



# ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Founded 1897

Ground and Clubhouse: Gorton Street, Peel Green, Eccles, Manchester, M30 7LY  
0161 789 2613 | info@ecclesrfc.org.uk | @EcclesRFC | www.ecclesrfc.org.uk

## 2020/2021 AGM COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

This season has probably been one of the most challenging and difficult the club has had to endure in its long history. With rugby suspended, one might conclude that there has been very little to communicate this past year. This could not be further from the reality. The coronavirus may have prevented participation but it did not provide a break.

Keeping members accurately informed of the ever-changing rules and developing situation, and keeping the club's spirit and community alive whilst activities were suppressed, demanded constant commitment and effort to ensure the club's readiness for a safe and responsible return.

The pandemic required the club to define its purpose and reason for existence. Promoting its activities, facilities and achievements to its players and community is now an essential aspect of its operations. Gaining attention, winning recognition, generating pride and presenting a distinct identity are crucial to the club's survival and future success.

Eccles RFC is situated in a sports-saturated district. To attract players, members, supporters and sponsors we must compete, not only against 8 local Rugby Union clubs but also 4 Rugby League clubs and numerous other sporting diversions on our doorstep.

Adult participation in Rugby Union in England has declined in recent years and there are fewer fixtures played each season. The game has changed and the club must adapt to meet these challenges whilst maintaining the values that define and distinguish Eccles RFC from other clubs.

Despite the absence of competitive matches this season, the club has continued to promote and uphold the two principles we believe to be at the heart of what we offer:

- **RUGBY FOR ALL** - We believe rugby is an inclusive game for all shapes and sizes with a position for everyone. We have teams for Men, Women, Youths and Kids. Regardless of ability, experience, age or gender, you'll be welcomed at Eccles.
- **HOME GROWN** - We believe in encouraging and nurturing local talent. We don't pay our players we breed them and we celebrate our Junior players who make the transition to pull on the Senior Navy & White hoops shirt. We take pride in our club history and its roots within our community.

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Embracing these principles, the constraints and uncertainty of COVID did not prevent several positive comms highlights this season:

## **July 2020 - Eccles Peak Challenge**

With the club facilities closed, we encouraged players and coaches and volunteers to maintain their fitness off-site, launching a summer challenge to bring us together 'virtually' for a collective goal - getting fit and raising funds in support of the Salford Royal NHS Foundation. The aim of the challenge was to run, cycle, swim the equivalent distance from Eccles, Lancashire to Eccles Peak, Utah, USA. With daily social media updates we reported progress and reached the summit, achieving 10,236 kms in 24 days! Almost 1,000 activities were recorded, 122 adult and child participants and £2000 raised for the NHS.

## **Sept 2020 - Eccles Touch**

With contact rugby suspended, the club relaunched Touch Rugby for all members of the Senior Section with a new identity and limited edition T shirt. Social Media was used to promote the Saturday morning event. Successful administration by James Wright and Rowanne Smalley saw an average of 40 players participate regularly throughout the season. This initiative also provided an opportunity to keep former colts players engaged who would have otherwise drifted away from the club.

## **Oct 2020 - Coaching CPD**

With training suspended, the club was presented with an opportunity to address coaching development. A series of Eccles coaching CPD sessions was devised with the goal of creating problem-solving players and encouraging coach-player engagement during lockdown. There were 5 autumn sessions in total (3 on zoom). Feedback was positive. We hope this initiative has kick started a renewed enthusiasm for coach self-improvement and attendance at RFU courses.

A coach WhatsApp Group was established for the purpose of support & sharing inspiration. This has proven useful for keeping the club's coaching fraternity connected during lockdown.

## **Nov 2020 - Girls Mini Warrior Events**

Launched to provide our junior female players with an opportunity to connect with their peers from other age groups and Senior Ladies players, SM was used to raise the profile of girls' rugby at Eccles RFC. The pilot session attracted over 100 girls, many from local clubs and attracted sponsorship. Further sessions were also well attended and the goal now is to turn this momentum into player recruitment.

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## **Dec 2020 to Feb 2021 - Ecclesathlon Challenge**

The winter lockdown preventing on-site sport was dispiriting.

To combat this we devised a 'One Club' initiative to keep players active, connected and competitive, testing their skills, fitness and knowledge at home each week to accumulate points for their team.

Points were awarded each week for player and parent participation, achievement and engagement with bonus points for the best social media video, effort and ingenuity.

Ecclesathlon 1 ran over 3 weeks. Ecclesathlon 2 ran over 5 weeks, which was too long to sustain interest.

Aside from its purpose of keeping coaches and players (and families) engaged with the club, the challenge was useful for highlighting the teams that needed support.

## **Feb 2021 - 100 Years of Hoops**

Historical research confirmed that Eccles RFC played in green shirts before WWI and adopted blue and white hoops in winter 1921. This discovery presented an opportunity to celebrate - a limited edition commemorative heritage shirt was designed as a fund-raising item and a 'Hoops 100' mens rugby tournament is planned for August.

## **March 2021 - Covid Recovery Crowdfunder**

The pandemic cost the club a year of income. To raise funds towards maintenance projects and improvements the club launched a Crowdfunder. With a major Social Media campaign and magnificent support from members and others the club raised £20k in 48 hours and went on to raise a total of £40k in a month (with generous backing from Sport England £8k and Salford Council £10k). This initiative significantly raised the profile of the club within its community and generated a lot of good will during a period of oppression, something the club must now reward with its completed projects.

