ENRICHING LIVES

THE SOCIAL VALUE OF COMMUNITY RUGBY UNION IN ENGLAND



FOREWORD



STEVE GRAINGER
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RUGBY DEVELOPMENT
THE RFU

Everybody connected to the game of rugby union will have experienced its unique values and benefits, as well as its ability to bring people and communities together. Whether it's a children's crèche, a community gym, or a meeting point for long-term friends on a Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning, our local rugby union clubs and facilities enable local communities to come together, get active together, and have fun together.

At the Rugby Football Union, we are lucky that we get to see community rugby union in action throughout the year.

In 2024, we have commissioned our first ever research into assessing rugby union's social value. We want to use the data from this research to not only evidence the positive outcomes of rugby union, but also to inform our forward-thinking decision making and investment planning.

It is with great pride, therefore, that we present **Enriching Lives: The Social Value of Community Rugby Union in England.** This report not only highlights the significant social, economic and health outcomes that community rugby union delivers across England, but also evidences the pivotal role that rugby union plays in enriching lives and strengthening communities.

In the 2023/24 season, the social value generated by community rugby union has been remarkable. Through the participation of our players and volunteers, rugby union has generated an estimated **£2.03 billion in social value.** This huge figure is driven by the range of positive outcomes seen across rugby union, including those generated by our incredible community of volunteers up and down the country. Other contributing factors include the ability of rugby union to improve physical and mental health outcomes. Those involved with rugby union clubs and facilities will know how much investment goes into creating a welcoming and inclusive space, and this is just one element of the economic value within the total social value.

We are committed to growing the game, with a key strategic focus on making rugby union more representative of society's diversity. One of the most notable findings from the research was the high social value generated by players in more deprived and less affluent parts of England, which signals that our programmes may be starting to create the positive outcomes we are hoping to see.

In an uncertain world, sport has a unique ability to address many of the intersecting challenges faced by society. We believe that rugby union has a fantastic opportunity to not only bring communities together but to instil the incredible values of our sport in players, volunteers and partners from all backgrounds and geographies.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and understand more about the work that we are doing in this space. I look forward to working with everyone involved in the game, to build on the findings of this research and continue creating a positive impact through rugby union.

FOREWORD

Substance, a specialist in understanding and assessing the social impact of sport and physical activity, have been delighted to work with the RFU to help them demonstrate the impact of their work and value of community rugby union in England through this groundbreaking study.

Whilst many sports organisations have sought to provide a fuller account of the social and economic difference they make, few have done so in as systematic and comprehensive fashion as the RFU. From the very start of this project there was a desire to capture the full breadth of perspectives and potential impacts of playing rugby union. Perhaps just as significant though was the governing body's desire to understand and tell the story of that impact across the game - in the context of all of England's regions, localities and clubs and from the perspective of players, volunteers and administrators.

With widespread engagement from across the sport's participants and stakeholders, this is a game-changing move that has the potential to embed social purpose and data-led strategic decision making in the design of rugby union's future. Substance is proud to play its part in that journey, providing the technical infrastructure, rigour and insight to demonstrate rugby union's impact and is confident that the study findings represent a minimum value that can grow based on enhanced service delivery and data flows.

TIM CRABBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, SUBSTANCE

substance.

At Think Beyond, we believe in the power of sport as a platform for social change. We work globally with leagues, teams, brands and athletes, and we have seen first-hand the transformative ability of sport and physical activity to create positive outcomes, from improved health to greater confidence, to genuine inclusivity and equity.

We have had the privilege of working with the RFU and Substance on this research and we are excited to see the findings published. This report explains not only the broad positive impact of rugby union, but also provides a detailed account of the social value generated across England, at a level of detail that enables tangible and targeted action to be taken.

A critical element of the findings is the geographical and demographic spread of social value, evidencing that rugby union is creating impact in every corner of England. In fact, the results show that the transformative power of rugby union is greatest in historically more deprived parts of England.

Having worked with the RFU from the start of the project, we know how much time and effort has gone into making this the most robust piece of research possible. We also have seen the genuine intention across the organisation to use this research to inform decision-making moving forward. We're delighted to see one of England's most influential sports organisations investing in an impact-led approach and we hope the RFU is one of many in the future.

SAM SHAVE
MANAGING PARTNER, THINK BEYOND

THINK BEYOND

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 05

RUGBY UNION'S VALUE ON A PAGE 06

RUGBY UNION FOR ALL PEOPLE IN ALL PLACES 07

CALCULATING RUGBY UNION'S VALUE 08 - 10

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF RUGBY UNION 11

STRONGER AND BETTER CONNECTED COMMUNITIES 12 - 14

Volunteers: The backbone of rugby union
Volunteering case study

IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING 15 - 18

The physical and mental health value of rugby union
Player welfare
Warley RFC case study

ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH EMPLOYMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND PLAYER SPENDING 19 - 20

Horsham RFC case study

THE FUTURE OF RUGBY UNION'S SOCIAL VALUE 21

APPENDIX 23 - 26

INTRODUCTION

The Rugby Football Union's (RFU) purpose is to enrich lives, introduce more people to rugby union and develop the sport for future generations. This report demonstrates and evidences how the organisation, and the game it serves, enriches the lives of players, volunteers and communities in every corner of England.

Everyone connected with rugby union sees the positive impact of the game week in, week out. Until now, however, there hasn't been a clear evidence-based assessment of these outcomes. As a result, there has been a gap in recognising rugby union's broader social value.

The RFU commissioned Substance and Think Beyond to conduct a bespoke social value assessment of participation in rugby union in clubs in England during 2023/24 season. This report provides those responsible for delivering and participating in community rugby union, whether at member clubs, schools, colleges, universities, the Allianz Stadium, or within the game's constituent bodies, with the evidence needed to demonstrate the wider value of community rugby union.

By understanding and communicating this social value, Substance and Think Beyond highlight rugby union's impact on society. This will strengthen the RFU's evidence-based decision-making, attract new interest in the game and build deeper local and regional partnerships with like-minded organisations dedicated to enriching lives and growing rugby union. The assessment includes aspects such as playing, volunteering, and the RFU's core activities including, but not limited to, facility investment, programme development and delivery, and workforce training and development.



