



Player Welfare Action Plan 2023

Community Game



July 2023

Introduction

Rugby is a contact sport and therefore it is acknowledged that players face risk in participating. However, research also shows that playing rugby union can significantly improve health and wellbeing (Griffin et al; 2020) and is a significant contributor to society.

Whilst there are risks in taking part in any contact sport, it is incumbent on any governing body to take steps to mitigate these where possible, and Scottish Rugby is committed to taking steps to do just this, starting with the introduction of the Player Welfare Action Plan.

This plan is designed to reduce injuries at all levels of the game, female or male and mini to adult by setting out the key areas in the community game where the introduction of new or updated policies are aimed to minimise risk while retaining the fundamentals of our game.

It is everyone's responsibility – from coaches, players, referees to volunteers - to ensure that player welfare is at the forefront of decisions made on and off the pitch.

Scottish Rugby's Player Welfare Action Plan aims to put the player first and foremost, utilising an evidence-based approach for decision making.

Aligned to the World Rugby six point plan for player welfare (available [here](#)), the Action Plan highlights what Scottish Rugby is committing to in the areas of pitch side care, concussion management, age banding, laws, education, research, wellbeing and coaching.

A core part of this strategy will be to create a Player Welfare committee, which will report directly to the Club Rugby Board, and this is a key part of the accountability process.

The Action Plan recognises that injury profile differs between men and women, and that differing levels of the community game also have differing injury risks.

Scottish Rugby's Player Welfare Action plan is based around eight objectives:

 <p>Objective 1: Improve standards of pitch side care</p>	 <p>Objective 2: Improve standards of concussion management</p>	 <p>Objective 3: Reduce physical mismatches through appropriate age banding and grading</p>	 <p>Objective 4: Implement age and stage appropriate laws to reduce injury rates</p>
 <p>Objective 5: Enhance the quality of player welfare themed education programmes available to clubs, schools and societies</p>	 <p>Objective 6: Increase the volume and quality of research in conjunction with established research partners</p>	 <p>Objective 7: Improve the wellbeing support available to all stakeholders in the game, and support to injured players</p>	 <p>Objective 8: Improving the quality of coaching of the key contact elements of the game at all levels</p>

Objective 1 - Improving standards of pitch side care

Injuries can and do occur in the rugby environment and even with the most robust mitigation, they will continue to occur.

It is recognised that prompt recognition of more serious injuries and timely management will improve outcomes of injuries.

Improving the skills and experience of those responsible for recognising and/or treating injuries pitch side at training or games is vital to improving player welfare standards.

As such, Scottish Rugby seeks to introduce minimum and aspirational standards for clubs and schools, along with improved emergency medical action planning and risk assessment tools, aiming to improve the standards of pitch care throughout the game.

To help achieve this objective Scottish Rugby will...



Communicate new minimum and aspirational pitch-side care standards for all levels of the game (see appendix 1).



Develop Emergency Action Plan / Risk assessment tools.



Create a network of Player Welfare Champions in each club/school.



Publish a list of recommended first aid equipment for all levels of the game.


Objective 2 - Improving standards of concussion management

The risks of concussion in contact sports such as rugby are well documented and are subject to ongoing research throughout the world. As laid out in this Action Plan, Scottish Rugby aims to improve overall concussion awareness through enhanced training programmes and marketing campaigns.

Improving the ability of all participants (players, coaches, and referees) to recognise and react to concussion symptoms, as well as undertaking research projects, are also key objectives of this plan.

To view Scottish Rugby's concussion policy, click [here](#).


To help achieve this objective Scottish Rugby will...



Promote the 'if in doubt, sit them out' message through a new marketing campaign.



Implement a revised concussion awareness training programme, including a new e-learning module for all stakeholders.



Integrate concussion training into all levels of player, coach and match official education.

Objective 3 - Reduce physical mismatches through appropriate age banding and grading

Scottish Rugby implemented a range of new age banding policies for the 2008/09 season after a spike in serious injuries involving players playing against older and more physically mature opposition.

Whilst these policies have significantly reduced the number of serious injuries at key age groups, we recognise that it is time to revisit them.

It is important to review current data on techniques to assess maturation and physical readiness to play out with chronological age band to ensure that the tools Scottish Rugby use are as effective as they can be in terms of player safety. These tools should be specific to our rugby playing population and consider differences between sexes if required.

Through this Action Plan, Scottish Rugby will embark on a full review of age banding policies and work with other Unions, sports and research partners to understand more about this complex but important topic.

To help achieve this objective Scottish Rugby will...



Refresh administration process linked to current age banding policies to smooth the process for the player.




Undertake a full review of age banding policies for the both the male and female game in line with current research.

Objective 4 - Implement age and stage appropriate laws to reduce injury rates

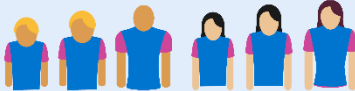
As a result of injury data analysis and research, Scottish Rugby is now more accurately able to identify areas of the game that result in high injury rates (e.g., tackle area). Through ongoing research and consultation with clubs and schools, and in conjunction with World Rugby, Scottish Rugby will seek to implement new laws aimed at reducing injury exposure in certain areas of the game.

