



Policy: Anti-Sexism and Anti-Misogyny in Rugby

Statement of Commitment

The RFU is committed to making rugby union in England a sport where everyone feels safe, valued, and respected. Tackling sexism and misogyny requires leadership, accountability, and sustained action at every level of the game. This policy underlines the RFU's expectation that all affiliated clubs and participants play their part in upholding these standards and the game's core values.

Background

In recent years, the RFU has received an increasing number of reports relating to sexism and misogyny. These experiences risk undermining individual wellbeing, volunteer retention, and the positive culture and values rugby strives to promote.

At the same time, rugby is experiencing a period of significant cultural development and growth. This includes the continued expansion of the women's and girls' game, rising expectations around inclusion and personal safety, and increased visibility of women across all areas of the sport. As the game grows and diversifies, it must also responsibly balance long-standing traditions with evolving standards of behaviour and respect.

This policy is informed by research commissioned by the RFU and conducted in partnership with Women in Sport, which examined the experiences of volunteers within rugby.

1. Purpose

We believe every woman and girl deserves the opportunity to play, coach, support, and thrive in rugby. We will strengthen the club offer for women and girls in local communities and support clubs and CBs to create a culture where women and girls are respected and supported in all roles.

This policy is issued by the Rugby Football Union (RFU) and applies across the whole game; from grassroots through to elite and professional levels. The policy sits alongside the RFU's overall position on the importance of inclusion and diversity within the game and does not seek to put one form of discrimination above another, but instead highlight where current, and significant, challenges exist.

The policy is intended for adoption by all rugby organisations, including clubs, Constituent Bodies (CBs), Regional Growth Boards (RGBs), and professional clubs and competitions. It will be implemented by the RFU at a national level, ensuring a coherent and aligned approach across all parts of the game.

This policy sets out a clear blueprint for preventing, challenging, and addressing sexism and misogyny within rugby. It reflects a game-wide commitment to creating a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all participants.

Sexism and misogyny undermine the values of rugby, damage trust, limit participation, and cause harm to individuals and communities. They will not be tolerated at any level of the game.

This policy applies universally across rugby and is not dependent on the presence of women's or girls' sections. It covers all participants, including players, coaches, match officials, volunteers, staff, board members, supporters, and any individual acting on behalf of rugby organisations.

We would also remind all our members that there is a legal duty now placed on employers, which many but not all clubs are, to ensure they are taking reasonable steps to prevent harassment of any nature within a place of work, this includes harassment from a third party. This also relates to our community game, where there are several employed roles throughout our clubs to which this would be relevant. One of the key ways we can take those steps to prevent harassment is policies such as this one and both education and strong cultures within clubs to communicate that this will not be tolerated.

2. Definitions

Sexism: Prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, or exclusion experienced by women or girls.

Misogyny: Contempt, malice and ingrained prejudice against women or girls, which may be expressed through behaviour, language, systems, or cultural norms.

Sexist or misogynistic behaviour may include, but is not limited to:

- Derogatory, demeaning, or sexualised language
- Harassment or bullying
- Exclusion from opportunities
- Normalisation of harmful stereotypes
- Abuse, intimidation, or coercive behaviour
- Online abuse or misogynistic conduct on social media

3. Core Principles

Rugby organisations at all levels will:

- Be expected to take a zero-tolerance approach to sexism and misogyny
- Promote the game's core values, as well as dignity, equality, and respect
- Prioritise inclusion, safety, wellbeing, and accountability
- Actively challenge harmful cultures and behaviours
- Ensure fairness, transparency, and consistency in decision-making

4. Role of the Rugby Football Union (RFU)

The RFU holds strategic leadership and system-wide responsibility for addressing sexism and misogyny in rugby in England. Its role includes:

4.1 Leadership and Governance

- Setting a clear national standard and expectations for behaviour
- Embedding equality and inclusion within governance structures

- Ensuring diverse and representative leadership and decision-making
- Holding affiliated clubs and bodies accountable for compliance with this policy

4.2 Policy, Regulation, and Regulatory Measures

- Ensuring sexism and misogyny are recognised as forms of discrimination
- Developing, maintaining, and enforcing robust policies and codes of conduct
- Defining clear regulatory compliance processes and proportionate regulatory measures
- Applying sanctions consistently across all levels of the game

