland and Ireland Students.



- Student Four Nations
 - The RFL are responsible for the organisation and running of the Student Four Nations on an annual basis
 - This is a round robin competition that takes place over an 8-night stay.
 - The only years that the Four Nations doesn't take place is in a World Cup year
- Student World Cup
 - Run by the Rugby League International Federation in conjunction with the host country or countries the Student World Cup is part of the Festival of World Cups and in 2021 the Festival of World Cups will consist of the following formats;
 - Students (Men's and Women's)
 - Emerging Nations (Women)
 - Armed Forces (Men's and Women's)
 - Police (Men's)
 - Learning Disability (mixed)
 - Physical Disability

Links to the Professional Game

Early discussions with representatives at the RFL and Super League have explored the pathways for student-athlete types 4 and 5. Plans are in development to link them to the newly developed Super League Reserve Grade and existing RFL Championship programmes, in doing so providing a clear progression and exit route when they graduate. This will ensure BUCS fulfils a significant role within dual career pathway provision for performance players.

One example of this is a conversation that took place with Hull FC who have shown an interest in forming a partnership with institutions out of their typical geographical area. They are starting conversations with Nottingham Trent to look at how they could work together to raise the profile of the Universities Rugby League programme.

Social & Recreational Sport

Deregulation of the at lower tiers provides opportunity to create programmes that allow those student-athlete type 1 & 2, or those new players to the sport, to participate in a safe and enjoyable environment. Rugby League 9's is a great way to introduce new or returning players to full contact rugby. They requirement for less players also reduced the need for large squads to complete a fixture. RL 9's is designed to foster the attaching element of the game and statistically has a reduced number of tackles. This will increase the number of fixtures played, increasing overall participation levels within the sport.

Physical Activity & Health

Many student athletes (80%) are new to or returning to Rugby League at University, this provides an opportunity to play and train in a team environment supporting their physical activity development and knowledge. Providing a competition framework throughout the game that is appropriate to the level of player there is a less likely to be drop out from the sport thus sustaining physical activity participation levels.

Profile & Influence

This proposal is driven by ensuring competition is relevant to all student-athletes types rather than profile raising, however the sport review process has presented opportunities to influence within the NGB and the professional game.

This proposal offers an opportunity for BUCS and the University sector to play a role in the progression of Rugby League aligning the student competition with both the grassroot and professional game.

Changes to the professional academy system in 2019/20 season will see a reduction in age from U19 to U18, this presents the prospect for the professional game to support dual career student-athletes in transition from FE to HE with an appropriate playing level.

The RFL have an excellent recent track record of introducing new offers or programmes and enhancing the visibility and profile if the offer. One example of this is the Women's Super League, the competition was only launched in 2017 when the Women's competition was given an 'elite amateur competition' status and aligned with the Super League brand and club brands through brand extension. Please see **APPENDIX H** . We believe

that through working closely with BUCS, HEI's, Professional Clubs and Foundations we could take University Rugby League on a similar journey to the journey taken by Women's Super League. The aim of this process would be to promote the high quality product we have within University Rugby League to a wider audience, showcase how more universities could promote and grow their Rugby League programme and fundamentally grow the number of students being given the opportunity to engage with Rugby League.

The RFL now has membership app called Our League. Our League allows the RFL to independently stream live footage of Rugby League games taking place, with weekly fixtures being streamed from a variety of different programmes and initiatives. The RFL would be very keen to explore a commercial partnership with BUCS to stream a weekly University Rugby League games. This would raise the visibility of University Rugby League; this would start with the new National Competition being the main games shown through the stream. Again following the example of Women's Super League this has led to headline sponsorship deals for the competition and we strongly believe by increasing the profile and visibility this would lead to more opportunities for commercial partnerships, if agreed by BUCS and the RFL to help support the National League teams and the wider University Rugby League game.

Through conversations with Robert Elstone, Chief Executive of Super League, he has given his support that there will be a tender process undertaken to find a host for the BUCS Championship Final. This would be linked to a Super League game. Again, the plan would be to stream or explore some options to broadcast the Championship final, linking this proposal to the growth and profile of Women's Super League once again Sky Sports have just announced that the 2019 Women's Super League Grand Final will be broadcast live on Friday 11th October.

Inclusion

To support Rugby League's long tradition of inclusivity and a sport that encourage everyone to participate it is vital there is a HE competition offer that matches players' ability levels, especially at the lower tiers.

