

spear

centre for sport, physical education
& activity research



Project Rugby Annual Evaluation Report: 2019 Executive Summary



About *spear*

The Centre for Sport, Physical Education & Activity Research (*spear*) is located within the Faculty of Social & Applied Sciences at Canterbury Christ Church University. *spear* undertakes a range of evidence-led analyses, from critical commentaries and reflections on current policy and practice, to commissioned research, evaluation and consultancy.

The Centre's research is funded by a range of national and international funders such as the International Olympic Committee, World Health Organisation, Terre des Hommes, Department of Health, Department for Education, English Federation of Disability Sport, Mencap, Access Sport, Youth Sport Trust, UK Sport, Sports Coach UK, Sport England and Sport Wales. Recent work has focused on sport, physical activity, health and wellbeing in schools and communities.

Research conducted by *spear* has helped guide and inform public policy by contributing to the wider evidence base used by policy makers, providing a rationale for government and commercial investment, and steering programme improvements that enhance the experience of practitioners and participants.

The Centre for Sport, Physical Education & Activity Research (*spear*)
Canterbury Christ Church University
North Holmes Road
Canterbury, Kent, CT1 1QU
Tel: 01227 922680
email: spear@canterbury.ac.uk
www.canterbury.ac.uk/spear
Twitter: [@spear_news](https://twitter.com/spear_news)

Report Author: Dr Abby Foad
Project Team: Dr Abby Foad, Karley Hubbard, Dr Katrina Taylor, Stacey Draper, Shelley Pletsch, Professor Mike Weed & Professor Jan Burns

Project Rugby evaluation undertaken by *spear* and commissioned by Premiership Rugby. Report produced by *spear*.

June 2019

Context

About Project Rugby

Project Rugby is a flagship participation initiative run by Premiership Rugby in collaboration with England Rugby. The programme is designed to engage and develop new audiences through rugby and stimulate a lifelong interest in the game.

Project Rugby aims to reach over 31,000 participants by 2020, increasing participation in the game by people aged 14-24 from underrepresented populations: people with disabilities, from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, and from Lower Socio-Economic groups (LSEs). The programme also aims to support transition into local grassroots clubs, enhance wellbeing, increase social connectedness, and challenge traditional perceptions of the game, positioning rugby as a sport for anyone regardless of background, ability or gender.

Project Rugby is taking place at schools, hubs and clubs across the country. Activities comprise accessible variant formats of the game, including touch and mixed ability rugby, delivered and supported by community staff from 14 Premiership Rugby shareholder clubs. Activities are delivered at a time and place that can be accessed by the target audience to provide appealing and accessible opportunities for engagement.

Project Rugby is run in partnership with Gallagher and supported by key stakeholders including Sporting Equals, the English Federation for Disability Sport, Asian Sports Foundation, IMAS and the Minister for Sport. The programme was shortlisted for the British Ethnic Diversity Sports Award within the Sport England Community Sports Project of the Year Category and won the Best Sports Governing Body Initiative at the Sports Business Awards 2018.

About *spear's* evaluation

spear has been commissioned from September 2017 to October 2020 to conduct an independent evaluation of Project Rugby. The evaluation captures evidence of outcomes achieved and draws out key lessons learnt.

This second Annual Report focuses on the impact of Project Rugby on new players, deliverers, families and communities, and how this impact has been achieved. Data informing this report are drawn from 3,384 participant and 50 stakeholder survey returns; three site visits to clubs; site visit interviews and focus groups with participants, parents, and club, school and community workforce; and three telephone interviews with stakeholders.

The report is divided into five substantive sections mapped to programme KPIs: *Participation, Perceptions, Transition, Wellbeing, and Social Connectedness*. *“Can’t play, won’t play”: A stakeholder’s guide to engaging traditionally underrepresented groups in rugby* and a suite of three interactive case studies are also presented.

