

Review into Women and Girls Rugby

January 2022

Introduction

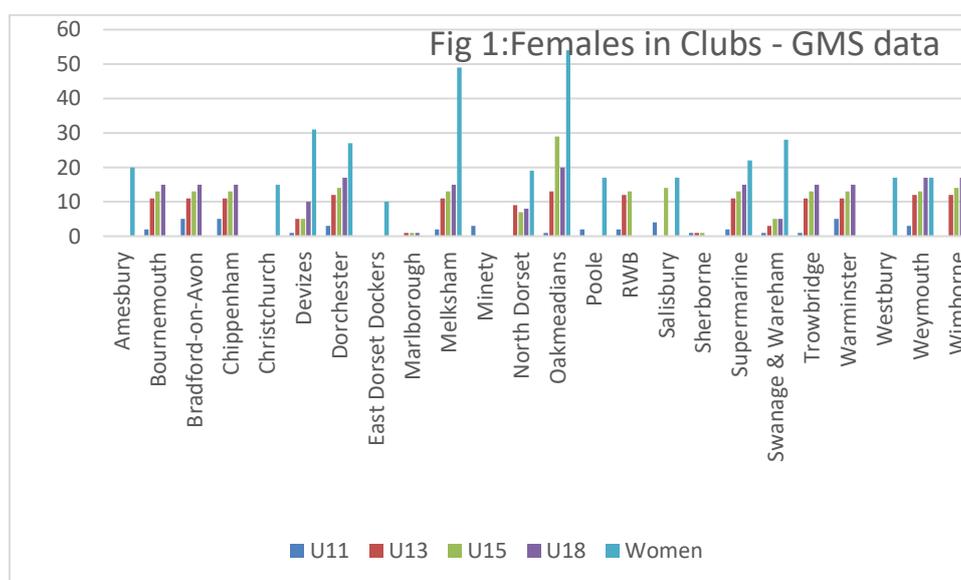
The apparent rapid increase in the number of Age Grade girls and adult Women teams across Dorset and Wiltshire in the last few years has prompted Dorset & Wilts RFU (D&W) to undertake a review of Women and Girls rugby. This review was undertaken between August and December 2021 and this document is a report of the findings. The Terms of Reference for the review is at Appendix 1.

Methodology

Reflecting D&W's strategic priority driver of the Recruitment, Retention and Transition (RRaT) of players the review was underpinned by consideration of RRaT principles. The methods employed were GMS and literature reviews, a survey of club women and girl contacts, discussions with club officials and both formal and informal discussions with other stakeholders, including players and teachers.

Women and Girls club rugby in Dorset and Wiltshire

24 D&W clubs are recorded on GMS as having either or both women and girls registered at their club (Appendix 2 and Fig 1). These figures are largely supported by survey returns.



Discounting any formal or informal flexible arrangements over match-day permitted team numbers, it is apparent from GMS data that there is a major issue concerning the sustainability of competitive teams in clubs.

Amongst club Age Grade teams only Oakmeadians RFC have enough players across the age grades to regularly undertake competitive matches. Similarly, amongst the 14 Women's teams only 7 are recorded with more than 20 players (a minimum number to sustain a 15-a-side team).

An effective Recruitment, Retention and Transition environment requires the players, and volunteers, to have a positive experience. In respect of playing and training opportunities it is clear that club rugby will find it extremely difficult to deliver this without recognising and adapting to this reality. The bottom line is that currently there are too few players for too many teams.

The way forward

Club Commitment:

A commitment to supporting the Women and Girls teams within a club is essential in delivering a quality player and volunteer experience. The survey responses to the questions around club commitment to Women and Girls teams varied considerably, even amongst respondents from the same club. This finding is reflected in discussion with club officers and players/volunteers and the only reliable conclusion that can be drawn is that there is a general need for clubs to adopt a differentiated strategic approach to managing and encompassing the differences, difficulties, motivations, and benefits of having Women and Girls teams at their clubs. Failing to do so appears to result in teams functioning alongside the club and not as part of it.

Recommendation 1: That the Huddle structure be used to deliver an information package on 'Women and Girls in your club'.

