



THE RFU CHAMPIONSHIP

A blueprint for a thriving future

Version 2, February 2020

Proposed for further discussion by





OVERVIEW

We believe that the RFU Championship is and should remain a cornerstone of rugby in England, thriving and growing based on a number of core principles.

1. The Championship offers a fiercely competitive proving ground for English qualified players
2. The Championship is the ideal development opportunity for coaches, referees and support staff alike
3. The Championship both takes professional rugby into new areas and consolidates the sport within its heartlands, helping the RFU achieve its objectives of encouraging the sport and its values to flourish across the country
4. The Championship is an ideal step in the ongoing pathway for clubs with ambition
5. The Championship can clearly demonstrate its value to rugby through demonstrable return on investment for our key stakeholders and financial partners, eg the RFU

With the landscape of English club rugby set to change rapidly and dramatically following the investment from CVC Capital Partners, we believe that the time is now right for a lengthy and serious discussion and some out-of-the-box thinking to try and break the mould to give ourselves a future in which all clubs can thrive.

What does the game look like from the 2021 season onwards? What will the competition structure be for English rugby and our own clubs? How can the Championship clubs showcase their relevance, vibrancy and key positions within the game, building on a demonstrable legacy of developing players, coaches and referees who have gone on to achieve success at the highest level.

This draft, which has been prepared by representatives from Cornish Pirates, Coventry Rugby, Ealing Trailfinders and London Scottish, is intended to be the basis for such discussion and comments, and it is important that all stakeholders should read the document with an open mind and in order for us to move forwards.



BACKGROUND

Current participation agreement ends June 30th, 2020

CVC is investing heavily in the Premiership, Pro14, Six Nations and MLR

There are a number of PRL shareholders who would like a 13-team Premiership, with a variety of views about the future of the A League. If PRL is allowed to extend the A League (aka Premiership Shield) then there is a real risk that the RFU will lose control of the second tier of the professional game in England

More commercial aggression within the Premiership could bring a restricted pathway for players, coaches and staff from outside the league. Furthermore a ring-fenced Premiership could also bring the end to both RFU central funding and PRL funding to the Championship (which we believe is PRL's intention)

The Championship does not have uniform standards or expectations, and there is a big difference in what is being delivered on and off the pitch by league clubs. The perception outside our competition is that we are a poor relation to the Premiership. However there is demonstrable commitment to seeking to develop, such as the approval for Stadium for Cornwall, Amptill's proposals for a purpose-built facility, the £3 million investment into Castle Park in 2008, and Hartpury being selected as a 2015 Rugby World Cup training base. Many clubs have already developed, others are committed to do so

With an increased emphasis on player welfare and furthering a life after rugby, the Championship clubs are ideally placed to provide a formal link between the professional game and BUCS Super Rugby teams. This provides those players released by PRL/RFU Academies with an opportunity to develop their game and receive an education, keeping our talented young players - and the knowledge they have gained within the PRL/RFU system - within the sport

We believe that there are opportunities which can be explored and developed to enhance the Championship's viability and future, based not on 12 clubs working individually but by using our collective reach and profile to provide a solid foundation for clubs to build their own sustainability on and off the pitch



MISSION STATEMENT

The Championship is unique. Everything we do is about providing the right opportunities for players, coaches, referees and clubs to achieve their full potential, fulfilling our responsibilities to the grassroots and the elite ends of English club rugby.

With vibrant competition, attractive rugby, approachable players, innovative community engagement, a collaborative approach, commitment to improving facilities for our supporters and a dedication to embodying the spirit and values of English rugby we can ensure a sustainable future that builds on our successes and legacy in a new sporting landscape.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are proposing:

A thorough review of the format of the Championship league, taking into account the views of all clubs, along with those National League One clubs with ambitions for promotion and making the league members as competitive as possible.

