



Cathaoirleach, Deputies and Senators, I thank you for the opportunity to attend today and outline the experience of and commitment by the IRFU regarding 'Inclusion in Sport'.

I address you in my capacity as Head of Equity, Diversity & Inclusivity, a new role created within IRFU, demonstrating its commitment to this area of the game. Having previously worked as 'Safeguarding & Inclusion Officer' since 2015 and 'Manager of the Spirit of Rugby Programme' since 2017, inclusivity has been a key element of my work on behalf of the Irish Rugby Football Union. I am joined today by Ultan O'Callaghan, IRFU Head of Rugby Development. Both of us will be more than happy to answer questions you may have.

The 'Spirit of Rugby' programme was created by the IRFU in 2017 to protect and promote the values of the game and to encourage a culture within clubs where the values of the game can be demonstrated in all activities. 'Inclusivity' is one of the IRFU's 5 core values, and is embedded in the IRFU Strategic Plan, which outlines the values and behaviors acceptable within the Irish Rugby family, where diversity of opinion and culture means working together to be a vibrant and respectful organization. We aim to make the game as accessible as possible and to provide a positive experience for those who walk through the gate of their local rugby club.

In 2020, the IRFU appointed a dedicated 'Disability & Inclusion Officer'. The focus of their work is the expansion of our rugby offerings for players with a disability and, in recent times, their remit has widened to attract players from the LGBTQI+ community. The IRFU is currently providing rugby activities to over 1,000 players with a disability across 4 provinces, and this figure does not include schools who also are assisted to deliver programmes to pupils with a disability.

Increased participation of women at all levels of the game is a very specific target for the IRFU and this programme is now showing significant results, with participation increasing from 2022 by 21% mini, 28% youth and 26% adult. In addition, we record female coaching up 58%, refereeing up 50% with over 145 clubs providing a female pathway. The original 'Women in Rugby Action Plan' articulates the IRFU's aim for rugby to be a sport of equal opportunity and outlines the steps to be taken to achieve this target. A deep, independent review of the action plan in 2022, initiated by the IRFU and chaired by our President, added even greater impetus to our approach.

As Head of Equity, Diversity & Inclusivity for the IRFU a significant part of my role is to develop a detailed EDI Policy and to ensure implementation of best practice in the areas of inclusion, including the attainment of 40% female representation within the governance of the game by the end of this year. To support the next generation of leaders, a leadership programme has been established with 50% of places targeted for female Leaders.

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It is the intention of the IRFU that all clubs become inclusive spaces, irrespective of one's sexual orientation or ethnic background. While we have several clubs using tag rugby as a safe and welcoming entry point to rugby, there are also clubs specifically encouraging the LGBTQIA+ community to join; the aim is that clubs feel welcoming to all. A training module has been developed to enable committees and volunteers to make existing clubs more open and inclusive. Between October 2022 and April 2023 almost 600 volunteers completed this Diversity & Inclusion training.

The IRFU's 'Spirit of Rugby Charter' states that everyone has a right to learn, play and administer the game, irrespective of differences in age, orientation, socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds. As an example, the IRFU is currently translating some key information documents into Russian, Romanian and Polish so that parents and players can obtain key information about the sport and to make it easier for them to understand how to get involved in their local rugby club.

The IRFU has established an Inclusive Club Facility Grant Funding Scheme for clubs to modernize their facilities to meet the needs of their participants. We have developed an A-to-Z guide for clubs regarding retrofitting their changing facilities to accommodate all genders. The IRFU offers a grant of up to €100k per club for this project.

In September IRFU partnered with the Irish Centre for Diversity to complete an EDI survey with staff and this will continue in 2024 with the input of clubs. Results will form the framework for the IRFU ED&I Action Plan.

As recently as this weekend of 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup> October, we collaborated with the GAA and FAI to kick start the 'Respect Our Games' campaign, highlighting when people feel respected and involved, they have a positive experience and more likely to stay involved throughout their lives.

The IRFU will continue to provide leadership, guidance, and support to our clubs to enable an inclusive environment to pervade across our membership. Every participant needs to know that they will be offered a positive experience through rugby and that starts with the welcome at the gate.

I can assure this committee that Irish Rugby is committed to INCLUSIVITY within our sport.

Thank you for your time.

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