Playing Opportunities:

Research shows that adequate and appropriate playing opportunities is a major factor in recruitment and, especially, retention. The analysis of playing numbers demonstrates the difficulty of achieving this at Age Grade levels without a flexible approach to overcoming the lack of numbers at individual clubs.

To date this has been largely successfully undertaken across Dorset and Wiltshire with inter-club competition being organised by clubs and with many clubs joining with their neighbours, playing reduced numbers, lending players etc. Unfortunately, there is evidence that this is not always the case with the fear of losing players to another club cited on more than one occasion.

Recommendation 2: That the current 'self-organisation' of inter-club fixtures be encouraged and, for the present, not be supported by any D&W organised fixture structure.

Recommendation 3: That in the summer of 2022 D&W hold a Women and girls club conference in which the issue of playing opportunities is discussed and formalised

The provision of adequate and appropriate playing opportunities has been addressed by D&W in the past three years through the provision of monthly 'superclusters' whereby players from all clubs attend a venue for training and playing. These events provide an exciting playing/training environment for more than 100 young players as well as development opportunities for volunteers.

Recommendation 4: That the superclusters continue with the 2021/2022 programme (Covid dependant).

Recommendation 5: That the evolution/development of superclusters is discussed at the summer conference.

An alternative and/or complementary activity to inter-club matches is local festivals. This concept has been supported throughout the review and could be for as many local clubs as deemed appropriate. An analysis fig 1 date reveals that clubs with women and girl players can be easily geographically clustered. It appears that these fit closely with the D&W Huddle areas. The adoption of these festivals/clusters at a Huddle level would provide an effective means of organisation and also serve to reinforce the Huddle concept.

Recommendation 6: That Huddles adopt the organisation of local 'mini-clusters' adopting a festival format appropriate to the area.

Playing opportunities for adult women teams are provided through the RFU league system with matches every two weeks. During the review a Cup Competition was proposed by some but the diverse levels of the Women's teams make such a competition difficult to plan and implement. Instead, in the interest of player development, coach development, Huddle consolidation and to raise the standard of women's rugby it is proposed to run an inter-huddle competition. This supports the concept of player Retention.

The ultimate format of the inter-huddle competition can be discussed at the summer conference but for 2022 it is proposed to hold a tournament day in April (covid depending). Activities prior to April will be at the discretion of the Huddle lead. Assistance with setting up a Huddle structure will be available from D&W should it be needed.

Recommendation 7: That Huddles organise a women's team to represent their clubs and to ultimately participate in a tournament in April.

Recommendation 8: That D&W consider funding bids from Huddles to run their team.

Recommendation 9: That the 2022/2023 format of the inter-huddle competition be discussed at the summer conference.

To further support the development of the women's game in Dorset and Wiltshire and to assist with the transition of 18 year olds into the adult game it is proposed to run an U18 Development Programme viz the current boys Developing Player Programme. This programme will commence will utilise specific RFU funds and will start in the summer of 2022.

Recruitment

The recruitment of players is clearly a priority for most clubs.

The RFU Inner Warrior initiative is an increasingly popular programme for clubs and is to be encouraged. The evidence strongly indicates however that club involvement with local schools is the most productive route for recruitment. Any club wishing to follow such a route is encouraged to liaise with Oakmeadians Gordon Horsley for examples of good practice.

Recommendation 10: That any club intending to interact with local schools liaise with Oakmeadians RFC, Gordon Horsley, for examples of sustainable good practice.

Recommendation 11: That D&W extend the services of Frank Butler to advise any club wishing to interact with their local schools.

Representative Rugby

Representative rugby competitions will continue to be supported by D&W in 2021.

Summary

Overall, the Women and Girls game in D&W is in a potentially healthy place but would benefit from a more focussed and centralised approach to the development of teams and players. This need not be to the detriment of club team development but should complement it and provide a vehicle for RRaT. The absence

of non-club personnel to implement activity places the emphasis for action firmly at the door of clubs and provides an opportunity for Huddles to take on operational responsibilities.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Huddle structure be used to deliver an information package on 'Women and Girls in your club'.

Recommendation 2: That the current 'self-organisation' of inter-club fixtures be encouraged and, for the present, not be supported by any D&W organised fixture structure.

