

## **BUCS RUGBY LEAGUE STRATEGY 2011-2015**

### **Introduction**

This document outlines realistic strategic aims for the development of rugby league in Higher Education in the UK. The BUCS rugby league strategy covers the period 2011-2015. The aim of the strategy is to improve BUCS rugby league across three key areas; Participation, Competition, and Performance.

Both sport and HE is experiencing significant changes, having been directly affected by recent political and economic factors. This strategy needs to reflect the added financial pressures on HE sports provision over the next few years, and be mindful of the increased pressure across HE to improve the quality of student experience and enhance graduate employability. The strategy, therefore aims to support this and ensure that rugby league provides a valuable role in this.

#### **1. Current state of student rugby league:**

- There are currently 51 individual HE clubs in BUCS leagues, with 70 teams competing in 11 BUCS leagues.
- Number of RFL's registered community game open age (over 18) players are registered student players: 16,968 registered open age community game players giving student rugby league a 13.5% share of this total.
- There is also a Merit league (which does not receive BUCS points) with almost a dozen teams including second teams and new RL clubs such as Imperial and Reading. There are also some older clubs playing in the Merit League such as Staffordshire who have struggled to commit to BUCS leagues for the last couple of years and are rebuilding; in the Merit league they can play fixtures as and when they can raise a team.
- There are approximately 1500 registered players playing every week in BUCS competitions
- The best student rugby league teams also enter into the Carnegie Challenge Cup.
- Women's student rugby league is not currently recognised by BUCS

## **2. RFL / SRL involvement in RL in HE**

- BUCS Rugby League (and Student Rugby League generally) is run by the Student Rugby League, a separate body of the Rugby Football League, and supported by the BUCS Sports Department. However from September 2011 the organisation will be fully integrated into the RFL.
- The eight BUCS Super 8 University clubs are supported to a varying degree by local RFL development officers. Support is also currently being given to other University clubs where the University is supportive towards RL such as Nottingham Trent, Exeter and Derby.
- The RFL/SRL did part-fund the Super 8 club coaches through the TASS funding, however since they were dropped by TASS this is no longer possible. They do offer support to many universities via their community RL Coaches that support the local University clubs to varying degrees from taster sessions through to 2/3 sessions guaranteed every week including Wednesday afternoon coaching. We have 4 University clubs where the Uni part-fund the CRLC
- The Rugby Football League have stated that they see HE as a vital sector that play a major role in helping them to GROW and SUSTAIN.
- Through an inclusive and varied range of programmes the SRL / RFL are able offer the student population the opportunity to participate at every level. This may be through 'dropping in' to informal sessions, facilitated in the first instance, by League4all officers, to the other end of the spectrum, representing on the student international stage.
- RFL assist BUCS in facilitating a vibrant and ever growing formal competition whilst also looking to support a complimentary programme of League4all which includes Touch, Tag and other variations of the game. Support is provided to HE club committees through a Volunteering support programme and RFL work actively to encourage those who participate in FE to remain in full time education post 19.
- RFL are also looking to progress the development of the women's game in higher education.
- RFL have been working on developing a 'Uni mark' and aim to pilot this in a small number of universities from September 2010.
- The League4All programme will be going into HEIs from September 2010 onwards. A mapping exercise is in progress to prioritise the roll out based on the capacity and resource of RFL and the audit findings from the He and Community Sport audit.

### 3. Participation

The aim of BUCS and the SRL is to increase participation in rugby league in Universities. Rugby League is currently enjoying an increase in participation in HE, however with turbulent times ahead within the sector, some of which could affect rugby league more than most sports, a robust participation strategy needs to be implemented to help ensure that growth is maintained.

<b>Strategy for Developing Participation</b>		
<b>Focus</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Measures of success</b>
Touch Rugby is a very widely used development tool of the RFL as it introduces players to the general rules of the game and allows them to utilise a lot of the skills involved without the element of contact that can put some players off. Touch rugby is very popular outside of Universities, however has not grown within Universities to the same extent.	To encourage universities that don't currently have a rugby league offer to start the process with touch-rugby.	SRL/RFL to implement Touch Rugby programmes in targeted areas where the game doesn't have a presence and offer the provision of implementation, equipment and support.
RFL to run a Touch Rugby Tournament at an existing BUCS event.	RFL to run a touch-rugby tournament at the BUCS Surf Champs 2012. BUCS to provide support from an accommodation offer and promoting the event.	To encourage universities that don't currently have a rugby league offer to start the process with touch-rugby To encourage those Universities that do have teams to grow their numbers by engaging new players in an attractive way to get into the game.
Add development officers to areas where the game needs help to development ie. the midlands and London	SRL to implement development officers in London and the Midlands to develop the game in these areas.	To set up a London (and surrounding areas) league to strengthen the game in a historically relatively weak area for the game (St.Mary's aside).
The 2013 Student Rugby League World Cup.	SRL keen to take the Student WC to an area where the game could do with a boost and would ideally like a University with the requisite facilities to host the competition, There will be playing, volunteering, attendance, curtain raiser opportunities at the Cup, with an individual strategy	To encourage universities that don't currently have a rugby league offer the opportunity to get their students to get involved in a multi-nation competition. To encourage those Universities that do have teams to grow their numbers by engaging new members by getting them

	to be completed by Jan 2012	involved in the competition.
The 2013 Rugby League World Cup	Work with the RFL to secure volunteering, ticketing and curtain raiser opportunities at the 2013 World Cup	To increase the profile of BUCS rugby league and provide a lasting legacy for those students involved.

