

# spear

centre for sport, physical education  
& activity research



## Project Rugby Annual Evaluation Report: 2018 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.

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

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# Context

## About Project Rugby

Project Rugby is a flagship participation initiative delivered by Premiership Rugby and England Rugby. The programme is designed to engage and develop new audiences through rugby and stimulate a lifelong interest in the game. Following successful pilot activity in the spring of 2017, Project Rugby launched in October 2017 in a high profile event at the AJ Bell Stadium in Manchester.

Project Rugby aims to reach over 12,000 participants by the summer of 2018, increasing participation in the game by people aged 14-24 from underrepresented populations: people with disabilities, from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, and from Lower Socio-Economic groups (LSEGs). The programme also aims to support transition into local grassroots clubs, enhance wellbeing, reduce social isolation, 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 over 500 sites across the country, including schools and community clubs. 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 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 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 is designed to capture evidence of outcomes achieved and draw out key lessons learnt.

This first Annual Report focuses on the impact of Project Rugby on new players, deliverers and communities, and how this impact has been achieved. Data informing this report are drawn from 1,338 participant and 108 stakeholder survey returns and three site visits to schools and clubs taking part in the programme.

## Key Project Rugby aims

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 questions

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?*

## Reception & Engagement

Engaging with communities and empowering people from underrepresented groups are the main reasons cited by deliverers for engaging in Project Rugby.

Participation is seen to enhance their health, wellbeing and individual development. It is also seen to develop citizenship, raise awareness and understanding, increase community engagement and trust, and provide a pathway to participation in local grassroots clubs.

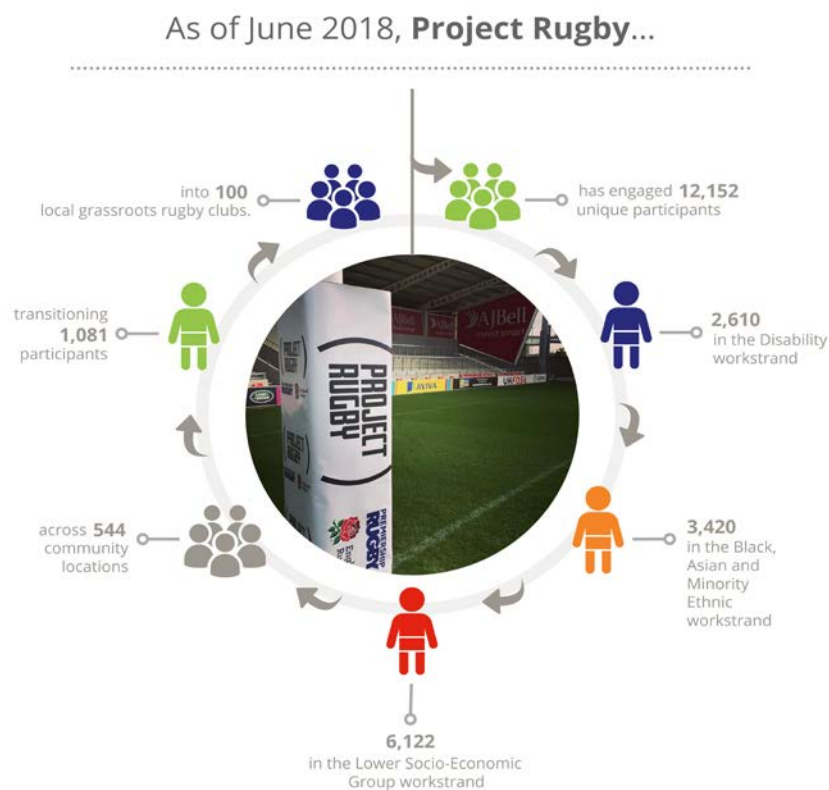
The chance for deliverers to develop their pedagogy around inclusive practice is a further reason cited for engaging in Project Rugby. Engagement is reported to equip deliverers with the skills and confidence to effectively support people from underrepresented groups and to increase the quality and scope of their inclusion offer.

Output targets for Project Rugby are to reach over 12,000 participants by Summer 2018 through provision of inclusive, accessible opportunities to play rugby in over 200 community locations across England. Monitoring data collated from the 14 Premiership Rugby shareholder clubs shows these output targets have been exceeded.

“

*What we're really excited about in Project Rugby is broadening the breadth and depth of the game – it's about taking the game to new communities and allowing people who didn't feel that rugby was a sport for them to be involved in our sport.*

Wayne Morris, Community & Corporate Social Responsibility Director, Premiership Rugby



## Activities

Deliverers are offering a range of inclusive activities to participants, often precipitated by networking, outreach and recruitment events.