4.3 Education and Cultural Change

- Providing education and training on sexism and misogyny
- Supporting awareness campaigns and cultural change initiatives
- Promoting positive role models and inclusive narratives within rugby in line with core values

4.4 Reporting and Safeguarding

- Establishing safe, accessible, and confidential reporting mechanisms
- Ensuring fair and objective investigation of complaints
- Aligning with safeguarding and welfare procedures

4.5 Monitoring and Accountability

- Collecting and analysing data on incidents, participation, and outcomes
- Regularly reviewing the effectiveness of this policy
- Publishing transparent reports on progress and challenges

5. Role of Rugby Organisations

Rugby organisations are responsible for implementing this policy at a local level, for shaping day-to-day culture and upholding the game's values. Tools, education and guidance will be provided to support clubs to deliver this policy. Rugby organisations' roles include:

5.1 Club Leadership and Responsibility

- Demonstrating visible commitment to tackling sexism and misogyny
- Appointing an inclusion lead where possible
- Ensuring club policies align with RFU standards

5.2 Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment

- Challenging sexist or misogynistic behaviour immediately and appropriately
- Promoting respect and inclusion in all club activities
- Ensuring allocation of facilities, scheduling and resources is fair

- Supporting women and girls to participate, progress, and lead

5.3 Education and Awareness

- Communicating to all members expected standards of behaviour
- Ensuring attendance at training and education programmes
- Reinforcing messages through inductions, team meetings, and communications

5.4 Reporting and Responding to Concerns

- Providing clear, accessible routes for raising concerns
- Taking all reports seriously and responding promptly
- Maintaining confidentiality and protecting those who report concerns
- All matters should be reported to the RFU for oversight and recording

5.5 Accountability and Regulatory Compliance

- Applying club-level compliance measures when required
- Cooperating fully with RFU investigations and processes
- Taking action to address poor behaviour or cultural issues when they are reported and/or persist

6. Individual Responsibility

Everyone involved in rugby has a responsibility to live the game values by:

- Challenging sexism and misogyny when it occurs
- Treating others with respect and dignity
- Reporting behaviour that breaches this policy
- Supporting those affected by sexist or misogynistic conduct

Bystander intervention and allyship are strongly encouraged.

7. Breaches of Policy

Breaches of this policy may result in regulatory measures against the rugby organisation or an individual, which may include:

- Education or training requirements
- Formal warnings
- A discipline case being brought which may result in suspension or removal from Community Rugby roles

Serious or repeated breaches may be referred to statutory authorities where appropriate.

8. Review and Continuous Improvement

This policy will be reviewed as required, but at least every three years, to ensure it remains effective, relevant, and aligned with best practice. Feedback from participants, clubs, and stakeholders will inform ongoing development.

Tackling Sexism and Misogyny in Rugby – One-Pager for Rugby Organisations

Our Shared Commitment

Sexism and misogyny have no place in rugby. All RFU-affiliated clubs are required to create a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for players, volunteers, officials, and supporters.

What This Means for Your Club

1. Lead by Example

- Make it clear that sexist or misogynistic behaviour will be challenged
- Committee members, coaches, and captains must model respectful behaviour

2. Clear Standards of Behaviour

- Address inappropriate sexist and/or misogynistic language, 'banter', and online behaviour
- Ensure all members understand expected standards
- Align club codes of conduct with RFU policies

3. Safe Reporting

- Provide clear routes for raising concerns (e.g. Welfare or Discipline Officer)
- Take all reports seriously and respond promptly
- Protect confidentiality and prevent retaliation
- Escalate issues to the RFU or CB where required via Speak Up

4. Act When Issues Arise

- Challenge behaviour early before it becomes entrenched
- Apply club disciplinary processes fairly and consistently
- Cooperate fully with RFU investigations

5. Education and Awareness

- Support RFU education and training initiatives
- Reinforce messages through inductions, team talks, and communications

6. Inclusive Club Environment

- Ensure women and girls have suitable access to facilities, resources, and opportunities
- Support female participation, progression, and leadership

Everyone's Responsibility

All members have a responsibility to live the game values by:

- Challenging sexism and misogyny
- Treating others with dignity and respect
- Reporting concerns
- Supporting those affected

Support Available

Clubs can access guidance, training, and reporting mechanisms through the RFU and their CB.

Creating a safe and respectful rugby environment is everyone's responsibility.

Appendix: Discrimination Reporting Flowchart