RUGBY UNION'S VALUE ON A PAGE

£2.03BN

IN ESTIMATED SOCIAL VALUE DELIVERED IN 2023/24, THROUGH APPROXIMATELY 378K PLAYERS, SUPPORTED BY 89K VOLUNTEERS

£823M

OF SOCIAL VALUE RELATED TO STRONGER AND BETTER CONNECTED COMMUNITIES: THE SOCIAL & COMMUNITY VALUE OF RUGBY UNION

£707M

IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING: THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH VALUE OF RUGBY UNION

£502M

ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH EMPLOYMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND PLAYER SPENDING: THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF RUGBY UNION

£20.6M

CHARITY DONATIONS RAISED BY RUGBY UNION CLUBS AND THEIR MEMBERS

24M+

VOLUNTEER HOURS

ON FIELD APPROXIMATELY '14M VOLUNTEER HOURS AND OFF FIELD 10M+ VOLUNTEER HOURS'

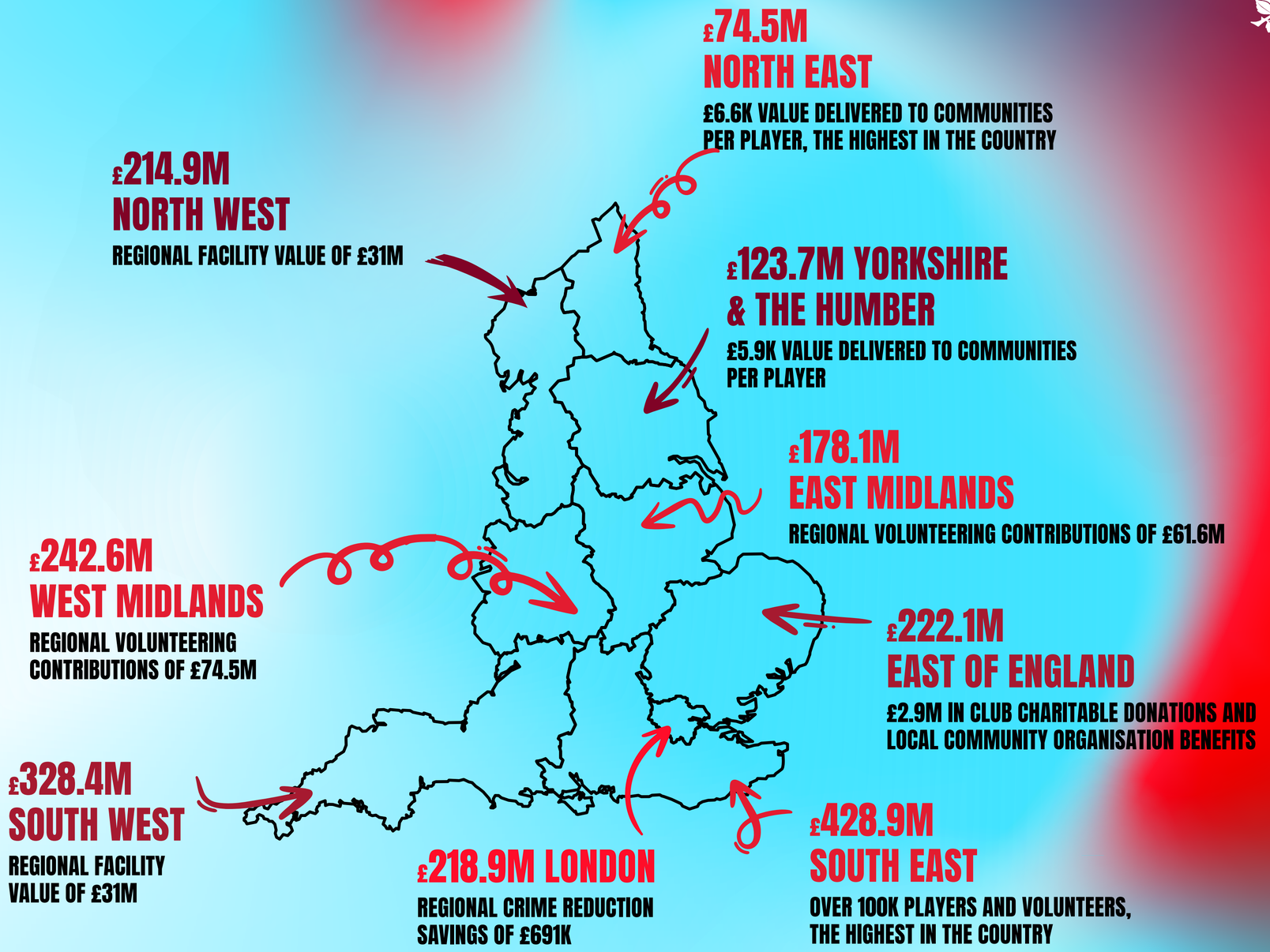
1 VOLUNTEER FOR EVERY 4 RUGBY UNION PLAYERS

£289M

VALUE OF INVESTMENT IN RUGBY UNION FACILITIES ACROSS ENGLAND DURING 2023/24

RUGBY UNION FOR ALL PEOPLE IN ALL PLACES

Across all parts of England, rugby union is improving the lives of people from all backgrounds and communities. In the same way as participation varies geographically, social value is also generated differently in each formal region of England.



CALCULATING RUGBY UNION'S VALUE

The methodology used to calculate rugby union's social value during the 2023/24 season has been delivered by Substance and Think Beyond, hereafter referred to as 'the research team'. This methodology reflects global best practice and is consistent with similar analyses undertaken for organisations including but not limited to the Irish Rugby Football Union, the Scottish Rugby Football Union, UEFA, and multiple national football associations across Europe. The process has been led by internationally renowned experts with specialisms in the area of social value assessment.

1.

ESTABLISH SCOPE AND IDENTIFY KEY STAKEHOLDERS

E.G. A focus on the community game and engaging with the RFU teams

2.

MAP OUTCOMES RELEVANT TO THE SPORT IN QUESTION

E.G. Improved physical strength and improved school attendance

3.

RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE OUTCOMES AND ASSIGN A VALUE

E.G. The list of measured outcomes for rugby union

4.

ESTABLISH THE IMPACT OF THE SPORT ON THOSE OUTCOMES

E.G. Rugby union's qualified influence on each of those outcomes

5.

CALCULATE THE SOCIAL VALUE

E.G. A sum of the qualified influence of rugby union

6.

REPORT FINDINGS

E.G. Publication of the RFU's findings and methodology

CALCULATING RUGBY UNION'S VALUE (CONTINUED)

Social valuing techniques have been developed and refined progressively over time and typically involve six consistent steps[1], which have been adapted for use in the sporting context. The detailed steps undertaken as part of this project have been explained in the appendix of this report, however, the following sections summarise the key parts of the process.