The action plan also sets out plans to engage with research partners to ensure law trials are monitored effectively so that injury rates and exposure can be accurately assessed.


To help achieve this objective Scottish Rugby will...



Establish a community game law group to review and implement welfare focused law trials.



Undertake an Age Grade Law Variation (AGLV) review in line with results from AGLV trials from 2017-22.



Adapt specific laws for the women and girls' game in line with specific female injury prevention data and research outcomes.

Objective 5 - Enhance the quality of player welfare themed education programmes available to clubs, schools and societies

Scottish Rugby currently delivers a programme of online and face-to-face courses and workshops for club and school volunteers. These programmes range from First Aid courses, through to the e-learning RugbyRight course.

To fulfil this objective, Scottish Rugby will work with partner organisations to develop a suite of new and enhanced resources and courses to upskilling those involved in delivering contact rugby.


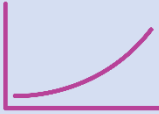


To help achieve this objective Scottish Rugby will...

 <p>Communicate a revised first aid and pitch side care education pathway (see appendix 2).</p>	 <p>Develop a new e-learning first responder course to complement existing provision, which will be open access.</p>	 <p>Increase number of qualified medical educators in each region and enhance their ongoing development.</p>	 <p>Develop a new concussion e-learning module to complement existing materials.</p>
 <p>Develop specific women and girl's resources and education programmes, including a female health toolkit.</p>	 <p>Review the annual RugbyRight minimum standard course to ensure it is still fit for purpose and in line with the objectives set out in this action plan.</p>	 <p>Continue to deliver an Anti Doping education programme in line with UK Anti Doping requirements.</p>	 <p>Develop a suite of dental health resources.</p>

Objective 6 - Increase the volume and quality of research in conjunction with established research partners

In collaboration with World Rugby and University partners, Scottish Rugby is currently undertaking research within several areas of the community game. It is Scottish Rugby's intention through this Action Plan to increase the volume of research relating to key areas of the community game, so that decisions regarding laws and education continue to be informed by quality, relevant research.

To help achieve this objective Scottish Rugby will...

 <p>Enhance the injury reporting process on the SCRUMS system and subsequently publish injury data on an annual basis.</p>	 <p>Establish a network of research partners to evaluate injury trends, and support ongoing welfare programmes</p>	 <p>Continue to support specific women and girls research in conjunction with World Rugby and University of Edinburgh.</p>	 <p>Undertake match analysis projects at key ages and stages to support decisions around laws and injury management.</p>
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Objective 7 - Improve the wellbeing support available to all stakeholders in the game, and support to injured players

There is a strong and positive link between sport and mental wellbeing. This is why Scottish Rugby is passionate in raising awareness of mental wellbeing, breaking any negative stigmas which might exist around poor mental health, and enhancing available support.

Through a partnership approach with agencies such as Breathing Space and other home Unions, Scottish Rugby is committed to ensuring clubs, schools and societies are supported with materials, training and guidance on matters relating to mental wellbeing.

Scottish Rugby is also committed to providing support to injured players through its insurance provider and via partner charities such as the Murrayfield Injured Players Foundation.

To help achieve this objective Scottish Rugby will...

			
Clearly signpost clubs/schools to mental health support and training.	Establish an action group to explore and promote partnerships to enhance knowledge and signposting.	Strengthen partnership with the Murrayfield Injured Players Foundation and other partners.	Promote the Mental Health & Wellbeing e-learning course to a wider audience.

Objective 8 - Improve the quality of coaching of the tackle and contact area of the game at all levels

Improving the quality of coaching in key areas of the game, such as the tackle, will significantly impact on a player's skill, decision making understanding of the laws of the game. This helps to reduce injury risks facing them, their teammates and the opposition.

Scottish Rugby has already implemented minimum standards for coaches, requiring them to possess a formal coaching qualification in order to coach contact forms of the game. Further information is available [here](#).





Through a blended approach of online and in person programmes, Scottish Rugby will develop an enhanced range of resources and courses to upskill coaches on aspects of player welfare.

To help achieve this objective Scottish Rugby will...

			
Set minimum coaching standards whereby all coaches will be required to be qualified (as of August 2024).	Enhance the Rugby Activate Injury Prevention material for available coaches.	Develop a physical blueprint to improve physical readiness to play.	Develop a tackle passport programme to support the introduction of tackling at key age groups.