Taster sessions are offered in schools and the community, while core sessions are supported by transition and engagement activities to strengthen local links and provide stepping stones into grassroots clubs.

Activities include parallel delivery of school and club sessions, rugby festivals, invitations to watch club games and opportunities to play on the pitch at half time during club matches.

Activities are focused on the development of rugby skills and competencies *and* the broader wellbeing of participants. The importance of developing new players' confidence, communication, teamwork and respect is highlighted by deliverers.

## Insight

Participants' perceptions of rugby vary widely on joining the programme, but these perceptions become more positive and aspirational as participation progresses.

The percentage of deliverers who believe participants feel "Rugby's not for me" has decreased significantly over the course of the programme.

## Impact

### Engagement

Almost three quarters of all participants say they play more rugby than before, around half say they *want* to play more rugby and around two thirds say they watch more rugby.

The percentage of players who think they are good at sports, good at playing rugby and enjoy playing rugby has increased significantly over the course of their engagement with the programme.

### Wellbeing

While no changes in new players' perceptions of self and individual wellbeing are evident after three months, the percentage of participants who feel happy, confident, and believe they can achieve anything they want to has increased significantly between the start and six months of engagement.

### Project Rugby activities

“

*The group come together to train together every Tuesday evening... We also plan social activities once a month so the group start to meet outside of the training sessions and become friends.*

Deliverer, Stakeholder Survey

### Participant perceptions

“

*Wet, muddy and fun.*

“

*It's tiring. Grass gets on your shoes. Too much yelling.*

“

*I'm small, but I do enjoy it.*

“

*I don't really think rugby is 'me' and none of my mates go to rugby.*

### Since taking part in Project Rugby

**74%**

of surveyed participants say they play more rugby than before

**65%**

say they *want* to play more rugby than before

**38%**

say they know more about Premiership rugby clubs than before

Participant Survey

Evidence suggests that sustained engagement in Project Rugby activities may be required for some new players to develop the confidence and self-belief needed to progress to grassroots clubs.

### Connectedness

Significant increases in the percentages of new players who like being with others, find it easy to get on with people and work well in a team are evident across six months of engagement in Project Rugby.

Participants' perceptions are reiterated by deliverers who note that Project Rugby provides opportunities for social interaction that otherwise may not be available to people who need them most.

### Transition

Almost two thirds of respondents to the Stakeholder Survey say they have successfully transitioned participants into local grassroots clubs.

The percentage of surveyed participants who say they know about their local rugby club has increased by over a third, while the percentage who say they are members of their local rugby club has more than doubled.

Key challenges to transition identified by deliverers include a lack of support from parents and peers, the absence of intermediary exit routes for participants, and clubs not being as inclusive as they need to be to support players with complex disabilities.

### Deliverers, clubs & communities

Project Rugby is seen to have raised awareness of the needs of underrepresented groups within the community and how clubs can broaden their appeal and accessibility to meet these needs.

Deliverers have gained confidence in delivering differentiated and adapted activities and now feel better equipped to provide the bespoke provision required to "open rugby out to anyone".

Enhanced local links and partnership working across schools and clubs has also raised awareness and aspirations among stakeholder groups.

## Achievements & Challenges

### What works?

Provision of inclusive activities that demonstrate respect for and support the development of the 'whole' person is seen as key to the programme's success in motivating and enabling engagement

Premiership Rugby club coaches are reported to play a focal role in the programme. Their leadership, support, delivery of bespoke initiatives and willingness to work in partnership with schools and communities is valued highly by stakeholders.

### Since taking part in Project Rugby

**47%**

of surveyed participants say they know about their local rugby club

**19%**

say they are planning to join their local rugby club

Participant Survey

“

*Our students progressed immensely. All of them gained a huge amount of confidence. They all learnt new skills and their communication significantly improved.*

“

*We have achieved good rates of transition as a result of running club sessions alongside school/group sessions. This has ensured that participants could take part in their usual venue as well as experience club sessions with familiar coaches.*

“

*Project Rugby is confirmation that sport is open to all regardless of ability... That sport is inclusive, assisting in bringing persons together without prejudice... The project in essence has encouraged the participation in sport of many people who would not normally take part.*

Deliverers, Stakeholder Survey

Taster and outreach sessions are seen as effective in engaging new players while festivals, competitions and events are cited as key to retaining players, increasing aspirations, and facilitating transition.

The chance to play at half time during club games is seen as useful for motivating and sustaining engagement, while visits from Premiership club players are valued highly for inspiring and maintaining interest.