ESTABLISHING SCOPE (1) AND MAPPING OUTCOMES (2)

Using the overarching Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology, assessing an organisation's social value typically begins with identifying the changes sought by a programme or organisation. For this project, a series of internal consultations with the RFU stakeholders were conducted to establish the scope of the study and map the outcomes. The full outcome map and Theory of Change is included in the appendix to this report.

EVIDENCING OUTCOMES AND ASSIGNING VALUES (3)

Following further desktop research and consultations, and after reviewing available data, the extent of evidence for the achievement of those outcomes was established, along with the feasibility of quantifying the value generated by rugby union. From this process the following set of measurable outcomes were identified and valued, see page 11.

ESTABLISHING THE IMPACT OF RUGBY UNION (4) AND CALCULATING SOCIAL VALUE (5)

Where sufficient evidence indicated that regular opportunities to play rugby union and participate in related activities were provided, a variety of techniques were used to establish and value the impacts.

In order to assess how social value is generated across England, this research has utilised a unique approach to measuring social value at a local authority level, in order to provide the most focussed and targeted results possible for this type of england-wide study.

For ***social and health***, researchers used a 'risk and protective factors' model[2], which assessed the risk of participants facing challenges such as health conditions and absence from school, as well as the effect of participation in rugby union and associated physical activity in reducing that risk. The value of this risk reduction

[1]*Social Value UK (2012): A Guide to Social Return On Investment*
[2]*Fisher, G. L., & Roget, N. A. (2009). Risk and protective factor theory. In Encyclopaedia of Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment, & Recovery (pp. 796-798). SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412964500*

CALCULATING RUGBY UNION'S VALUE (CONTINUED)

was then quantified using a per-capita saving, which was then multiplied by the number of participants to create an overall annual valuation.

Impacts on ***educational attainment*** are based on a 'lifetime earnings' approach[3] that considers the effect of participation in team sports on academic performance and uses the differential between lifetime earnings potential across different levels of academic qualification to identify a monetary value for that impact.

The approach to the calculation for ***wellbeing*** employs a 'compensating variation' or 'willingness to pay' approach[4] that has its roots in microeconomic theory and explains how much money individuals might be willing to forego to be able to continue participating in rugby union while maintaining the same level of wellbeing.

A range of additional ***economic*** and ***social*** values were also considered, including using the Gross Value Added (GVA) approach to assess the added value of facility investment. Player spending is based on the results of a survey distributed amongst active adult players and the parents of junior players which considered a range of spending elements including, but not limited to, membership costs, match fees, clothing, footwear and other equipment.

The ***additional value created in the supply chain*** related to this spending is represented through the application of sector-specific multipliers drawn from the Sport Satellite Accounts[5].

REPORTING FINDINGS (6)

In this report, the research team has published the full results of the evaluation, including stating any methodological limitations or challenges with access to data or information.

For instance, the economic impact analysis does not represent a holistic economic impact assessment for rugby union in England, as it does not include elements such as fan spend, land value or total investment figures by the RFU and its partners. This figure can therefore be seen as a conservative estimate of the economic value of rugby union in England.

Throughout the report, a range of specialist terminology has been used to describe the process the research team followed, as well as findings that have been detailed. For this report, the following terms are defined as:

- **Outcome(s)** – The changes that occur for stakeholders in the areas being measured.
- **Social impact** – The accumulated benefit or deficit of those outcomes, that occurs as a result of participating, volunteering or being involved in rugby union.
- **Social value** – The quantification of that social change, represented in monetary terms.

[3] *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-attainment-and-lifetime-earnings*
[4] *https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209107/greenbook_valuationtechniques.pdf*
[5] *Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission) (2018) Study on the economic impact of sport through sport satellite accounts, Brussels: European Commission*

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF RUGBY UNION

From minis and juniors through to adult competition, rugby union has long delivered a unique blend of positive impacts to both individuals and communities across England. The sport offers something for everyone, from enhancing physical health and wellbeing to facilitating meaningful connections within communities. While the joy of playing the game is undeniable, the true value of rugby union lies in the key positive outcomes it provides, benefitting everyone involved in the sport.





THE RESEARCH HAS GROUPED THE POSITIVE IMPACTS OF RUGBY UNION INTO THREE CORE OUTCOMES:

1. **STRONGER AND BETTER CONNECTED COMMUNITIES**
   Outcomes include: Volunteering, improved school attendance, reduced crime and charitable donations.

2. **IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING**
   Outcomes include: Reduced hypertension, strokes, breast cancer, dementia, schizophrenia, and depression.

3. **ECONOMIC GROWTH**
   Outcomes include: Player spending, facility investment, cost savings and tax contributions.

The following sections of this report explain each outcome and provide case studies that demonstrate how and where these outcomes are realised across rugby union in England.



STRONGER AND BETTER CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

THE SOCIAL & COMMUNITY VALUE OF RUGBY UNION

Rugby union has the power to unite communities by strengthening a sense of belonging, enhancing connections within communities and providing enjoyment of the game.

The social and community value of rugby union is estimated at **£823.5m.** Currently, there are approximately **378K club-level players,** with an average social value per player of **£5.4K.**



£736M
THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

£22M
CHARITABLE AND COMMUNITY VALUE

£3.5M
CRIME-RELATED SAVINGS

£62M
EDUCATIONAL & EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

EDUCATIONAL & EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

Rugby union participation has played a key role in improved school attendance through the avoidance of at least 4.4K cases of schools absence. It has also enabled 200 under-25s to stay in education, employment or training. The combined educational impacts, including enhanced lifetime earnings potential, total £62m.

CLUBS CHARITABLE & COMMUNITY VALUE

Through surveying over 180 clubs and applying the findings to remaining clubs, the overall charitable and community value is approximately £22m. The total charity donations raised by clubs and their members amounts to £20.6m. Additionally, local community organisations that use rugby union club facilities at discounted rates benefited from community savings of £1.4m.

CRIME-RELATED SAVINGS

Through rugby union participation in England, instances of both adult and youth crime have been avoided. This resulted in savings related to the avoidance of **adult crime of £3.2m and youth crime related savings of £303K,** resulting in total savings of **£3.5m.**



VOLUNTEERS: THE BACKBONE OF RUGBY UNION

Volunteers are the backbone of rugby union in England. From coaches, to match officials, to team managers, to people serving food after matches, thousands of people generously give their time each year to support rugby union clubs across the country. These volunteers play a vital role in the sport's success and sustainability at every level.