Exploration of new competitions in which the Championship clubs would participate, eg a new Premiership and Championship Cup; a new Championship and National League One Cup; British and Irish league; or third tier European tournament.

Clear and transparent governance of the competition, including the appointment of an independent chair and paid executive(s) to maximise the Championship's commercial potential and therefore investment into the clubs

The proactive use of the best practices shown by large American and Australian sports (ie NFL, MLB, NRL, etc) and being adopted by CVC with the Premiership for an integrated and collaborative approach across key commercial and playing areas.

The introduction of new educational pathways to give opportunities for players cut by Premiership Academies to both remain within a professional rugby environment while also preparing themselves for life with a post-18 education.

Robust community programmes and the sharing of best practice across the league.

The introduction of comprehensive minimum standards across all areas of a club's operations, with the incentive of greater incomes and investment for clubs which achieve those standards. A transition period would be in place for clubs to achieve those minimum standards within a set time period.

More efficient use of current central funding and re-allocating other funding streams within the sport to the Championship.



A NEW STRUCTURE

The commercial restructuring of PRL and new long-form agreement gives us the ideal opportunity to refresh our own structures, looking to be innovative and realistic in our season and competitions. A new innovation group, overseen by the CCC's new independent chair and reporting to the full CCC, will drive the preparation of the structure, underpinned by transparent and robust governance, enhanced standards and rigorous audit processes
2019/20

Agree a roll-over of the current format into 2020/21. However the innovation group will propose a new format for approval no later than June 30th, 2020. All clubs will have the opportunity to contribute their thoughts
 Retaining one-down, one-up relegation/promotion with both the Premiership and National League One
2020/21

New structures could include a change in numbers within the league, the re-introduction of play-offs to provide more excitement at the later stages of the season and a marketable product for TV

Season dates to mirror Premiership

Other possible competitions

Premiership and Championship Cup to replace current Premiership Rugby Cup, Championship Cup and Premiership Shield (aka the previous A League). Championship players regularly appear in the Premiership Shield, demonstrating that PRL clubs do not always have the wherewithal to deliver their own competitions

Championship and National League One Cup, giving teams lower down the pyramid the opportunity to test themselves and grow their own attendances

British League option to include the Championship clubs with Super6 (Scotland), 4 x Regional Development teams (Wales) and 4 x Irish Province Development teams. New costs (eg travel) must be covered for this competition to be viable

Third-tier European competition with Pro D2 (France), Top 12 (Italy), along with Tier 2/3 representative teams, eg from Romania, Spain, Portugal and Germany. New costs (eg travel) must be covered for this competition to be viable



FINANCIALS

We believe that using the existing funding streams more efficiently and effectively the vast majority of the operating costs and new minimum standards can be met using current income, including other funding options outside the existing central schemes. The clubs and RFU can then work together to grow new income streams

The current central financing is significantly less than required by a full-time professional club, especially taking into account top class coaching and Premiership-standard ratios of physios to players (1:12)

Current central income from RFU and PRL: +/-£645,000 per club

Typical costs of full-time professional playing department: c.£1,500,000

Based on:

40 players @ £20k average

5 coaches @ £30k average

4 medical/conditioning staff @ £25k average

Travelling costs @ £50k/annum

Food and supplement costs @ £75-100k

3 off-field salary costs @ £33k

Health insurance @ £125k

Company insurance @ £25k

The above does not take into consideration any non-rugby staff, eg operations, conference and events, facilities management, etc

NEW OR REDISTRIBUTED INCOME SOURCES

Should PRL decide on a 13 club Premiership, then there needs to be a compromise agreement with a min of £350k per team per year for duration of new participation agreement

Redistribution of existing funding streams, such as BUCS, linking existing coach education into clubs' CPD programmes, referee development (to give referees access to medical and S&C at their local Championship club)

Identified commercial growth opportunities

Investment from World Rugby/Home Nations into new cups, league or European model

Funding linked to delivery of standards



ENHANCED OPPORTUNITIES

The Championship is the ideal environment to develop players, coaches and referees alike