Recommendation 3: That in the summer of 2022 D&W hold a Women and girls club conference in which the issue of playing opportunities is discussed and formalised

Recommendation 4: That the superclusters continue with the 2021/2022 programme (Covid depending).

Recommendation 5: That the evolution/development of superclusters is discussed at the summer conference.

Recommendation 6: That Huddles adopt the organisation of local 'mini-clusters' adopting a festival format appropriate to the area

Recommendation 7: That Huddles organise a women's team to represent their clubs and to ultimately participate in a tournament in April.

Recommendation 8: That D&W consider funding bids from Huddles to run their team.

Recommendation 9: That the 2022/2023 format of the inter-huddle competition be discussed at the summer conference

Recommendation 10: That any club intending to interact with local schools liaise with Oakmeadians RFC, Gordon Horsley, for examples of sustainable good practice

Recommendation 11: That D&W extend the services of Frank Butler to advise any club wishing to interact with their local schools.

Appendix 1: Review Terms of Reference

Intention

It is the intention of Dorset & Wilts RFU to carry out a short review into adult and age grade female rugby in the two counties.

Introduction

There is no doubt that women and girls' rugby is experiencing growth nationally and in Dorset and Wiltshire. Since the 2019/2020 season many D&W clubs have reported new women and girl age grade teams but these reports are largely anecdotal and sometimes appear without substance.

Over the past three years D&W RFU have made considerable forward improvements to the development of the girls' overall game and the women's' representative rugby. This progress however has not seen participation from all clubs and this exacerbates the lack of knowledge about the true situation in D&W.

Anecdotally the concepts of recruitment, retention and transition (RRaT) do not appear embedded in clubs in respect of women and girls and, indeed, the female players/teams often seem to sit outside of the main club with all the difficulties that can bring.

Purpose

The purpose of this review is to examine all aspects of the adult and female rugby game in Dorset and Wiltshire to:

- Establish a definitive understanding of the numbers of women and girl age grade players and teams across club in Dorset & Wiltshire
- Establish a geographic picture of the women and girl age grade players and teams across the clubs in Dorset & Wiltshire
- Establish a geographic picture of player potential across D&W
- To examine the efficacy of the current women and girls' rugby in D&W in respect of the component factors of a healthy RRaT environment. To include:
 - Club commitment to the female game
 - The quality of coaching
 - Club recruitment, retention and transition policies and procedures – including Inner Warrior
 - Playing opportunities
 - Player development opportunities
 - Representative rugby
- To recommend strategies, policies and actions to D&WRFU Management Board to improve and develop the female rugby environment wherever appropriate. Any such to be costed and prioritised in the interest of RRaT

Administration

The review will be carried out by a team comprised of Chris Burton (Chair DWRFU Management Board), Brett Bader (Chair of DWRFU Women and Girls), Emma Lyttle, Amy Hayden-Smith, Clare MacCarron and Matilda Ferguson. The review will be undertaken using any and all methods available and appropriate. Every effort will be made to triangulate research methods.

A report and presentation will be compiled including review findings and recommendations.

The review will be presented to Management Board in December 2021.

Appendix 2: Numbers of Women and Girls at Clubs – GMS data October 2021

Club	U11	U13	U15	U18	Women
Amesbury	0	0	0	0	20
Bournemouth	2	11	13	15	0
Bradford-on-Avon	5	11	13	15	0
Chippenham	5	11	13	15	0
Christchurch	0	0	0	0	15
Devizes	1	5	5	10	31
Dorchester	3	12	14	17	27
East Dorset Dockers	0	0	0	0	10
Marlborough	0	1	1	1	0
Melksham	2	11	13	15	49
Minety	3	0	0	0	0

North Dorset	0	9	7	8	19
Oakmeadians	1	13	29	20	54
Poole	2	0	0	0	17
RWB	2	12	13	0	0
Salisbury	4	0	14	0	17
Sherborne	1	1	1	0	0
Supermarine	2	11	13	15	22
Swanage & Wareham	1	3	5	5	28
Trowbridge	1	11	13	15	0
Warminster	5	11	13	15	0
Westbury	0	0	0	0	17
Weymouth	3	12	13	17	17
Wimborne	0	12	14	17	0