THERE IS 1 VOLUNTEER FOR EVERY 4 RUGBY UNION PLAYERS

Results from the RFU's National Rugby Survey (2022/23) highlighted the top reasons why people volunteer, which include:

95% to make a difference to other people
92% to give back to the sport
87% to feel part of a group

Volunteers embody the community spirit and values that rugby union is known for, nurturing the next generation of players and volunteers alike, and ensuring the sport remains accessible to all. Collectively, their efforts in 2023/24 are valued at **£736m.**

£736M ECONOMIC VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

89K Estimated number of volunteers
OVER 24M HOURS Total number of hours volunteered
14M HOURS On field volunteers
10M HOURS Off-field volunteers

ACROSS THE 89K VOLUNTEERS, THE AVERAGE VOLUNTEER PROVIDED ALMOST 7 HOURS PER WEEK OF THEIR TIME TO THE GAME

85%

OF VOLUNTEERS SAY THAT

VOLUNTEERING IN RUGBY UNION HAS A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR LIFE

VOLUNTEERING CASE STUDY

RICHARD LIDDLE, CREIGHTON RUFC
NOMINEE FOR VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD 2024

Richard is one of the many volunteers recognised by the Honda Volunteer Recognition Programme. A lifelong rugby player and father of three, he strongly believes in the immense value that rugby union brings to a young person's life. It teaches essential life skills like communication, resilience, and teamwork, while fostering connections and providing a positive outlet for personal growth.

In 2016, Richard and his wife (Hayley) established their own youth system at Creighton RUFC with a mission to make rugby union accessible to all children in their community. Starting with just 10 players, mostly friends of their children, Richard and Hayley have since grown the programme to over 100 children who now play rugby union weekly. Their efforts have not only provided a new generation with the chance to enjoy the sport but have also instilled a sense of belonging and purpose in the local youth.

Reflecting on their journey, Richard says, *"We have a great group of people helping with everything from coaching and admin through to kitchen duties. We're a really good team that does it all together."* For him, the true reward lies in the impact he has had on the lives of young people in his community.

"I don't do this kind of stuff for recognition," he says. ***"I do it to help people.*** *For the RFU to recognise those at grassroots doing the not-noticed things is fantastic."*

Richard earned a trip to Allianz Stadium as a finalist for the RFU Honda Volunteer of the Year award. His groundbreaking work at Creighton RUFC has embedded the club at the heart of the community, ensuring that no child in the area misses out on the opportunity to play rugby union.



HONDA VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION PROGRAMME

The RFU partnered with Honda to create the Honda Volunteer Recognition Programme. Running for 4 seasons, the programme offered grassroot clubs and the wider rugby union community a platform to honour and reward these invaluable individuals.
The programme also provided volunteers with unique opportunities, such as coaching experiences with England's team, training sessions, and the prestigious Volunteer of the Year award. In the past year alone, the programme has recognised over **3,100** volunteers from **7,684** clubs across England.



THE KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAMME ARE TO:

- Thank Volunteers
- Recognise the importance of, and acknowledge the contribution of, volunteers
- Amplify the awareness of volunteers & the impact that they have
- Support positive volunteer experiences

IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING

THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH VALUE OF RUGBY UNION

Rugby union is a multi-faceted sport, involving a wide variety of full-body movements such as running, side-stepping, tackling and kicking. As a result, rugby union plays a crucial role in improving the health and wellbeing of its players, offering numerous physical health impacts including improved strength and power, enhanced cardiovascular endurance, and greater physical literacy. All of which reduce overall healthcare costs.

Physical inactivity contributes to 1 in 6 deaths in the UK and costs the nation £7.4bn annually, nearly £1bn of which directly impacts the NHS (GOV.UK, 2022).

£707M

estimated healthcare savings and value from rugby union participation in 2023/24. Approximately 378k club - level players are staying active or becoming more active through rugby union.

85%

of players agree that being part of their club has improved their physical health. (National Rugby Survey, 2023)

HOW PLAYING RUGBY UNION LEADS TO HEALTHCARE SAVINGS

EVALUATE THE RISK	MEASURE RUGBY UNION'S ABILITY TO REDUCE HEALTH RISKS	QUANTIFY THE RISK REDUCTION	CALCULATE ANNUAL HEALTH CARE SAVINGS VALUATION
Evaluate the risk of health condition for an individual based on factors like age, gender, and location.	Assess the effect of participating in rugby union over and above physical activity in reducing that risk.	Identify the number of negative outcomes prevented by multiplying the risk reduction by the number of participants.	The annual healthcare savings valuation is calculated by multiplying the number of negative outcomes prevented by the per capita cost of treatment over a one year period.

See appendix for full methodology

IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING

PLAYER WELFARE HAS AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE RFU'S TOP PRIORITY

Rugby union has established and been at the forefront of concussion and injury surveillance, education, and law changes using evidence to manage player welfare proactively. This includes the lowering of the tackle height in the community game. In the professional game, the RFU is using smart mouthguard technology to study the magnitude and frequency of head impacts in matches and training. This will aid decision-making around future interventions and protocols.

RugbySafe is the RFU's overarching community player safety and wellbeing programme including the Headcase concussion and awareness programme. It offers resources to support clubs, colleges, schools, universities, players and parents. Headcase aligns to the Government's UK Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport launched last spring; the RFU was involved in its development and its key message is that if there is any doubt a player should 'sit it out'.

Playing rugby union provides significant physical and mental health benefits along with life skills gained from playing a team sport which has strong values. Against a backdrop of decreased physical activity and a global obesity epidemic in children, the RFU believe rugby union has a role to play in keeping people active, healthy and engaged. It is also crucial that other non-physical positive benefits of contact and non-contact rugby for all ages are noted, including increasing confidence, self-esteem, self-discipline and building character, as well as the physical benefits of engaging in enjoyable exercise whilst working as part of a team.