The RFL recognise that universities play a critical role in the recruitment and retention of players within the game and that University Rugby League provides a suitable environment for new players. Hence, the league competition should be designed to suit the needs and sporting motivations of these new players to encourage them to stay involved within the game after University.

Professional & Workforce Development

To support the transition of the new structure there is an identified need to provide support for the rugby league workforce in University Rugby League, the SAG along with representatives from the RFL and Professional clubs are working to deliver an offer which will be included and evidenced in the final submission of the proposal in October 2019

On an annual basis the RFL run University Club Committee Steering Group Meetings, these meetings are an opportunity to do face to face consultation, information sharing, prepare clubs for the season ahead and risk assess clubs ahead of the season. The meetings take place on a regional basis, however we do open the meetings up to all clubs to allow student to access the most appropriate meeting for them, as an example Durham University attended the Yorkshire meeting as the committee members were not back in University accommodation. If clubs are highlighted as at risk, then the RFL will work with the club on a club development plan . These club development plans allow the RFL to highlight and explore the main issues with the club alongside the AU / SU. The RFL will then keep in touch with the club on a weekly to fortnightly basis and with the AU/SU on a fortnightly to monthly basis to monitor the progress of the club.

Great Britain Pioneers Programme

- The GB Pioneers is a reward and recognition programme for University students involved in running their University Rugby League Club. It acknowledges the work they have done as a volunteer throughout the academic year.
- The Pioneers programme links in with the Rugby League European Federation
- Although the Pioneers will play a test match against the national team of the country, they tour the main aim of the Pioneers programme is to visit a developing Rugby League Nation with coaching, equipment and publicity.
- Prior to the tour the selected students attend a training weekend were they are prepared for the tour and engaged with a series of development workshops that can be deployed on the tour and back at their university club.

Officials

The RFL's match officials and development departments have highlighted the need to recruit, train and deploy more match officials to service the rugby league activity that takes place within an education setting. Mike Smail the Match Officials development and appointments officer has attended the University Rugby League steering group meetings and will work with identified institutions to put recruitment strategies in place for Match Officials, this has already happened with Universities such as Aberystwyth, Bangor, Bath and Oxford. In the 2018/19 academic year the RFL and Jon Burton from BUCS specifically targeted the South Western and Welsh institutions to recruit and train match officials, this was a success and there were 8 new officials who have all been deployed in the University setting.

The potential for newly qualified match officials in HEI's is a relatively untapped market and the RFL's match officials department would be really keen to discuss further with institutions to set up annual recruitment drives, training and deployment.

The involvement and direction provided by senior members of staff at the RFL has ensured the proposal considers alignment with the RFL Strategic alignment and hence continued support from the governing body with the implantation phase from September 2019. (See **APPENDIX J**)

PGCE Programme

The RFL have launched a PGCE CPD programme in 2019, the ITT Rugby League Coach Education session has been developed to support Trainee PE Students to be able to deliver Rugby League in a school setting. The focus of the session is to build on the Trainees teaching skills and coaching pedagogy with specific rugby league activities and the confidence to deliver an invasion sport safely.

The aim of the programme is to increase the number of teachers who are able to deliver Rugby League. This should lead to an increase in the number of schools who have rugby league on the curriculum and take part in competitions alongside expanding the geographical footprint of the sport.

With more children introduced to rugby league there will be more competition for players moving through the player pathway for both men and women and so raise the standards of athletes in these systems.

4. CONSULTATION AND SUPPORT

In developing this proposal 4 stakeholder groups involved within University Rugby League were canvassed on their current perception of the Rugby League offer within BUCS to gain an understanding how we can move the game forward, genuinely creating the best Rugby League student experience in the world, namely:

1. Registered student players
2. AU/SU Sport Administrators
3. Directors/Head of Sports of current Premier League HE Institutions
4. Coaches within University Rugby League Club.