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## Website

The 'new' website is now 2 years old and there were no technical issues to report this season (other than the familiar issues with membership through GMS).

Throughout lockdowns, the website provided an online virtual clubhouse, crucial for keeping Eccles RFC 'alive' whilst the gates were locked and was an invaluable tool for keeping members informed with the weekly changing details of Government restrictions and RFU guidance - information that was far too complex to share on social media and needed a permanent home so it could be quickly and easily referenced.

The website uses the RFU GMS to electronically manage membership & registration, record fixtures, results, team sheets, player stats and archive match reports.

Next season, we're aiming for all teams U14s upwards to record their results and add match reports every weekend (a failure to achieve this will affect RFU International ticket allocation).

## Social Media

Social Media offers the club the most cost-effective method for reporting news, responding to enquires, recruiting members, raising profile, celebrating success, thanking sponsors and improving search engine rankings. It also allows us to measure the growth of the club's influence and the effectiveness of our communications.

Despite Covid-19 preventing any social events or meaningful Rugby this season we still passed our season targets to achieve over **600 new Social Media followers in 12 months!**

It's not as impressive as the 900+ of last season (when we were playing rugby) but it's pretty good growth for a club of just 300 registered members! (these figures exclude Ladies & Minis Social Media followers which would add a further 3,400 to the club tally!)

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**2020/21 TOTAL: 4,638 Social Media followers** (+ 608 new followers since June 1 2020)  
**TWITTER:** 1,807 followers (+128 new followers)  
**FACEBOOK:** 1,865 followers (+304 new followers)  
**INSTAGRAM:** 863 followers (+156 new followers)  
**LINKED IN:** 52 followers (+6 new followers)  
**YOU TUBE:** 51 subscribers (+14 new followers)

Eccles continues to out-punch Sedgley Park, Manchester, Sale, Stockport and Blackburn in the SM rankings (we're now well above those clubs rising to 8 in the Top 20).

Some weeks we've out performed the North West heavyweights by as much as treble their engagement rate. Orrell and Bolton remain just behind Eccles and are the club's closest rivals in the battle for attention. Broughton Park and Macclesfield remain 500 followers ahead.

I suspect Eccles is reaching its limit of what it can achieve in terms of exposure and reach. Although growth remains possible, I believe it's unlikely Eccles can close the gap with BP and attract that level of audience without a significant change in its Senior playing status or a financial investment to 'buy' followers or produce 'next level' SM content.

The club's followers remain faithful to one platform so the club has to build three communities (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram) rather than focus resources into one.

Analytics show club followers are broadly split 60/40 Men/Women typically 25-34 years old living in Manchester and Salford (followers are biased slightly older and female on Facebook, and slightly younger and male on Insta)

Unsurprisingly, SM activity spiked in the spring with the return to rugby.

In general, rugby action photos are the most popular posts with club SM followers.

Recruitment of photographers for every team would be a worthwhile target next season.

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## **Digital Online Match Programme**

With all fixtures cancelled this season there's been no opportunity to develop this platform, but the artwork templates are set up and feedback from sponsors was very positive last year so hopefully we'll see it published once again for every 1XV home game next year (FREE to all sponsors and all subs-paid members).

## **Community Communications**

Plans for distributing 2,000 flyers to local residents to promote facilities and recruit players/members were put on hold. If the Beer Festival is possible in August we can look at producing such a piece to hand out to visitors ahead of the new season.

## **Internal Club Communications**

Response to volunteer recruitment remains poor.

Response to promotion of coaching courses and qualifications remains low.

There is only so much the club can achieve with zooms and messages in what's app groups during lockdown. When restrictions are lifted to make it possible, a pre-season coaches & managers meeting would be the most productive way to discuss and find solutions to these pressing challenges.

## **Sponsorship**

As one might expect, with little rugby played, sponsorship activity this season has been low. However, the club is sincerely grateful to all those businesses and individuals who have stuck by the club and remained supportive its events, players and coaches throughout the pandemic, all of whom are identified on our website including our stalwart sponsor Seward Refrigeration.

Many of our sponsors made donations or gave rewards to our Crowdfunder project ( special mention here to D3 tape) which also introduced two new sponsors to our club, MOJO and local brewer FIRST CHOP, a relationship we hope to develop as we go forwards.

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## **Thank you**

That concludes the Communications and Sponsorship report for 2020/21 season.

As you may be aware, after 3 years in my role as Club Communications Officer, I am standing down.

Many volunteers and committee members have assisted and supported my efforts during this time and I thank them all.

I'm proud of the contribution I've made to the improvement of the club's presentation and promotion.

However, the scale and scope of the club's comms role has now grown to a 24-7 commitment, where it is too big for an individual to manage and requires a team of volunteers to share the load.

My recommendation to the committee is to begin the process of devolvement with each club section taking on the responsibility of their own social media, following a set of guiding principles.

Solutions to fulfilling the other related aspects of my role (Sponsorship, Marketing, Coaching Co-ordination) I'm sure will all found in due course.

The last 12 months have been hard work and not much of it rewarding.

However, I believe the club is in a very strong position to continue its growth.

Although the future remains uncertain, it appears restrictions are lifting and we have much to look forward to.

Next season offers the exciting prospect of a fresh start and renewed vigour.

All things prosper with effort.

Chris Gaffey, Eccles RFC Communications Officer

June 30 2021

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