THROUGH INCREASED PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, RUGBY UNION REDUCES THE RISK OF SEVERAL HEALTH CONDITIONS, ALL OF WHICH LEAD TO SIGNIFICANT HEALTHCARE SAVINGS. THESE INCLUDE:

- **A REDUCED RISK** OF CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE AND DIABETES, WHICH RESULTED IN ANNUAL HEALTHCARE SAVINGS OF £49M
- **LOWERED RISK** OF CANCERS SUCH AS BREAST AND COLON CANCER, WHICH RESULTED IN ANNUAL HEALTHCARE SAVINGS OF £65K
- **IMPROVED OR MAINTAINED** PHYSICAL CONDITION, HEALTH, AND MOBILITY AMONG OLDER ADULTS, WHICH RESULTED IN ANNUAL HEALTHCARE SAVINGS OF £20M

WARLEY CASE STUDY

WARLEY RFC'S REVIVAL POST-COVID

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on communities worldwide, including the rugby union community. By the end of the 2020/21 season, many rugby union clubs across England, including Warley RFC, faced a significant drop in adult male participation, leading to cancelled training sessions and difficulties in fielding teams for weekend fixtures.

Warley RFC have significant challenges in recent years. A dwindling player base, lack of structure, and declining engagement had left the club struggling to field competitive teams. By 2022, Warley RFC had just 30 members, minimal volunteer support, and faced financial uncertainty.

Using the RFU's "Play Together, Stay Together" campaign as a focal point, Warley RFC were able to drive player recruitment, leadership changes, and community engagement, to make a remarkable comeback.

Recruiting players

Successfully increased the number of active players from 20 to over 75.

Warley RFC successfully used social media and community outreach to recruit players. Collaborations with local schools and colleges further boosted recruitment.

Leadership & Coaching

Experienced a threefold increase in training attendance.

A new coach was appointed bringing structure and ambition. Training attendance increased from 10 to over 30 players per week, and personalised development programmes improved player engagement. The coaching team expanded, improving the quality of training and match preparation.

Higher Volunteer Engagement

Player to volunteer ratio of 4:1.

Over 30 volunteers now support the club in various roles, including skills and forwards coaches, and 2nd XV management. The player-to-volunteer ratio is now 4:1, improving operations.

PLAY TOGETHER, STAY TOGETHER

In August 2022, the RFU launched a national campaign called "Play Together, Stay Together" (PTST). The campaign supplemented club recruitment nationwide with multi-channel marketing that fostered a sense of belonging to encourage players to return to the game. The two key audiences of the campaign were men aged 35 and over, who were identified as being slow to return to the sport after the pandemic, and players aged 16 to 22, who missed a crucial part of their playing journey and are now transitioning into adult rugby union.





EDWARD DIAMOND REJOINED WARLEY IN 2024 POSITION: WINGER

"I had missed playing rugby for some time due to moving, injuries & covid. I finally made the decision to return as a way to improve my fitness, regain strength and rejoin a social community. Warley has always been my club so I knew I would only ever return to them. They are a great group of guys who look out for each other, and it feels great to be part of a club with such a positive outlook"

Improved Community Presence

Social events and partnerships have strengthened Warley RFC's role in the local community.

Regular social events like live music nights, quiz nights, and monthly player socials have increased community involvement. Attendance at these events ranges from 50-100 people, drawing a diverse group from the local Sandwell area. Similarly, by renting its pitches to local teams, Warley RFC has generated additional income and expanded its visibility within the local community.

Financial Security

Membership has quadrupled, and food and drink revenue has stabilised the club's finances.

By offering its facilities to local teams, Warley RFC has boosted its income and increased its visibility within the community, strengthening both its financial position and local presence.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

RUGBY UNION IS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR BUILDING, ENHANCING, AND SUSTAINING POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH AND OVERALL WELLBEING



WELLBEING

Participating in rugby union has a positive impact on a player's wellbeing, providing a source of happiness and greater life satisfaction.

One of the key data sources for this research was a player survey conducted by the RFU in 2024, which had a sample size of 2,100 players. Key findings included:

95% OF RESPONDENTS FEELING THAT THEY HAVE MADE FRIENDS AT THEIR RUGBY CLUB
87% STATING THEY FELT A SENSE OF BELONGING WITHIN THEIR RUGBY UNION CLUB

The findings reflect not only the greater sense of life satisfaction amongst the rugby union community, but also the possible source of these gains beyond the joy of playing the game itself: the deep sense of connection that players and volunteers experience. When expressed in monetary terms, the value of this impact was £628m. This figure represents the equivalent additional income people would require to maintain the same levels of life satisfaction associated with participating in rugby union, adjusted for current income levels and the positive impacts gained from other physical activities.

Of this total, £109m comes from the participation of 57,000 women and girls, while £519m is attributed to 321,000 men and boys.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health issues cost the UK economy at least £117.9 billion annually (LSE & MHF, 2022), including direct expenses like health and care services, as well as indirect costs such as lost employment and reduced quality of life.

The impact also extends to families and caregivers. Rugby union participation contributed to a £9.8m reduction in mental health-related healthcare costs.

82% OF PLAYERS AGREE THAT 'BEING PART OF MY CLUB HAS IMPROVED MY MENTAL HEALTH (NATIONAL RUGBY SURVEY, 2023)

- Over **1k** cases of anxiety prevented, with cost savings of £1.4m
- **1.84k** cases of depression prevented, produced health-based savings of £7m
- **40** cases of schizophrenia prevented, saving the healthcare system £1m

ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH EMPLOYMENT, INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT AND SPENDING

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF RUGBY UNION

Alongside social and health-related value, rugby union also generates extensive economic value at a national and local level.

To analyse the economic impacts, the research team considered inputs such as player spending, the value of facility investments, as well as tax contributions (**£11.1m**) and cost savings (**£26.4m**). This enabled the research team to estimate the positive economic impact created by rugby union in England in 2023/24.

Overall, participation in rugby union generates a total economic value of **£502m**.



£175M

IS SPENT NATIONWIDE, ANNUALLY, ON ITEMS SUCH AS KIT AND MEMBERSHIP

This covers a range of spending areas such as membership, match fees, individual coaching, tournaments/training camps, transport and travel, clothing/ footwear, equipment, food and drink and health services.





£289M

VALUE OF INVESTMENT IN RUGBY UNION FACILITIES ACROSS ENGLAND

This figure is derived through two key areas; the additional value of the investment into pitches and the hire rates of facilities. Through the Sport England Facility Cost Guidance, standardised figures across both Artificial Grass Pitches and Natural Turf (Grass) were utilised for the purpose of the study. Over 2,700 pitches across England impacted the value shown above.

HORSHAM RFC

INCREASING WOMEN & GIRLS PARTICIPATION

Rugby clubhouses and pitches are more than just physical spaces; they are the heart of the community, acting as central hubs of physical activity and social connection. These spaces allow clubs to bring people together, fostering a sense of belonging among players, families, volunteers and supporters. To maximise the potential of these facilities to deliver social value for communities, these sites can and should be utilised for a wide range of activities beyond rugby union.