1- Registered student players- May/June 2019

An e-mail survey was sent to the 1700+ registered University players from the RFL database

A basic Summary of student responses: (See **APPENDIX F**)

- 176 responses
- 31% from Premier Competitions (14% North & 17% South 17%)
- The remaining 59% came from students playing in Tiers 1 & 2
- 52% said they were motivated to play RL to compete in regular BUCS competition
- 32% could be identified at type 4 and 5 student athletes stating they are motivated to compete at the highest level university level with a progression to elite or professional RL
- 76% of respondents stated changes were need to the current competition structure, 58% of players felt the competition was good but would make some changes
- Of those it would be impacted by a restructure of the University Rugby League BUCS Leagues, to focus on a balanced league structure 85% were in support

1a- Student Forums with New Club Committees

Student Forums, also referred to as Steering Group Meetings, were used to gain insight and feedback from students currently involved in University Rugby League. The overwhelming feedback was that this was the right approach to be taking and it would allow for more even leagues, more competitive games and an opportunity to engage more students to a second or third team through the deregulated lower leagues.

Prior to the 2019 season the RFL Education Team held 6 regional forums with club committees (97 attendees from 43 University student clubs) and took this opportunity to gather some student insight on the current University Rugby league format and draft proposal.

Summary of feedback:

- 6-8 teams leagues were preferred, playing both home and away games
- All players were keen to see a well-balanced league structure that supported a quality student experience
- The potential to link with professional clubs to raise profile and standard of RL in their University was seen as an exciting opportunity by all attendees.
- 35 clubs stated they would be interested in 9's and it would support player retention and expansion
 - Students suggested a more informal structure would be beneficial
 - The majority of clubs mentioned concerns of introducing new players to contact in a full league structure
 - Comments were made this has caused players to leave the club/sport

Figure 1- Social media reflection of student forums

2. AU/SU Sport Administrators- June 2019

An e-mail survey was sent to the AU/SU Sport Administration as per the BUCS data base.

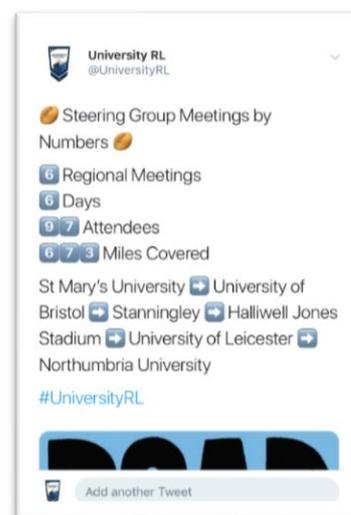
A summary of feedback is below:

Full results along with some specific feedback in support for lower leagues adjustment is shown in **APPENDIX G**.

Feedback was received from at least one AU or SU representative that gave us coverage of all the current BUCS Leagues, we believe this allows us to build a comprehensive picture from the feedback.

A summary of the feedback can be seen below:

- The feedback on the student motivations was interesting as there was an even spread across the 5 athlete types, this can be seen in question 3 of Appendix G;
 - Each athlete motivation type was covered with at least 33% of respondents selected at least one type.
- 75% of all respondents identified that the current BUCS League competitions were good but needed improvements, some of the suggestions were;
 - A need for a National League at the top of the competition structure
 - Review of lower leagues with a 9s offer available
 - Need to work with institutions and teams to make the competition offer more competitive
- 86% would be in support of a restructure of the BUCS competition framework
- 56% identified a lack of development opportunities in the current competition structure with at least 18% highlighting Rugby League 9s as an opportunity to grow their current club and increase the number of people playing on a more regional basis. This would help facilitate the Type 1 and Type 2 athletes.



3. Directors/Head of Sports of current Premier League HE Institutions- June 2019

A short e-mail survey was sent to all Directors/Head of Sports of current Premier League HE Institutions along with an invitation for a 1 to 1 follow up call.

The RL SAG made the decision to focus on the data collected in the initial survey and correspondence and to continue with the holistic structure redesign, the finer details and design of a National League can be developed

with the support and guidance of a wider group as identified in Page 7 of this proposal (RL National League Development Group (RLNLDG)).

Summary of feedback from HOS/DOS:

- Initial survey 2 universities were not in favour of a national league from their institutional perspective- The main reason been travel impact on their particular University (Both southern Universities)
- There were a couple of concerns raised around the perception not having a enough teams of suitable ability
- Other expressed the desire for more dialogue, to develop and better understanding.
 - All but 1 were open to develop dialogue (Citing travel distance as the reason why)
- The group were split on the Sport Development principles behind creating a national league, there was interest in explore support options from the RFL
- All but one where in favour of deregulated version of RL and saw the benefits

4. Coaches within University Rugby League Club- May/June 2019

A range of coaches from across the University Rugby Clubs were interviewed to canvas insight on players motivation "in reality" both from a training player perspective. It is hoped this will help provide a balanced overview of the current student-athlete requirements alongside team's ability and distribution student-athlete types.