PLAYERS

Maintain (or increase) and enforce the 16/23 EQP target with points deductions as possible sanctions
 Average 4 EAP/dual reg in each match day squad during the season, creating 44+ playing opportunities each weekend for the most talented young EAP

Each club to have a HE/FE partner with a central education programme to be launched across every Championship club, enhancing pathways from grassroots to elite, linking the community to the Academy and increasing facilities usage

Each club to enhance player welfare with RPA support, health and mental wellbeing officer, committed provision for personal development. Alternatives are available through the likes of Switch The Play

CASE STUDY EALING AND BRUNEL UNIVERSITY

Ealing oversees the male and female performance rugby programmes at Brunel, with coaches, S&C staff, analysts and medics all contributing their time

Brunel's players have the opportunity to become part of the Ealing Academy

Academy players continue to develop their education at Brunel, with a cash bursary to help towards university and tuition fees, along with kit and medical support



A PROVEN BREEDING GROUND

A host of well-established internationals built up significant experience in the Championship before representing their country. Here are some England examples but in all 21 nations have had players play in our league before their first cap:



MAKO VUNIPOLA
30 Champ apps



TOM YOUNGS
42 Champ apps



JONNY MAY
14 Champ apps

The list of players is extensive and includes some more household names. The full list is in the appendix



ENHANCED OPPORTUNITIES

COACHES

Players and coaches from Championship clubs to work with Constituent Bodies and England Counties U20s to support the England Aspirational Teams programme

REFEREES

Clubs can work with their respective Constituent Bodies on their referee pathway programmes, providing S&C, medical and analysis support

This can continue into the professional ranks, with referees continuing their development based at Championship venues, and meanwhile working with players and teams to increase their understanding of the laws



CASE STUDY SIMON AMOR

After his England Sevens playing career was over, Simon joined London Scottish as a part time assistant coach and player; he progressed through the coaching ranks with Scottish and left as full time Director of Rugby five years later to become Head Coach of England Sevens. He has just been appointed England Attack Coach



CASE STUDY GREG GARNER

Greg refereed in 17 Championship matches on his way to becoming one of the best referees in the world. In all he refereed over 200 professional matches, and in the 6 Nations and Rugby Championship and helped design the strategy of the Professional Game Match Officials Team. He is now the Elite Referee Manager for the PRO14



CASE STUDY JULIE SNOW

Julie's first role in sport came at Coventry Rugby, where she spent two seasons. After three years as Head Academy Physio at Saracens she moved to Doncaster Knights, then Jersey Reds and finally Worcester Warriors, where she was Head Physio for three years. In 2017 Julie joined the RFU to be the Physio for the England Women's 7s squad



ENHANCED SUSTAINABILITY

We are reliant on a small group of benefactors to maintain our viability. This is not healthy for any organisation which is seeking long-term sustainability in any area of its operation

As a competition we would benefit from clear and transparent governance, with an independent chair and group responsible for scrutiny and mediation between clubs

A common sense salary cap, which could be a set amount or a %age of club turnover, reducing financial risk and encourage commercial growth

A minimum salary of £17.5k (in line with national living wage) to make the Championship a fully professional league, with possible marquee players and a limit on foreign players

Greater commercial revenues from collaborative working across the league (see next page) will increase turnover, allowing for more investment, better players and facilities, and more growth in a virtuous circle

ENHANCED STANDARDS AND INCENTIVES

We should use the PRL minimum standards rationale as a guide, namely to ensure the best possible playing facilities, the best possible supporter experience, and using better media image and facilities to help achieve greater revenues. Clubs which meet higher standards receive more central funding as an incentive

Clubs will have a transition period to achieve minimum standards or have a robust plan in place to achieve them within an agreed timeframe