Horsham RFC recently completed a major renovation project, which included the construction of six new changing room blocks, with a club investment totalling £750,000 over seven years. This redevelopment also enabled the club to qualify for an Artificial Grass Pitches (AGP) grant from the RFU.

In 2018, Horsham RFC underwent another significant transformation with the installation of a state of the art AGP, which cost £850,000 and took three months to complete. Since then, Horsham RFC has seen a remarkable growth in participation, particularly among women and girls.

Before the AGP, the club had only four women playing rugby and around 20 girls, all of whom participated in mixed teams with boys. **Today, Horsham RFC boasts 120 girls aged 10 -18 playing in dedicated female teams, and 40 women playing adult rugby.** The women's teams now include a competitive league team in National Challenge (NC) 1 South and a social league team that plays monthly, catering to newcomers and those returning to the sport.

The club attributes this remarkable growth to the modernisation of the changing rooms and pitch facilities, along with increased visibility of women's rugby, such as the televised Red Roses matches. The AGP has allowed for consistent training and match play, regardless of weather conditions, making rugby more accessible and appealing to a broader audience.

In addition to the AGP, Horsham RFC has successfully secured grants from the RFU to further enhance its facilities, including improved toilet amenities to better accommodate female players and the extension of changing facilities to manage the growing number of participants. These developments have not only supported the **rise in participation** but have also helped Horsham produce six international players for England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, with four players advancing to Premiership Rugby Clubs.

The transformation of facilities at Horsham RFC has been instrumental in creating an **inclusive, supportive environment** that has encouraged more women and girls to take up rugby, leading to a thriving and growing community of players. Moving forward, the club is committed to building on this engagement, further expanding opportunities for women and girls to participate and excel in the sport.

ARTIFICAL GRASS PITCHES PROGRAMME

The RFU's £24 million initiative to install 28 Artificial Grass Pitches (AGPs) across England, as part of the Rugby World Cup 2015 Legacy programme, has had a profound impact on clubs and communities across England. Prior to these installations, clubs were limited by the constraints of grass pitches. AGPs have transformed these spaces into vibrant, multi-use hubs, supporting a variety of sports and activities. This increased usage has not only strengthened community connections but also contributed positively to the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals involved in rugby union and other activities, such as football and american football.





Quotes by Female Participants (U15s)

"It helped me deal with anxiety better"
"Improved my fitness and confidence"
"I am healthier and I have made more friends"
"Given me lifelong friends and lots of experiences"
"I've been able to learn new things and perfect the skills I needed to be better at"

THE FUTURE OF RUGBY UNION'S SOCIAL VALUE

The RFU is committed to supporting rugby union from grassroots to performance level, enabling players, clubs, and the wider rugby union ecosystem to thrive.

The RFU's purpose is to enrich lives, introduce more people to rugby union and develop the sport for future generations. This report has demonstrated the huge range of positive outcomes generated by playing rugby union, volunteering, or generally being involved with the game.

Rugby union can play a major role in transforming communities and giving people a more positive outlook on life, and this report provides the evidence to demonstrate the positive impacts of the game as a whole.

THE RFU NOW WANT TO BUILD ON THE FINDINGS OF THIS REPORT BY:

ESTABLISHING SOCIAL VALUE AS A COMMON MEASURE OF SUCCESS WITHIN THE RFU

This will help the RFU to make informed investment decisions and to ensure that funding and support is going to the places, communities and people that are generating the greatest impact.

REFINING THE MEASUREMENT OF RUGBY UNION'S SOCIAL IMPACT, UNDERTAKING FURTHER RESEARCH AND IMPROVING THE DATA USED TO INFORM ANALYSIS AND CALCULATIONS.

The RFU aims to provide a deeper understanding of rugby union's holistic impact in England, further illustrating the value of participating in the sport.



LOOKING BEYOND RUGBY UNION CLUBS AND THE TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY GAME, TO MEASURE RUGBY UNION'S TOTAL IMPACT IN MORE DETAIL

Rugby union is far reaching across England with much more happening outside of the club setting, whether that's in schools, in parks or elsewhere. The RFU continues to build its understanding of the community game as a whole and intends to integrate this more effectively into future social value assessment.

THANK YOU FOR READING ENRICHING LIVES: THE SOCIAL VALUE OF COMMUNITY RUGBY UNION IN ENGLAND

We hope you enjoyed understanding more about the RFU's assessment of social value, the positive outcomes being generated by rugby union, and our plans to go further in the future.

If you would like to learn more about the work that RFU does, please visit englandrugby.com or contact researchandengagement@rfu.com

APPENDIX

CALCULATING RUGBY UNION'S SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT: DETAILED METHODOLOGY

The full methodological steps (which follow global best practice) taken in this study are outlined below.

The research team followed the social valuing techniques that have been developed and refined progressively over time and involve the following steps.[6]

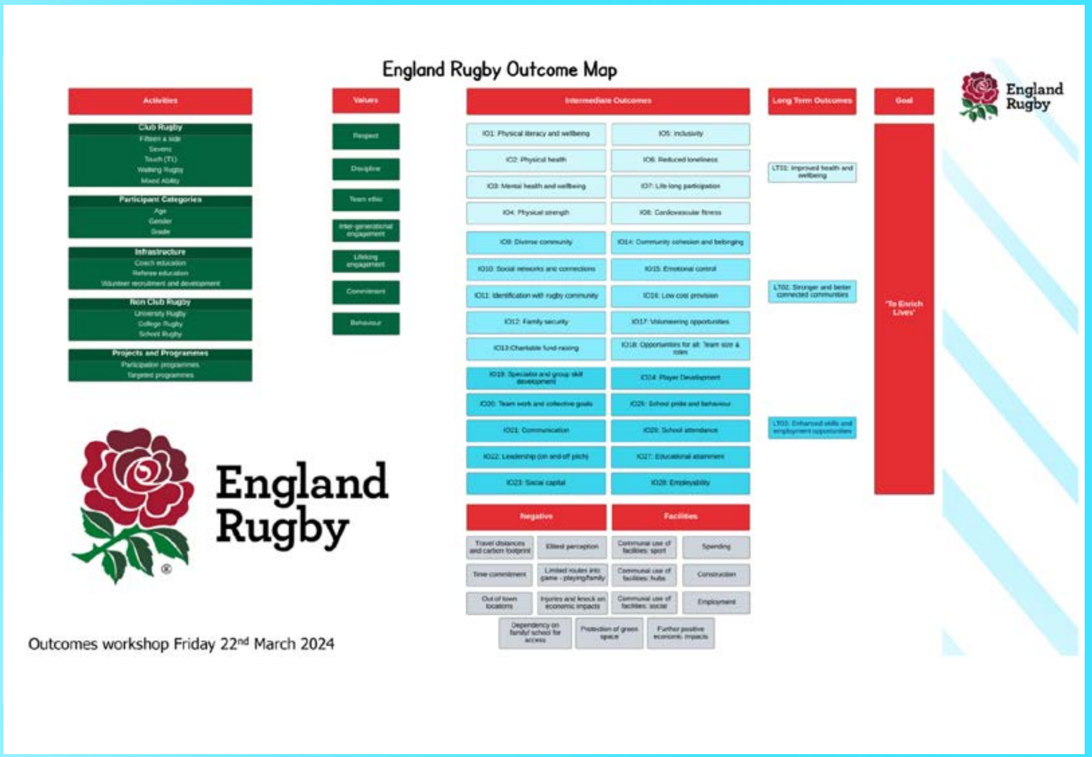
1. Establishing scope and identifying key stakeholders
2. Mapping outcomes
3. Evidencing outcomes and giving them a value
4. Establishing impact
5. Calculating the SROI
6. Reporting, using and embedding

