



SCOTTISH RUGBY MATCH OFFICIAL STRATEGY 2021-24



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Introduction

Match officials are critical to the game at all levels and have a huge influence on people's enjoyment and participation in rugby. Be it facilitating a game of mini rugby, running touch at the local club, or in the 6 Nations, match officials play an integral part in the rugby experience.

To continually improve the quality and growth of rugby in Scotland we need the best match officials possible, who feel valued, supported and rewarded for their contribution to rugby.

Our Vision

Rugby in Scotland has the necessary depth and quality of Match Officials to deliver an enjoyable and quality rugby experience for all, whilst ensuring sustainable match official representation at the highest international levels.

Our Mission

- Recognising our desire that "Rugby is for Life", we are dedicated to ensuring that our game and values enrich the lives of our match officials, players and their communities.
- We will work collaboratively and actively seek to engage with and include all members of our community when developing match officiating.
- We will increase the positive profile of match officiating.
- We will inspire people to get involved and stay involved in match officiating, where necessary through innovative solutions.
- We are committed to supporting active lifelong participation in rugby and to providing officiating opportunities for all.
- We promote individual development and well-being and strive to enable all match officials to achieve their full potential.

Strategic Objectives - Overview

1. Produce world class match officials who will be an ever-present on the European and World stage.
2. Improve the quality and consistency of match officiating.
3. Increase the number and diversity of match officials to support the growth of the game.
4. Improve match official retention rates at all levels of the game.
5. Improve the standards of referee coaching at all levels of the game.
6. Streamline and strengthen match official governance at all levels.



Strategic Objectives - Detail

Strategic Objective	Specific Actions
1. Produce world class match officials who will be an ever-present on the European and World stage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 Closer align the Elite Refereeing Pathway to the High Performance game within Scottish Rugby. 1.2 Establish an Elite Refereeing recruitment programme and pathway with bespoke support for Female referees. 1.3 Establish a Performance Development Match Official Academy. 1.4 Develop a Talent Identification system and network. 1.5 Introduce a mentoring programme to support the next generation of Elite referees.
2. Improve the quality and consistency of match officiating.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 Introduce a Match Official Academy programme in each society with a national framework. 2.2 Introduce national and regional CPD events and workshops for match officials at all levels. 2.3 Implement a revised match official training and education pathway, and new accreditation process. 2.4 Introduce a referee exchange programme for match officials between referee societies and other unions. 2.5 Revise the match official grading system to support the development programmes and appointment processes. 2.6 Revamp the online Hive Learning match official community. 2.7 Support groups/forums created in each region to help targeted match official groups (e.g. female referees). 2.8 Introduce a Match Officiating Blueprint aimed at providing clarity on the 'how' and 'what' of match officiating, linking closely with the Scottish Rugby Technical Blueprint 'The Scottish Way'. 2.9 Review match official injury prevention/management, wellbeing and fitness resources and support for all levels of the game.
3. Increase the number and diversity of match officials to support the growth of the game.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3.1 Communicate a revised match official pathway (all levels) and role profiles. 3.2 Implement a revised recognition programme within each society, aligned to the Scottish Rugby programme. 3.3 Promote match officiating as a viable progression from playing to all current and former players. 3.4 Complete an annual data analysis exercise on all match official activities to help support the development of Match Officiating at all Levels. 3.5 Raise the profile of match officiating through a new marketing campaign, including a 'Get into Refereeing' pack. 3.6 Host regional recruitment activities /events in each region. 3.7 Revamp the match official web pages on the Scottish Rugby website. 3.8 Deliver targeted Female specific match official courses and events. 3.9 Support Referee Societies with Marketing and Communications activities. 3.10 Work with Referee Societies to undertake a rebranding exercise to help modernise and develop.

4. Improve Match Official retention rates at all levels of the game.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Introduce a Newly Qualified Referees (NQR) retention and development programme. 4.2 Introduce a new 'Newly Qualified Match Official' liaison role in each society. 4.3 Introduce a post-course follow-up process to support Match Officials becoming active. 4.4 Annual national welcome event for new match officials. 4.5 Match Officials at all levels to be registered in SCRUMS system to track retention rates and trends. 4.6 Increase the number of match officials accessing opportunities within Rugby Development programmes. 4.7 Implement an annual review process with active match officials to support their transition through the pathway.
5. Improve the standards of referee coaching at all levels of the game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Referee Coach Coordinator appointed within each Referee Society, with accompanying national training programme. 5.2 Develop an Elite Referee Coach Programme for talented coaches. 5.3 Introduce a new Referee Coaching programme including courses and CPD.
6. Streamline and strengthen match official governance at all levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1 Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders in the delivery of Match Officiating. 6.2 Introduce a new Match Official Strategic Board, implementation sub-groups and regional advisory groups. 6.3 Revise the referee society participation agreements in line with the match official strategic objectives. 6.4 Facilitate the sharing of good practice between referee societies. 6.5 Deliver an annual national referee conference. 6.6 Create a match official safeguarding policy and review safeguarding practice in each referee society. 6.7 Review the incentives for people to start or being retained in match officiating.

Strategic Planning Process

In November 2020, a 'Raising our game' conference was organised collaboratively by Scottish Rugby and the Scottish Rugby Referees Association to initiate discussions on the future of match officiating in Scotland. This conference was facilitated by Steve Gormley (Open Arena Consultancy) and identified the need for a new match officiating strategy for the whole game, and a need for closer alignment between the key stakeholders – Scottish Rugby, Scottish Rugby Referees Association, Referee Societies, Club and Schools.

A Match Official Project Board was set up in January 2021 comprising of representatives from Scottish Rugby and the Scottish Rugby Referees Association, to oversee the development of a new strategy to cover the period 2021-2024.