Minimum standards apply across the organisation - eg at least one coach with RFU Level 4, or 5 years' experience at Championship/Premiership level; stadium facilities; compulsory attendance at coach CPD sessions, with points accrued; active involvement with referees; active involvement with Constituent Bodies

The RFU Academy Licence is a useful reference point - some other areas include: a published coaching and playing philosophy, medical provision throughout the club, individual athlete support, mandatory lifestyle training and career planning



A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH

The biggest sporting leagues in the world - eg NFL, MLB, NRL, AFL, etc - have collaborative approaches which benefit all the participating teams. We consider that the Championship and RFU should use the best practice approaches to grow both the member clubs and league as a whole.

For a national competition our commercial opportunities are not being optimised. Indeed the Greene King title sponsorship and Sky Sports broadcast deal are both included within larger RFU deals, meaning that we get little support for exposure and consistent broadcasting respectively, and will always play second fiddle to England and Twickenham.

We propose that all clubs contribute an equal amount to employ a dedicated Commercial Manager to secure dedicated partnerships and agreements so that we are not reliant on being included within the RFU's England-based deals. The Commercial Manager would work closely with their RFU equivalent.

Such opportunities could include:

Enhanced and improved competition sponsor

Enhanced TV exposure similar to Premiership Rugby Productions or Mitre 10 Cup (New Zealand) with a distribution agreement via DAZN or similar

Central team wear partner providing kit for all clubs

Main shirt partner/sponsor for all clubs

Medical insurance partner

S&C equipment partner

Sports nutrition partner

Hotel and travel partner

Central website provider, including stats provision

Central brewery partner

We should also be working together to upskill across all areas of our operations, from medical to community to outreach to communications, led by an independent chair and innovation group.



OUR COMMUNITY ASSETS

The Championship is in the enviable position of both consolidating the sport within its heartlands as well as expanding professional rugby into new areas. We are also fortunate to have the flexibility not necessarily afforded to PRL clubs thanks to their central obligations.

This gives us the opportunity to entrench links with RFU Delivery Officers for a co-ordinated approach which delivers the RFU objectives of more players, volunteers and supporters and therefore return on investment. All 12 clubs should be the base for their local RFU Delivery Officer(s), with stadiums becoming hubs for projects and activities.

This streamlines delivery costs to the RFU and gives access to Championship facilities for the local rugby community.

This can also increase access to CSR budgets and therefore income, and by tying together the work of the club's own staff and the RDOs we can grow participation and engagement thanks to the connections into local schools and clubs, and support the work and development of the Constituent Bodies.

We can also share best practice in terms of bid writing for charitable funding and delivery across a range of areas, such as schools, disability sport, mixed ability, etc.

CASE STUDY COVENTRY WHEELCHAIR RUGBY

- Key project within the Coventry Rugby Foundation
- Support from GB Wheelchair Rugby at its inception and then support from charities to fund wheelchairs
- Corporate support from RML, a Coventry Rugby partner
- International player as team coach
- Players actively seeking to move from Leicester and Northampton
- Increased success on the court
- Gives the club an extra commercial option, eg corporate team building





SUMMARY

As set out at the start of this draft, the suggestions made here are not comprehensive or exhaustive. They are intended as a step towards a comprehensive and positive discussion which should also include the RFU and PRL and perhaps NL1 clubs who have the ambition to reach the Championship.

We have used this document to demonstrate that by doing the correct things well and by adopting and tailoring best practice to our specific needs we can make the Championship an even more viable and dynamic environment which can help all of us achieve our ambitions, grow and thrive.