Establishing scope and mapping outcomes

In general, social return on investment studies typically begin with the determination of the changes sought or generated by the programme, policy, investment or organisation, followed by a structured approach to determining whether any identified positive impacts can be attributed to the work under consideration and converted into financial terms. Whilst not to be confused with traditional financial accounting methods, the representation of social value in monetary terms provides a consistent and reliable format with which to communicate social impacts. SROI can be calculated for a single year or over the life of a project or programme, and it can be calculated summatively (i.e., once outcomes have been realised) or estimated formatively (i.e. as work is underway, or prior to it getting underway).

In this instance a series of stakeholder consultations were conducted to establish the scope of the study and map outcomes. A workshop held on the 22nd March 2024 resulted in the following Outcomes Map and Theory of Change, linking activities and rugby union values to the intermediate and long-term outcomes and goals related to rugby union participation. See **Figure 1**

Figure 1: England rugby union social outcomes theory of change



[6]*Social Value UK (2012) A Guide to Social Return On Investment, http://www.socialvalueuk.org*

Evidencing outcomes and assigning values

From the original long list of outcomes, the research team was then able to consult further and review data to establish the extent of any evidence of the achievement of those outcomes and whether it was possible to give them a monetary value. From this process, the following set of measurable outcomes were identified and valued where high-quality evidence of participation and the associated positive impacts of playing rugby union and becoming physically active through participation could be demonstrated. See **Table 1**

Table 1: Measured outcomes

Economic Growth	Social	Health
Player spending	Volunteering	Reduced hypertension
Facility value	Improved educational attainment	Reduced heart disease
Cost savings	Improved school attendance	Reduced strokes
Tax contribution	Reduced NEET	Reduced diabetes
	Reduced crime	Reduced breast cancer
	Community discounts	Reduced colon cancer
	Charitable donations	Reduced dementia
		Reduced osteoporosis
		Reduced schizophrenia
		Reduced anxiety
		Reduced depression
		Improved subjective wellbeing

Establishing the impact of rugby union and calculating social value

Where we were confident that regular opportunities to play rugby union and related activities involving moderate to vigorous physical activity were provided, a variety of techniques were employed to establish the impacts and to value them.

In the **social** and **health** domains, using a 'risk and protective factors' model[7] for crime reduction, NEET (not in employment, education or training) status, absence from school and a range of health conditions including cardiovascular diseases, cancers, ageing and mental health conditions, the risk of participants in relevant population groups facing these outcomes; the associated cost to society of negative outcomes; as well as the effect of participation in rugby union and associated physical activity in reducing that risk is considered to calculate a per capita saving which is then multiplied by the number of participants to create an overall annual valuation. Where we are not confident that all of the impact can be attributed to participation in rugby union, a discount, based on physical activity levels across the general population, is applied to account for deadweight on the basis of the proportion of rugby union players that might reasonably be assumed to remain physically active in the absence of rugby union.

Impacts on **educational attainment** are based on a 'lifetime earnings' approach[8] that considers the effect of participation in team sports on academic performance and uses the differential between lifetime earnings potential across different levels of academic qualification to identify a monetary value for that impact.

The approach to the calculation for **wellbeing** employs a 'compensating variation' or 'willingness to pay' approach[9] that has its roots in microeconomic theory and explains how much money individuals might be willing to forego to be able to continue participating in rugby union while maintaining the same level of wellbeing. The approach built on analysis conducted by Professor Paul Downward for the Irish Rugby Football Union and considered the variation in responses to questions relating to how satisfied respondents are with their life (wellbeing). These scores (which were marginally lower than those scored by respondents in Ireland) were weighted in relation to the proportion of respondents drawn from different income bands to impute a monetary value for the uplift in wellbeing experienced amongst rugby union players. Finally, a discount was applied to account for deadweight based on the proportion of rugby union players that might reasonably be assumed to gain the wellbeing impacts of physical activity in the absence of rugby union.

A range of additional economic and social values were also considered. In the economic domain, facility valuation is based on the use of the Gross Value Added (GVA) approach[10] to assess the added value of direct investment in construction, which is discounted over the estimated lifetime of the facilities to generate an annualised value. This is considered alongside a market approach[11] assessment of direct spending on, or a proxy value for, the usage of facilities hired or made available for programme delivery on an annual basis. Player spending is based on the results of a survey distributed amongst active adult players and the parents of junior players and considers a range of spending elements including membership costs, match fees, clothing, footwear and other equipment, coaching sessions, tournaments and training camps, health services, food and refreshments and transport and travel. Additional value created in the supply chain is represented through the application of sector specific multipliers drawn from the Sport Satellite Accounts.