Project Rugby KPIs

1. *Increase participation in the game by people from underrepresented groups*
2. *Challenge traditional perceptions of Rugby*
3. *Transition Project Rugby participants into local grassroots rugby clubs*
4. *Enhance individual wellbeing and perceptions of self*
5. *Reduce social isolation and increase social connectedness*




Key research Qs

1. *Has Project Rugby improved participants’ individual wellbeing and perceptions of self?*
2. *Has Project Rugby improved perceptions of the game within the target audience?*
3. *Has Project Rugby reduced social isolation and improved levels of social connectedness within the target audience?*
4. *How have any outcomes been experienced and achieved?*

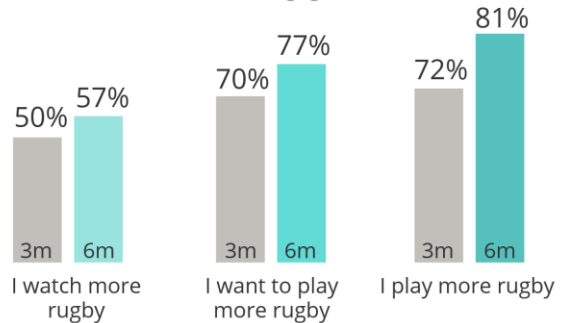
Participation

Participants

Across Phases 1, 2 and 3, **Project Rugby** has engaged...

-  **29,777** unique participants
-  **5,595** in the Disability workstrand
-  **23,792** in the BME/LSEG workstrand

Positive changes in participation and attitudes observed between 3 and 6 months of engagement



Overcoming barriers to participation

● Kit
 “The first few weeks I didn't have football boots, my coach sent out an email and I now have boots from an England rugby player!”



● Opportunities
 “To provide as many opportunities as possible for individuals from underrepresented groups to access rugby”

● Fear of injury
 “Embracing other rugby formats allowed us to maintain a protective, supportive environment”

At 6 months...

BME/LSEG **89%** of participants say they **want to** play more rugby
 Disability **64%**

BME/LSEG **91%** of participants say they **play** more rugby
 Disability **70%**

"More people like me would play rugby if..."

- BME/LSEG
- Disability



"What is it about **rugby** that you like?"



BME - Black & Minority Ethnic, LSEG - Lower Socio-Economic Group.
 Data derived from the Project Rugby Survey, Stakeholder Survey and Graffiti Walls.

Perceptions

Participants



“It’s fun being able to play a game like this, I never thought I’d be able to”
(Participant)

“It makes me feel okay to be different”
(Participant)

Perceptions of rugby in 3 words

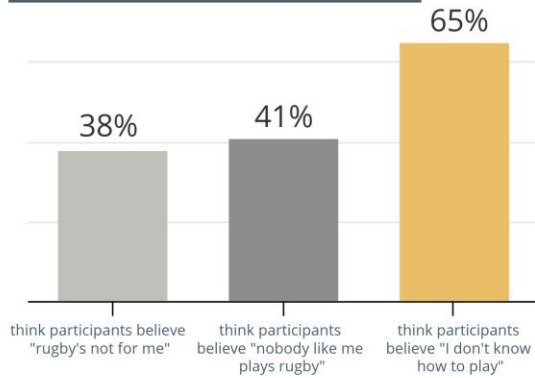
BME/LSEG

Cold Violent ok Muddy Inclusive Tough Difficult cool team enjoyable Love good strength physical new rough pain fun funny aggressive Fun Good hard awesome exciting fast paced competitive Fast-paced

Disability

Fun healthy good fun Love exciting brilliant exercise Enjoyable Teamwork Great fitness teamwork Playing Physical feel happy sport ok Hard strong enjoy tag Ball kind team Throwing ball rugby learning Rough teamwork respect interesting Easy Sportv lovely work

Deliverers & Facilitators



Communicating and demonstrating rugby's core values and the programme's ethos and activities has helped shift perceptions from "Rugby's not for me" and "nobody like me plays rugby" to a chance to "meet like-minded people" and "be accepted in something new".

