



Annual AGM Report

Reporting Period: 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025



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Purpose: Annual operational, performance and governance overview

Audience: WRL Membership

1. Overview

The 2024–25 reporting period represented a year of structural consolidation, leadership transition and mixed international performance outcomes for Wales Rugby League.

Key outcomes included:

- World Cup qualification for the Women’s and Wheelchair national teams
- Senior men’s team reaching the final stage of World Cup qualification but not qualifying
- Continued strengthening of pathway structures (U14–U18, Students, Dragonhearts)
- Stable delivery of the community game, supported by volunteers
- Key Board and senior leadership appointments

2. Governance & Leadership

During the reporting period, Wales Rugby League strengthened its governance and leadership capacity through the following appointments:

- Richard Hibbard – Chief Executive Officer
- Clive Griffiths – Director of Performance
- Adam Rowland – Non-Executive Director
- Adam Malcolm – Commercial Director

The Chief Executive’s first year focused on organisational stability, restoring international fixtures to Wales, strengthening commercial partnerships, and reinforcing the volunteer-led nature of the organisation.



The Board recognises the financial constraints under which WRL operates, particularly in relation to performance funding, and the reliance on volunteers across governance, coaching, officiating and administration. Leadership capacity has improved; sustainable funding and workforce support remain critical strategic considerations.

3. Community Game & Participation

The community game remains the foundation of Wales Rugby League, with delivery across open-age, junior, women's and wheelchair formats continuing throughout the season.

Participation levels during 2024 showed continued positive growth, particularly within junior and inclusive formats, reinforcing recent upward trends and strengthening the future player base.

The JES Group Rugby League Conference operated as the principal domestic open-age competition. It provided regular regular competitive fixtures and remains a key reference point for representative selection.

Aberavon Fighting Irish were winners of the JES Group Rugby League Conference, winning a tight Grand Final 21-18 over league leaders South Wales Jets.



The results of the junior Grand Finals were as follows...



U16 - Aber Valley Wolves 8 Swansea Rams 22

U14 - Cynon Valley Cavaliers 16 Aber Valley Wolves 10

U13 - Cynon Valley Cavaliers 34 Torfaen Tigers 10

U12 - South Wales Jets 24 Aber Valley Wolves 4

Delivery of the community game remains heavily dependent on volunteers, with variation in club capacity and resilience. Club sustainability, volunteer retention and administrative support remain ongoing risks requiring continued oversight.

4. Women's Rugby League – World Cup Qualification

- In June 2024, the Wales Women's national team defeated the Netherlands, securing qualification for the 2026 Women's Rugby League World Cup.
- This marked the first World Cup qualification in the women's programme's history.
- Cardiff Demons reached the finals of the Super League Nines, the Grand Final of the Women's Southern Championship, then entered the Northern Championship in December 2024, increasing domestic competition standards.

Focus now shifts from qualification to preparation, squad depth and programme sustainability.





5. Wheelchair Rugby League – World Cup Qualification

- The Wales Wheelchair national team qualified for the Rugby League World Cup, continuing Wales' strong presence in inclusive formats.
- Domestic wheelchair delivery remained stable, with North Wales Crusaders winning the Welsh Wheelchair Challenge Cup in November 2024.

Wheelchair rugby league remains a strategic strength and positive representation of WRL values.



6. Senior Men's International Programme

- In October 2024, Wales hosted Jamaica at The Gnoll, Neath.
- In 2026 Rugby League World Cup European qualification:
 - Wales defeated Serbia in the semi-final
 - Wales lost to France in the final
- The men's team did not qualify, falling at the final hurdle.



The campaign highlighted progress but also confirmed a performance gap at the final qualification stage. We need to consider how we get World Cup Ready 2030.



7. Youth & Pathway Development (U14–U18)

- U14 and U16 Origin fixtures were delivered as planned, with West Wales securing titles at both age grades.
- December 2024 saw the first-ever U18 Origin fixture, addressing a long-standing pathway gap.
- In August 2024, Wales retained the U16 Home Nations Championship, defeating England Community Lions 32–10 at Neath.

Pathway depth continues to improve; retention and transition into senior environments remains a priority.