## Challenges

Six key challenges to delivery are identified by deliverers: perceptions, transition, ethos, buy-in, logistics, and data.

Negative perceptions are recognised as a challenge to the engagement of target groups. Taster and outreach sessions are seen as effective, but deliverers emphasise that sustained efforts aimed at engaging all sectors of the community are needed.

Transition of Project Rugby participants into local grassroots rugby clubs is challenging for some deliverers. They highlight the need for dedicated stepping stones to grassroots clubs to sustain engagement.

Concerns around the 'win at all costs' ethos of some clubs are expressed by deliverers, while others cite the degree of inclusivity of clubs and the ability of club staff to support people with diverse needs.

Stakeholders emphasise that the work of Project Rugby deliverers in schools and communities must be reflected in the work of the clubs to retain new players from underrepresented groups.

Deliverers report a degree of attrition by participants, citing logistical reasons in relation to sourcing and resourcing staff, facilities, and transport. However, retention is broadly reported to be good.

The challenge of collecting data is noted by deliverers, and easier ways of gathering information from participants would be welcomed.

## Embedding & sustaining

Stakeholders are keen to see inclusive provision embedded into the culture of rugby so that all people have access to the game and support to transition into local grassroots clubs.

While opportunities for all are seen to be important, the need for targeted interventions for people less likely to access these opportunities is recognised by stakeholders.

Early provision of opportunities is seen as key to maximising impact. This is particularly pertinent for underrepresented groups who may receive and access these opportunities later than others.

Partnership working is believed to be pivotal to the success of recruitment, outreach and transition events; the retention and progression of players; challenging perceptions; and increasing social cohesion and trust. Actively engaging with communities, and with those hardest to reach within these communities, will be vital to realising the programme's aim of using the values and essence of the game to help and support people who need it most.

## Achievements, Challenges & Next Steps

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*The sessions we do are fantastic and do not leave less able players out of the game. I love the inclusivity of our group and the coaches are amazing.*

“

*As a school we have been overwhelmed by the impact of Project Rugby... Our young people have fully engaged and gained so much from the experience...*

“

*Everything is provided for us which is great. There are challenges on the day around individual students and who attends but that is what we deal with anyway. One or two students are less keen and haven't tried yet. One is worried by being in a noisy hall and we are just encouraging him to be present at the moment.*

“

*Not as inclusive as we would like. We specialise in working with people with complex and profound disabilities however transition does not support this level of disability.*

“

*Don't cancel it. What's your objective for it? If it's to unearth the next Jonny Wilkinson then I'd stick with the private schools where kids get to play every day. If it's to engage with communities and to broaden understanding of the values of rugby then I'd stick with it and really push it because we've proven that it works.*

Deliverers, Stakeholder Survey

# Top Tips: A Deliverer's Guide to Project Rugby

1

## Offer Tasters

Negative perceptions are often part of what make people from underrepresented groups 'hard to reach'. Taster sessions are a great way to 'get your foot in the door' and demonstrate the appeal, accessibility and inclusivity of the game. They give people the chance 'try before they buy' and provide a means of challenging perceptions and developing new audiences through rugby.



2

## Create young champions

Activating young people to become engaged advocates of inclusive practice is the surest way to foster a culture of inclusivity in rugby. Inclusive young players pave the path for their peers to engage in the game and co-create more accessible and respectful places for all.



3

## Find a role for everyone

There is a role for each and every person; they can plan, organise, play, lead, coach, officiate and spectate. Help them find the starting point of their journey by allowing them to choose a role they are comfortable in, and can progress from.



4

## Signpost to appropriate exit routes

Some new players need extra time and support to develop the self-belief necessary to progress to grassroots clubs. Intermediate exit routes provide stepping stones to grassroots club engagement and will help to sustain the confidence and progression of new players.



5

## Work with partners

Partnership working is central to the success of outreach and transition events; to the retention and progression of new players; to increasing social connectedness; and to shifting perceptions. While challenging at times, actively engaging with all sectors of the community is key to using the values and essence of the game to support people most in need.



6

## Embrace learning

Inclusive practice is a collective task and different stakeholders have different roles and responsibilities to fulfil. Play your role by embracing opportunities to develop the skills and confidence you need to practise and promote inclusion.



7

## Audit and address

Opportunities that are 'open to all' are not always effective in engaging all people. Auditing your club's workforce will help identify gaps and shape provision so it is appealing and accessible to people from underrepresented groups.



8

## Collect, reflect and share

Evidence-based decision making is critical for the effective development of inclusive practice. Look for ways to evidence impact and find out what works, what doesn't, and why. Share this evidence as widely as possible to inform policy and investment and support provision and practice.