Working groups were established in February 2021, again comprising of representatives from Scottish Rugby and the Scottish Rugby Referees Association, to produce recommendations for inclusion in the strategy. The project board and working group representatives are tabled overleaf.

Group	Scottish Rugby Representatives	Scottish Rugby Referees Association & Referee Society Representatives
Project Board	Sheila Begbie, Neil Graham, Chris Hildrey, Stephen Gemmell, Andrew Macpherson, Ailie Gardner	Graeme Hastie, Kenneth Knott, Mhairi Hay, Vernon Fawcett
Recruitment & Retention	David Drummond, Jen Griffin, Hollie Davidson	Vernon Fawcett, Steven Dyer, Allana Maclean, John Evans, Grant Steven, Willie Stoops, Gavin Douglas
Technical & Pathways	Rudi Urbach, Colin Brett, Ben Blain	Mhairi Hay, Iain Heard, Jamie McGregor, Jess Butler, Colin George, Colin Dow
High Performance	Andrew Macpherson, Stephen Gemmell, Tappe Henning, Michael Adamson	Neil Paterson, Charles Samson, Bob Nevins
Governance	Sheila Begbie, Neil Graham, Chris Hildrey	Graeme Hastie, Kenneth Knott, Jonathan Cockayne, John McLaughlin
Marketing & Communications	Caitlin Gould, Alyssa Wilson, Sam Grove-White, Pete Burgon	Ruaridh Campbell, Ed Crick

Each working group engaged with internal and external stakeholders to sense check their discussions and provided the project board with regular updates. The project board agreed the strategic plan in June 2021, before updating the Scottish Rugby Referees Association committee, Scottish Rugby Council and Board.

Implementation Framework

The Match Official Strategic Board will oversee the implementation of this plan. The Strategic Board will convene quarterly to review progress against the objectives and targets set out in the plan. The implementation plan will set out specific goals, objectives, actions and progress indicators to guide the Match Official Strategy over the course of the next three seasons.

The implementation plan is [available here](#).

Match Official Pathway

The Match Official pathway illustrates the opportunities to start and progress in Match Officiating and acts as a focus point for this strategic plan. The pathway provides clarity of the roles within match officiating and will support the ongoing development of programmes and interventions to support the growth of match officiating in Scotland.



Stakeholder Roles and Responsibilities

The key stakeholders within Match Officiating in Scotland are listed below with the main responsibilities associated with each group:

Scottish Rugby Referees Association

- Represent the interests of Rugby Match Officials.
- Collaborate with Scottish Rugby & Referee Societies to further the recruitment, development & training of Match Officials.
- Facilitate good practice amongst Referee Societies.
- Provide representation on the Scottish Rugby Council.

Referee Societies

- Manage a programme of development for all Society Match Officials to progress through the development pathway.
- Administer the appointments of Match Officials at the agreed levels of the game.
- Actively recruit & develop Society Match Officials to meet the demands of the regional area.
- Promote match officiating as a pathway for those not able to play on any more or those coming to the end of their playing career.
- Liaise and engage with local rugby clubs to raise awareness of match officiating opportunities.
- Assist Scottish Rugby with the selection process to identify Match Officials with potential to officiate National Panel and/or High Performance rugby (Managed by Scottish Rugby, supported by Referee Societies).
- Manage Society accounts and administration including the distribution of kit.

Scottish Rugby

- Oversee a programme of training and education courses and Continuous Personal Development (CPD) for all Match Officials in conjunction with Referee Societies.
- Manage a programme of development, CPD & appointments of the High Performance & National Panels Match Officials.
- Provide central operational support to facilitate match officiating in the community and High Performance game.
- Oversee the process of identifying and supporting the transition and retention of Match Officials into, through and out of panels.
- Rugby Development responsible for engaging with Referee Societies and clubs/schools to implement the Match Official strategy.
- Set minimum Match Officiating standards for all levels of the game and communicate these to Societies.
- Provide funding to Referee Societies to support the delivery of the Match Official strategy and day-to-day operational processes.
- Ensure Match Officials meet minimum standards before being appointed.

Clubs and Schools

- Actively promote Match Officiating opportunities to current and former players.
- Identify Match Officials to actively officiate matches at all levels of the community game.
- Responsible to register active Match Officials in community level rugby (e.g. U16s).
- Ensure Match Officials meet minimum standards before being appointed.
- Facilitate good communication between club/school and local referee Society.
- Promote and apply behavioural standards (code of practice) for all club members interacting with match officials.

Data Insights

Throughout the strategic planning process a range of data sources were used to inform the strategic direction and objectives. This data provided valuable insights into the match official landscape and will continue to help shape priorities within the implementation phase. Some of the key data insights are outlined below from three main data sources - SRRA Inclusion and Diversity Survey 2021, Who's The Ref data 2021, 4 Unions Survey 2018 and SCRUMS.

Key data insights:

- The vast majority of match officials (85%) started refereeing in order that they could stay involved after retiring voluntarily or through injury from playing (Source – SRRA Inclusion and Diversity Survey 2021).
- Active match officials quote lack of support from societies, abuse from players and coaches, lone working (and isolation after a game), lack of coaching or negative coaching, lack of kit and weather as reasons for giving up refereeing (Source – SRRA Inclusion and Diversity Survey 2021).
- 5% of the current society referees are female, with 2.9% of fixtures refereed by a female in the 2019-20 season (Source – Who's The Ref data 2021).
- Society referees were appointed to an average of 13.6 games in season 2019-20 (Source – Who's The Ref data 2021).
- 42% of match officials identified 'threatening touchline behaviour' as the biggest threat to our game and match official retention (Source: 4 Unions survey 2018).
- 2218 match officials are registered as having completed a qualification but their status as an active match official needs validating (Source: SCRUMS 2021).



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