Families

Initially parents were put off by the traditional perceptions of rugby but once they acknowledged the benefits and safe environment more parents came along resulting in an influx of new players.

“Parents often tell us rugby is one of the best things, how good it is for their young person”
(Coach)



“They’re people you may find as most unlikely team mates, however because they have a common interest it works”
(Parent)

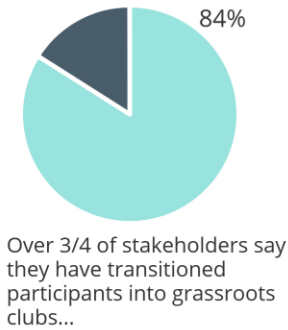
“I thought rugby wasn't for her but this does look like rugby and feels like rugby but without the risk of her getting tackled and getting hurt”
(Parent)

BME - Black & Minority Ethnic, LSEG - Lower Socio-Economic Group.

Data derived from the Project Rugby Survey, Stakeholder Survey, Stakeholder Interviews, Site Visits and Graffiti Walls.

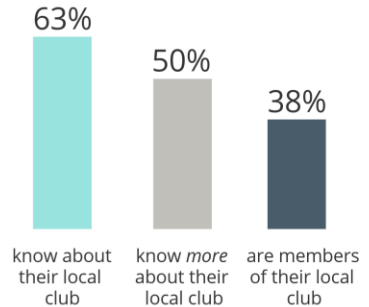
Transition

Stakeholders



Project Rugby participants

After 6 months of Project Rugby...



"If you are not planning on joining your local rugby club, please tell us why"

- I think it would be too physical if I joined a club
- I'm into other hobbies
- Not physically capable of engaging outside this group
- My disability prevents me
- Joined before and did not feel included
- I am so busy I haven't got time

Transitioned participants

Perceptions of the club



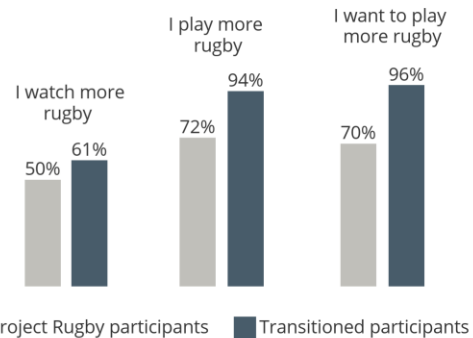
"If your friends were thinking about joining their local rugby club, what would you say"

- everyone is always so supportive
- it's fun, creative and healthy
- the club is very welcoming
- it will be a great experience
- come and try something new
- you would learn a lot of key rugby skills
- I enjoy it so you should too
- try it and then you won't stop

“Around half of participants are disadvantaged, vulnerable and less engaged with school. Playing rugby has helped engage these pupils”
(Teacher)



“What's key is developing the confidence to join and important to build this to enable them to embrace this opportunity. Parental support is also key to enable transition”
(Teacher)



BME - Black & Minority Ethnic, LSEG - Lower Socio-Economic Group.

Data derived from the Project Rugby Survey, Transition Survey, Stakeholder Survey and Site Visits.

Wellbeing



Parents and coaches reported a range of improvements in players' physical, mental and social wellbeing

All participants

Participants in BME/LSEG and Disability workstrands reported increased feelings of...



“ He was anxious about attending the rugby sessions at first, but he worked really hard at each session and over time developed his rugby skills and confidence ”

“ She’s got more confident, her coordination has got better and she gets excited to go to rugby ”

(Parent quotes)



BME - Black & Minority Ethnic, LSEG - Lower Socio-Economic Group.
Data derived from the Project Rugby Survey, Stakeholder Survey and Site Visits.