#### 4. Competition

- **The BUCS leagues and BUCS Championships**
- In the 2010/11 season the Super 8 Winners were decided by a series of play-offs with a Grand Final (screened live on Premier Sports).
- The BUCS Championship is a knock-out cup competition that all teams enter and compete for. The final of this is played as part of the BUCS Championships and was held at West Park RFC near Leeds.
- Currently BUCS only sanction the men's competition.
- Beneath the bottom competition there are inter mural games, "League for All" programmes.
- RFL in the process of developing a touch programme and are keen to grow this from Sept 2011.

#### 4 (b) SWOT ANALYSIS OF CURRENT BUCS COMPETITION OFFER

##### Strengths:

- Competitive Competition
- Wide Spread of Universities
- Generally high standard of performance, comparatively across other BUCS sports
- Has been televised in the 2010/11 season
- Simple structure
- Growing as a sport

##### Weaknesses

- Not played in every University
- Final not always played at Iconic ground
- Has had the profile raised through TV coverage, but still not huge crowds watching finals (circa 1000)
- Venue not geographically part of the BUCS Championships (in Sheffield)
- Communication between BUCS & SRL could be improved

##### Opportunities

- 2013 Rugby League World Cup – general increase in awareness & profile of the sport
- New versions of the game – touch rugby, 9's, tag

- TV coverage to increase awareness and profile

### Threats

- Other sports attracting potential players
- Increase in tuition fees affecting student numbers generally, but potentially areas & demographics where the game is particularly strong

<b>Strategy for Developing Competition</b>		
<b>Focus</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Measures of success</b>
Build the Rugby League Championship Final into a well-supported, high-quality event.	Hold finals at an iconic rugby venue	Iconic venue, large crowd, high profile coverage.
Replicate the top level of the sport by the competition structure	To create a play-off series in the top level of the competition to provide a focus and level of excitement at the end of the season. This will be done in the Super 8's initially with a view to rolling out across all leagues	A high-quality, well run series of play-off games with a Grand Final. Raised profile of the game. Increased coverage.
Increase the profile of the competition	To gain more coverage for the student game	More local and national press coverage for BUCS finals and the game in HE generally.
Create a code of conduct and best practice	That individual university clubs can: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) improve the organisation of their club matches.</li> <li>b) Engage with their University and encourage spectators to games</li> </ul> Professionalise the games as a "product" that could have commercial value attached to it by way of sponsors, tv coverage.	Increase in organisation, quality and profile of BUCS rugby league matches.
The 2013 Rugby League World Cup	Work with the RFL to secure volunteering, ticketing and curtain raiser opportunities at the 2013 World Cup	To increase the profile of BUCS rugby league and provide a lasting legacy for those students involved.

## 5. Performance

- The current performance pathway is well established and strong.
- On the whole talented RL athletes generally have been identified prior to 19 yrs old although the SRL does act as a second chance for a number of athletes who return to the pro game at Championship and occasionally Super League level after university having played in BUCS competitions, then progressed to the rep programme and then are picked up by the clubs.
- The RFL are developing links between the university clubs and pro clubs, good examples of this are Gateshead Thunder linking with Northumbria Uni and Middlesex Uni linking with London Skolars where the University attracts young aspiring players, who have been cut by Super League clubs.
- Current Super League coach Rob Powell began his coaching career at Newcastle University as a student there and has progressed his way through the coaching pathway and is now half way through his first season as a Super League head Coach with Harlequins RL.
- 160 players are selected at the start of each representative year to play in the SRL Regional Championships, out approx. 1500 registered players - this represents just over 9%.
- Championship clubs recognise the GB students programme as a quality environment to develop players into Championship players.

### 6 (a) The Performance Pathway is as follows:



## 5 (b) Strategy for Performance Development

<b>Focus</b>	<b>Aim</b>	<b>Measures of success</b>
SRL to help Uni clubs to establish more links with professional league clubs.	Opening up professional coaching opportunities.	Players of a higher standard progressing through to representative honours.
Clearly publish performance pathways.	Enhance student player's knowledge of representative options are available to them.	Players of a higher standard progressing through to representative honours.
The Student Rugby League World Cup	Use the SRLWC as an opportunity to inject new interest in the representative competition.	Higher standard of player throughout the home nations. Increased involvement in the SRLWC from all parties.
Student – Professional Ambassadors	There are a number of former student players currently playing professionally. The aim would be to use them as ambassadors for the student game to increase the profile and highlight the performance pathway.	Increased profile of student rugby league, more players going down the performance pathway.
Continued development of GB Pioneers	To give young / developing players a taste of international student sport.	GB Pioneers players progressing to GB Academic Team.

There is a development tour, the Great Britain Pioneers, who are an invitational side and who travel to places where the game is either not played, or is in its infancy (such as Kazakhstan) to promote it further, provide coaching support to the players there who do play, and provide a high quality series of exhibition games.

## 6. Next Steps

The next steps from here, along with a clear time frame is outlined in the delivery plan.