[7] *Fisher, G. L., & Roget, N. A. (2009). Risk and protective factor theory. In Encyclopaedia of Substance Abuse Prevention, Treatment, & Recovery (pp. 796-798). SAGE Publications, Inc., https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412964500*
[8] *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-attainment-and-lifetime-earnings*
[9] *https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209107/greenbook_valuationtechniques.pdf*
[10] *https://www.investopedia.com/terms/g/gross-value-added.asp*
[11] *https://www.investopedia.com/terms/m/market-approach.asp*

The relative costs of playing the game based on the costs incurred and savings achieved by rugby union players in comparison to participants in the most popular English team sport of association football; the estimated tax contribution made by those who work in the rugby union sector giving due consideration to estimated salary, tax allowance and tax rate; savings achieved by local community organisations who make use of rugby union club facilities at discounted rates; and the value of charitable donations raised by clubs and their members.[12]

Assumptions and data sources
For the purposes of this report, the research team has made the following assumptions.

Basis period
Valuations are based on the 12-month period from 1st July 2023 to 30th June 2024. Where data was provided without a date or related to a different period it was assumed that it was the best fit for the period in question and used as a proxy for the defined period.

Population
The population for the study included a count of 181,899 under 19 age grade players provided by the RFU and an estimate of the number of adult players based on Sport England's most recent Active Lives (AL) dataset[13]. For the adult count of regular players, we identified a total number of adults who had either played rugby union 3 or more times in the previous 28 days or played rugby union in each of the past 1-3 months, past 6-9 months and the past 7-12 months (or those periods that corresponded with the rugby union season) from the AL dataset. This gave us a total population of 572 respondents to work with (which compares with just over 900 who said they played rugby union once in the past 12 months).

Once this group was established, the research team looked at options for grossing them up to local authority population levels. It was clear that the sampling at LA level isn't good enough to do this in a straightforward way, not least because many LAs don't have any rugby union players recorded in their AL dataset. After some research, it was noted that Sport England doesn't report rugby union participation figures at anything below regional level.

To get around this, the proportions of AL respondents were calculated - grouped by region, age group and gender - who meet our definition of a regular rugby union player and then mapped them proportionally to LA populations (also grouped by age and gender) in each region.

Next, to improve differentiation between local authorities, geographic markers were looked at in the AL data that would help weight the estimates of player counts at an LA level and settled on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation which revealed that the proportion of people who play rugby union rises consistently across the five IMD quintiles with reasonable levels of variation within each region, shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Proportion of people playing rugby union by IMD

Row Labels	Percentage Playing Rugby Union
IMD 1-2 (20% most deprived)	0.249%
IMD 3-4 (21-40% most deprived)	0.410%
IMD 5-6 (middle 20%)	0.530%
IMD 7-8 (21-40% least deprived)	0.535%
IMD 9-10 (20% least deprived)	0.787%
All	0.518%

This approach allowed the research team to adjust our proportional estimates depending on the IMD profile of each LA in each region.

To generate the estimates, the following steps were taken:
- The proportion of the population meeting the definition of a regular rugby union player was calculated, segmented by region, age group, and gender. This data was then further divided by region and IMD profile, with the population split into five IMD quintiles.
- These two data sets were combined to determine population proportions by region, age group, and gender, weighted by variations in rugby union participation likelihood based on the IMD quintile in each region.
- Estimated counts of players at the local authority level were generated by:
  - Calculating the number of people in each local authority, grouped by age group, gender, and IMD quintile.
  - Applying the weighted regional proportions to each local authority grouping after determining the proportion of the population meeting the definition of a regular rugby union player.
- The figures were then aggregated to produce an overall estimate of 201,947 regular adult rugby union players.

Participation rates
Based on the definition of a regular rugby union player as someone who was identified as either playing rugby union 3 or more times in the previous 28 days or playing rugby union in each of the past 1-3 months, past 6-9 months and the past 7-12 months we have assumed that all regular rugby union players included in the study for whom participation-related valuations have been generated, engage in sufficient levels of moderate to vigorous physical activity to meet outcome requirements as defined by the UK Government's Chief Medical Officer (CMO)[14].

[12] *Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission) (2018) Study on the economic impact of sport through sport satellite accounts, Brussels: European Commission*
[13] *https://www.sportengland.org/research-and-data/data/active-lives*
[13] *https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-uk-chief-medical-officers-report*

Deadweight and discounts
'Deadweight' (what might have happened anyway) is accounted for through a discount based on the proportion of rugby union players that would be likely to be involved in other sports or physical activity if they did not engage in rugby union. The assumption made is that, without rugby union participation, the proportion of players meeting the CMO's physical activity guidelines would match that for the relevant population group in the country at large. A value is therefore only included for the proportion of players that would otherwise be defined as 'inactive'.

Data
A range of data relating to facilities, players, volunteers and staff was gathered directly from the RFU using their membership database and results from the National Rugby Surveys.

Additionally, bespoke surveys were created to address specific outcomes and were distributed to individual players and clubs to collect detailed primary data.

Further backend data on social profiles, health and social condition prevalence, and associated costs were obtained from the RFU, Sport England, the Office for National Statistics, published reports, and the research team's data sources.

These data sources and values are presented in **Table 3.**

Table 3: Data and sources for core valuation

Risk and Protective Factors Related Measures			
Outcome	**Risk**	**Effect**	**Cost**
School Attendance	LA specific	4%	£6,175.00
Sources	UK Government	Loughborough Univ.	NPC
NEET	LA specific	11.1%	£15,992.01
Sources	UK Government	SHU	Ciclavoro
Crime (Adult)	1.79%	1%	£39,560.08
Sources	MoJ	STT	UK Government
Crime (Youth)	0.84%	1%	£30,024.00
Sources	UK Government	STT	UK Government
Hypertension	LA specific	50%	£4,238.56
Sources	BHF	AOMRC	EJHE
Heart disease	LA specific	40%	£2,140.14
Sources	BHF	AOMRC	EHN - adjusted
Stroke	LA specific	30%	£47,524.75
Sources	BHF	AOMRC	EJN
Diabetes	Region specific	50%	£4,868.01
Sources	BHF	AOMRC	Diabetologia
Breast Cancer	Age specific	25%	£77,442.00
Sources	Cancer Today	AOMRC	NCBI
Colon Cancer	0.4%	20%	£77,442.00
Sources	Cancer Today	AOMRC	NCBI
Schizophrenia	0.24%	11.8%	£32,563.44
Sources	OurWorldData	CTF	NCBI
Anxiety	4.74%	32%	£1,630.07
Sources	IHE	NCBI	NCBI
Depression	4.74%	30%	£4,663.40
Sources	IHE	AOMRC	NCBI
Dementia	1.36%	30%	£29,240.83
Sources	AS	AOMRC	AS
Osteoporosis	6.7% / 21.9%	40%	£1880.84 / £1051.86
Sources	OF	AOMRC	NCBI