8. Students Rugby League

- April 2024 saw the first ever rugby league Welsh Varisty match with Swansea University beating Cardiff University in the opening sport to a day's worth of events.
- January 2025 saw Wales Students trials held with a squad pulled together for a double header vs England. We lost the double header with a review to take place of the current programme for 2024-5 season.
- The Students programme continues to support retention of players in education and late developers.

Greater alignment with senior and Dragonhearts pathways would strengthen progression clarity.



9. Dragonhearts – Community Representative Programme

- A 39-player Dragonhearts train-on squad was announced in May 2024.
- In November 2024, Dragonhearts recorded a 56–12 victory over Germany and completed a successful tour to Poland.

Dragonhearts remains an effective development bridge; financial sustainability should be reviewed.



10. Match Officials & Workforce

- WRL promoted referee recruitment via free online courses in May 2024.
- Welsh officials Craig Davies and James Jones officiated at the European U19 Championships in July 2024.

Referee recruitment and retention remains a medium-to-high operational risk.

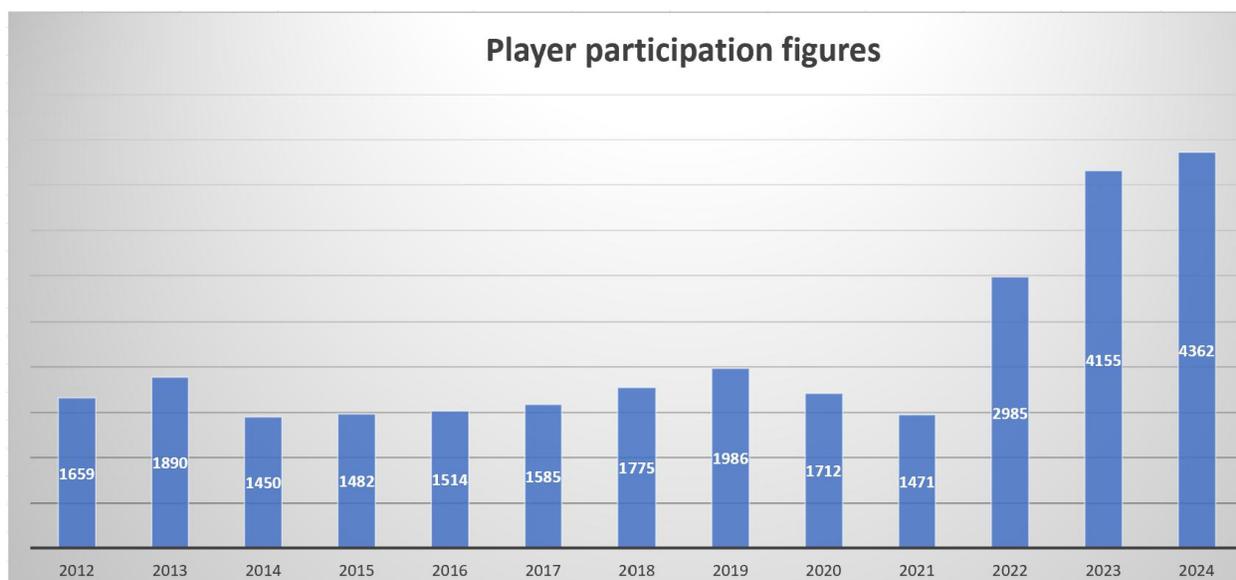


11. Key Risks & Strategic Focus Areas

- Volunteer capacity and club sustainability
- Transition from youth to senior rugby
- Funding constraints relative to performance ambition
- Workforce (officials, coaches, administrators)
- Sustaining momentum following World Cup qualification (women & wheelchair)

12. Summary

In total, we had a record number of participants in all forms of rugby league in 2024.



The 2024–25 period delivered historic success for women’s and wheelchair programmes, strengthened leadership structures, and continued pathway development. The men’s programme’s failure to qualify, despite reaching the final stage, provides clear learning for future performance planning.

Wales Rugby League enters the next cycle with strong foundations, clearer governance and defined priorities for Board oversight. Our Bottom up Top Down Strategy has been developed to underpin the lessons learn during the 2024-2025.