Appendix 1 – Standards of Pitch Side Care in the community game

Definitions:

 Rugby First Responder	1  Level 1 provider	2  Level 2 provider	3  Level 3 provider
<p>Any individual who is present at a training and match situation.</p> <p>Online e-learning module available to support individuals make correct decisions to keep the person safe until skilled help arrives.</p>	<p>An individual who has successfully completed a World Rugby First Aid In Rugby (FAIR) course or recognised equivalent Sport First Aid Course.</p> <p>Covered under Scottish Rugby's insurance policy.</p>	<p>An individual who has successfully completed Scottish Rugby Union Medical Cardiac and Pitchside Care (SCRUMCAPS) level 2 or an equivalent course.</p> <p>Has a health care background and may be able to provide other skills such as injury management after the match and rehab/prehab*</p>	<p>An individual who has successfully completed SCRUMCAPS level 3 or an equivalent course.</p> <p>Typically, a physiotherapist or doctor. Can provide advanced immediate care and ongoing support pre and post-match.*</p>
<p>*Providers require their own indemnity insurance to provide additional skills.</p>			

Pitchside Care Minimum Standards

1. All clubs and schools should develop a Medical Emergency Action Plan (MEAP) which should be shared with club personnel, coaches and players.
2. MEAP should be shared with visiting teams ahead of match day.
3. The MEAP should include ensuring ambulance access is available and access points are always kept free of parked vehicles or other obstruction.
4. Risk assessments should be undertaken if it isn't possible to achieve minimum care standards and activity modified if required.
5. Clubs or schools may engage an individual to also provide prehab, rehabilitation and ongoing care to the players.
6. It is the club's responsibility to ensure that if this is the case, the individual has the appropriate qualifications and indemnity to provide this care, in addition to the required pitchside care qualification.

Mini & youth rugby

Pitchside care standards for season 2023/24 onwards

	Recommended Minimum Standards	Aspirational Standards
Training	<p>1 x level 1 provider to 40 players. Consideration given to the layout of pitches as this may require additional providers.</p> <p>Risk assessment recommended if the standard above cannot be met, and session modified depending on outcome.</p> <p>Medical Emergency Action Plan (MEAP) in place.</p>	<p>1 designated Level 1 provider per age group.</p> <p>Co-ordinator to support providers if multiple groups training at the same time.</p> <p>Recommended that the level 1 provider is separate from the coaching team.</p>
Matches	<p>1 designated Level 1 provider per match (home team to provide).</p> <p>Risk assessment should be performed if minimum standard isn't achievable, and game modified if required.</p> <p>Medical Emergency Action Plan (MEAP) in place.</p>	<p>1 designated Level 1 provider per team.</p> <p>Top youth and schools conferences – 1 x Level 2 provider per match (Home team to provide).</p> <p>Recommended that the provider is separate from the coaching team.</p>
Festivals	<p>1 designated Level 1 provider per 50 players.</p> <p>Medical Emergency Action Plan (MEAP) in place.</p>	<p>1 designated level 1 provider per game. Consider geography of pitches</p>

Adult rugby





Pitchside care standards for season 2023/24 onwards

	Recommended Minimum Standards	Aspirational Standards
Training	<p>1 x level 1 provider to 40 players but consider layout of pitches as this may require additional providers.</p> <p>Risk assessment recommended if standard cannot be met, and session modified depending on outcome.</p> <p>Medical Emergency Action Plan (MEAP) in place.</p> <p><u>Premiership (Men & Women)</u> 1 designated physio (Level 2/3 provider) present for Thursday evening training.</p>	<p>1 designated Level 1 provider per age group.</p> <p>Co-ordinator to support Providers if multiple groups training at the same time.</p> <p>Recommended that the level 1 provider is separate from the coaching team.</p>
Matches	<p>1 designated Level 1 provider per <u>match</u> (home team to provide).</p> <p>Risk assessment should be performed if minimum standard isn't achievable, and game modified if required.</p> <p>Medical Emergency Action Plan (MEAP) in place.</p> <p><u>National League matches</u> 1 designated Level 1 provider per team (separate from the coaching team).</p> <p><u>Premiership (Men & Women)</u> Level 2 provider per team plus additional Level 2/3 match day Doctor.</p>	<p>1 designated level 1 provider per <u>team</u>.</p> <p>Recommended that the provider is separate from the coaching team.</p> <p><u>National League matches</u> Level 2 provider per match present (home team to provide)</p>

All other medical support or provision such as therapist led prehabilitation and rehabilitation, strapping, soft tissue massage and the treatment of potential non-life and limb threatening and musculoskeletal injuries is outside the scope of this document and should be determined by the club, school, college, university, and rugby activity providers based on circumstances, availability of personnel and capacity.

Any organisation and/or practitioner providing additional provision should be appropriately qualified and insured.

Appendix 2 – Education pathway and offering

 E-learning modules	1  First Aid in Rugby / SCRUMCAPS Level 1 course	2  SCRUMCAPS Level 2 course	3  SCRUMCAPS Level 3 course
<p>Online non-assessed courses.</p> <p>Rugby First Responder course.</p> <p>Concussion education.</p> <p>Clean sport (anti doping) course.</p>	<p>Qualifies the individual as a Level 1 provider.</p> <p>1 day course.</p> <p>Available to anyone who is undertaking a first aid role at the club or school.</p>	<p>Qualifies the individual as a Level 2 provider.</p> <p>1 day course.</p> <p>Available to health care professionals who are providing pitch side care.</p>	<p>Qualifies the individual as a Level 3 provider.</p> <p>2 day course.</p> <p>Available to those who have a Health Care Professional background and who provide pitch-side care to those in elite, performance or representative programmes</p>

Contacts

Clubs and schools can contact Scottish Rugby regarding welfare related matters by emailing training.education@sru.org.uk