Social Connectedness

Participants



9 out of 10 participants say they **'work well in a team'** and **'like to play sport with others'**

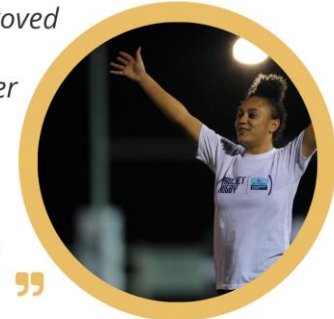
“ Confidence has improved

They feel like they have another friendship group or family

...meeting more like minded people

...camaraderie and support

(Coaches' Quotes)



Families

“ Parents have the opportunity to take part in a session of their own at the same time and place

The Dad's join in the game, and he has learnt a lot from playing alongside them

It's a shared interest and something they can do together and look forward to

Even when parents aren't playing but they are watching, they're sharing experiences and making memories”

(Coaches' quotes)



Clubs used **innovative ways** to involve **families**

- Parent volunteers
- Letters to carers
- Information events
- Respite Social media
- Join In Taster sessions
- Bring a friend
- Family meals at fixture night
- Family fun days Siblings
- Supporters Open days
- Sports Journalism Course
- Mixed ability sessions

Communities

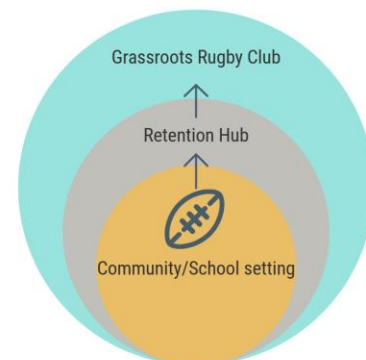


“ The physical health of everybody is improving. Mental health, confidence and managing anxiety is improved

...awareness on how to develop and grow disability rugby but also how to increase community engagement within disability sports

Friendships have been made, people have come together through rugby and now spend time together outside rugby

(Coaches' and Parents' quotes)



Stepping stone pathway supports player **transition** to clubs via Hubs

Data derived from the Project Rugby Survey, Stakeholder Survey and Site Visits.

"Can't play, won't play"

A stakeholder's guide to engaging traditionally underrepresented groups in rugby

At the core of Project Rugby is the belief that participation in rugby is positive: that participation not only benefits the people who engage but their wider social networks and the community at large. Having a regularly engaged, interested, sociable and active community is key to enhancing rugby's reputation as a sport of choice, and a sport for all.

Reaching out to traditionally underrepresented groups is an essential step in maintaining the strength of the game's grassroots advocacy. Following are simple steps stakeholders can take to engage and empower these communities.



INFORM

Take your offer to them. People from underrepresented groups interact and engage with their communities in different ways and are unlikely to come to you. Go to their schools, community groups and cultural spaces and to the organisations that deliver services to these communities. Find out where and how to disseminate information and be resourceful in your communications.



CONSULT

Get to know your target groups. Frame your offer in ways that relate to their perceptions and potential misconceptions and tap into the things that matter to them most. What do they need to know and what do they want to achieve? Meaningful engagement will increase the relevance, reach and impact of your communications and the quality and appropriateness of your offer.



INVOLVE

Create a strategic plan for involving family, carers and community stakeholders. Invite them to an event at the club so they can see what rugby actually is and what it can offer. Make them feel welcome, understood and respected. Maintain contact, offering meaningful opportunities for engagement that build connectivity and help create an active, invested and diverse rugby community.



COLLABORATE

Initiate cross sector partnerships. Develop new relationships with groups and organisations that serve target populations and are invested in building healthier communities. These organisations can help connect you with hard to reach groups and increase access to participants. They can also help promote, and importantly validate, your offer to members.



EMPOWER

Create beacons of change. As Project Rugby becomes increasingly established and produces more role models and advocates, the aspirations and expectations of underrepresented groups change. Support this culture of change through inclusive opportunities that foster a sense of ownership and empower new players, families and communities to be voices of inclusion and diversity in rugby.