The coaches' feedback can be summarised below:

- In support of introducing a National League at the top end of the competition structure, this would;
 - Help with the visibility and profile of University Rugby League
 - Aid in recruitment
 - Aid the support given to Rugby League within their institution
 - Provide a more competitive offer for the stronger teams currently competing
 - Give institutions something to aim for and aspire to be part of
- 9's was seen as a great way to introduce players to the game and also a way of providing playing opportunities for clubs with extra players but not enough players to create a 2nd team at 13 A-side.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The RL SAG acknowledges that there will be some impact on Resource Implications on the competition, most likely with those teams in a National League, however across the whole competition structure this would be close to neutral/status quo.

The introduction of the National League may see minimal further resource added to the structures. The knockout competitions will mean that for the National Teams, some will play less games total within the season which will reduce cost of field hire, travel and resource associated to those games.

The RFL will continue to centrally appoint match officials and therefore there will be no added resource for the BUCS office and institutions, other than for BUCS to build and coordinate the additional 6 team National League.

Travel is the likely increase on an introduction of a National League and without yet knowing which teams will be involved, **modelling** is purely hypothetical, the table below show the travel impact on a 6 team national league modelled on 6 "likely" teams.

Indicative Travel impact on a National League modelled on the last 2 years:

Change on 18/19			Change on 19/20			
Miles	Time	%	Miles	Time	%	% Average
24.8	0.4	4%	24.6	0.4	4%	4%
22	0.4	2%	309.4	5.2	31%	17%
20	0.3	2%	308.8	5.2	31%	17%
27	0.5	4%	26.4	0.4	4%	4%
26.6	0.4	3%	-40	-0.7	-4%	-1%
\	\	\	105.4	1.8	8%	8%

Depending on the Institution that are in the final National league the inevitable increase in travel could be negligible. Ways to mitigate this can be explored with the RL National League Development Group, to match the motivation and need of the effected HEIs and their students.

For the potential increases in travel the adjustments of the Tiers 1 & 2 with hep reduce the travel and number of games which will align with the student-athlete type motivations at this tier.

The BUCS RL SAG & RFL are committed to exploring ways of reducing any significant increase in resource in participating in University Rugby League, competition programme income will be reviewed as part of the final restructure.

6. WIDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

It is anticipated the final proposal will provide a university rugby league competition that provides competitive matches across the tiers and encourages growth in the sport.

Aligning to the changes in the professional game will present dual-career opportunities in competitive environment.

The SAG acknowledges that the realignment of the league structure will not irradiate 'blowout' score neither will it be perfect in year 1 given the cyclic nature of University sport, hence the RL SAG and BUCS will continue to monitor the leagues as well as developing on going insight with all stakeholder groups.

One potential wider impact that is still to be explored is minimum operating standards for specific tiers to contribute to matching student experience with the student-athlete motivation, this will be examined further with the RFL, BUCS and potentially effected institutions. An example of the RFL minimum operating standards for Reserve Grade rugby can be found in (See **APPENDIX I**)

The deregulated lower tiers will require communication and resources to define the options and deliver a level of consistency as well as wider sector knowledge. This will be supported by the RFL and communicated by the SAG to BUCS members and student clubs.

7. CONCLUSION

In presenting this proposal the BUCS Rugby League SAG is hoping the BUCS membership can see the need for a full restructure of the BUCS University Rugby League Competition framework. A review and redesign of the current competition structure can provide a new structure that will have a positive effect on the playing experience of all student-athletes types (1-5) within BUCS Rugby League.

The current model has been judged as not 'fit for purpose', the aim is to reduce 'blowout' score lines, increase the number of competitive fixtures, provide an entry-level tier to increase participation and also support dual-career athletes.

The remit of this proposal is to introduce a 6 team National League at the Premier Tier of the BUCS Rugby League Competition structure to begin in the 2020-21 season. The current 6 team Premier North and South will sit underneath the National League, along with a revised Tier 1 and deregulated derivative of the game at tier 2 and below.

The RL SAG are fully aware that a competition re-structure alone will not solve all of the challenges with the current structure but it does provide the correct framework and a platform for the RFLs commitment to a wider development offer for the sector.

The Rugby League SAG looks forward hearing feedback from the BUCS membership to ensure the University Rugby League experience is BUCS is the best in world.