



**CASHBACK
2025/26**



CASE STUDY

Female Activity

Creating Environments Where Girls Felt Comfortable Taking Part

Networks

FEMALE ACTIVITY

Creating Environments Where Girls Felt Comfortable Taking Part

In many schools, girls did not initially need more rugby opportunities. They needed environments where trying rugby felt socially comfortable in the first place.

Across Phase 6, staff consistently reflected that confidence, friendships and the wider social environment often shaped girls' participation far more than rugby ability itself. For many young people, the biggest barrier was not the sport, but the fear of judgement, pressure or simply walking into an unfamiliar environment.

As a result, some of the most effective approaches were often the simplest. Smaller groups, familiar faces, girls-only activity and supportive coaching environments allowed confidence to develop gradually and naturally over time.

One staff member at Castlebrae High School reflected:

“The girls sessions gave pupils a chance to try rugby without feeling judged or pressured.” Staff Member, Castlebrae High School

That same theme emerged repeatedly across schools including Larkhall Academy, Greenfield Academy, Auchmuty High School and Inverclyde Academy. In many environments, girls-only sessions became an important first step into rugby, particularly for young people who may never previously have considered themselves sporty or likely to engage in school sport.

Importantly, participation often grew through relationships rather than recruitment drives. Young people attended because friends were already involved, because older pupils encouraged them to come along, or because the environment itself felt welcoming and relaxed. In several schools, staff noted that once a small core group became established, confidence and attendance often grew organically from there.

At Auchmuty High School and Glenrothes RFC, this approach contributed to significant growth in girls' participation throughout the phase. Through regular girls-only activity, transition festivals and strong school–club alignment, increasing numbers of young people progressed into school fixtures, festivals and club rugby for the first time. More than 4,300 female attendances were recorded across the programme, while girls' membership at Glenrothes RFC increased significantly over the phase.

What appeared most effective was the flexibility of delivery. Sessions did not immediately centre competition or performance. Touch rugby, smaller-sided games and adaptable approaches to contact allowed young people to build confidence at their own pace before deciding how far they wanted to progress within the sport.

Practical barriers also mattered. Across several schools and festivals, staff highlighted the importance of access to spare boots, gumshields and kit. Removing those smaller obstacles helped participation feel realistic and accessible for young people who may otherwise have felt rugby was “not for them.”

Role models increasingly became another important part of sustaining engagement. Across Greenfield Academy, Dundee rugby activity and wider festival programmes, older pupils and pathway players supported younger girls through coaching, refereeing and ambassador roles. Seeing older girls already participating within rugby environments helped normalise involvement and made progression pathways feel more visible and achievable.

At Larkhall Academy, one pupil reflected:

“I used to be nervous about taking part, but now I'd encourage other girls to come along.” Pupil, Larkhall Academy

Staff also noted that rugby environments increasingly became important social spaces for girls who had previously struggled to engage confidently in school sport. In several cases, participation led to stronger friendship groups, improved confidence within school life and a greater willingness to try new experiences generally.

One teacher at Inverclyde Academy explained:

“The programme has opened opportunities for young people to come out of their comfort zone and try rugby for the first time.”
PE Teacher, Inverclyde Academy

Across the phase, one of the strongest areas of learning was that female participation grew most successfully where environments adapted to the young people engaging in them. Where schools and clubs prioritised encouragement, relationships and flexibility during early experiences of rugby, girls were far more likely to remain involved and continue progressing within the sport over time.

In many cases, confidence in rugby came after young people first felt comfortable within the environment itself.