APPENDIX

PLAYERS' APPEARANCES BEFORE BEING CAPPED (min 10 Championship appearances)

ENGLAND

Jonny May (14 apps; 52 caps)
Matt Kvesic (10 apps; 4 caps)
Harry Williams (33 apps; 18 caps)
Sam Simmonds (32 apps; 7 caps)
Alex Lozowski (21 apps; 5 caps)
Ellis Genge (15 apps; 14 caps)
Mark Wilson (20 apps; 18 caps)
Tom Johnson (23 apps; 8 caps)
Tom Youngs (42 apps; 28 caps)
Luke Cowan Dickie (18 apps; 21 caps)
Alec Hepburn (17 apps; 6 caps)
Paul Hill (12 apps; 5 caps)
Henry Slade (11 apps; 27 caps)
Mako Vunipola (30 apps; 58 caps)

SCOTLAND

Ryan Wilson (17 apps; 49 caps)
Blair Cowan (53 apps; 17 caps)
Rory Hutchinson (11 apps; 4 caps)
Nick Haining (61 apps; 1 cap)
Gary Graham (32 apps; 2 caps)
Duncan Taylor (33 apps; 26 caps)
Darryl Marfo (23 apps; 3 caps)
Greig Tonks (25 apps; 8 caps)
Mike Cusack (42 apps; 2 caps)
Tyrone Holmes (34 apps; 1 cap)
George Horne (12 apps; 11 caps)
Steven Lawrie (39 apps; 1 cap)

WALES

Jonah Holmes (73 apps; 3 caps)
Tomas Francis (34 apps; 48 caps)

REFEREES WHO TOOK CHARGE OF A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH BEFORE GOING ON TO REFEREE A TEST MATCH

Greg Garner (17 matches)
Luke Pearce (43 matches)
Matthew Carley (51 matches)
Ian Tempest (62 matches)
Craig Maxwell-Keys (28 matches)
Anthony Woodthorpe (12 matches)
Karl Dickson (16 matches)
Christophe Ridley (25 matches)
Thomas Foley (35 matches)

REFEREES WHO TOOK CHARGE OF A CHAMPIONSHIP MATCH BEFORE GOING ON TO REFEREE IN THE PREMIERSHIP

Adam Leal (11 matches)
Jack Makepeace (17 matches)
Matthew O'Grady (44 matches)
Andrew Jackson (53 matches)
Greg Macdonald (77 matches)
Steve Lee (85 matches)
Llyr Apgeraint Roberts (54 matches)

EXAMPLE COMMUNITY PROGRAMMES

CORNISH PIRATES

'Connecting Penzance' sees members of the Pirates coaching and administration staff delivering talks at events aimed at alleviating loneliness among people living in the town by bringing together like-minded individuals.

Another positive mental health initiative was Get Set To Go, using sport to help prevent suicides in partnership with Cornwall Sports Partnership and MIND.

The Pirates also supported Cornwall Council's adoption team kicking off National Adoption Week at the Mennaye.

COVENTRY RUGBY

Project:500 has brought together the club, the city's business community and individuals to fund and deliver weeks of activity for underprivileged youngsters from the Coventry area. These weeks include on-pitch sessions, a new Coventry Rugby replica shirt, and support and information regarding healthy living and empowerment.

NOTTINGHAM

Forget Me Notts is a partnership which includes Notts County Cricket, Nottingham Rugby, Nottingham Forest, the National Ice Centre and Edwalton golf, and uses sport as a vehicle for reminiscence and interaction between people with dementia, their carers and those experiencing isolation and loneliness.

Carers who attend also have the opportunity to establish an informal support network with others who can empathise with their situation through experience.

EDUCATION SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

Most Championship clubs offer a range of support programmes to local schools, such as breakfast and after-school clubs, Rugby and Reading sessions, PPA cover, and mentoring students who need role models to help keep them engaged with their classes.

CLUB SUPPORT PROGRAMMES

Many Championship clubs also offer 'coach the coach' sessions to other clubs and teams within their local area, passing on knowledge and best practice

MINIS AND JUNIORS

Amphill, Doncaster Knights, Ealing Trailfinders, Jersey Reds and London Scottish all have vibrant and dynamic minis and youth sections within their broader structure, showcasing a pathway from grassroots to a possible professional career within the same club