



ECCLES RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

Founded 1897

2025/2026 CHAIRMAN'S AGM REPORT

The club's Annual General Meeting provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the progress of the past 12 months and to share plans for the future development and direction of the club, on and off the pitch.

The 25/26 season has been, at times, a test of character. No community club can survive without faithful volunteers who selflessly put in the time for the benefit of others. I would like to begin by thanking our Club President, Alan Bent, for his continued and unwavering dedication, not only in his commitment to the hospitality of our visiting opponents on senior match days, and his work maintaining the club's facilities each week, but also his long standing role as a Mini and Junior coach. After 25 years of coaching children, Alan will be retiring this summer and on behalf of the club I would like to recognise his enthusiasm and devotion to instilling the skills of the game and the values of discipline and teamwork into generations of young people at Eccles.

I would also like to thank our club Secretary Mark Greenhalgh and Treasurer Greg Wilson for their commitment, alongside myself, to the management and administration of the club. Their passion and tireless behind-the-scenes work, representing countless unnoticed hours throughout the year keeps everything running smoothly.

When a situation becomes difficult, resilient people don't quit, they work harder, increase their determination and take action to overcome the adversity. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Katie Houghton for her coaching commitment to our Women's team this season who endured a tough campaign, Katie has stepped down from her role and we will be looking to appoint her replacement in readiness for pre season preparations. I would also like to thank and recognise Sam Simpson for his commitment to the Men's Rugby cause this season. Sam pulled on an Eccles shirt and put himself into the front row furnace this season on more than one occasion, something that should not be overlooked in any analysis of the mens campaign.

Finally, I would like to thank Danny and Rachel Nicholls, Heather Thorpe, Leeann Aspinall, Naithan Ariane and Stephen Russell for their leadership of the Age-grade rugby section. Aside from the disruption of some parental discipline incidents, it's been a successful, enjoyable season with overseas tours and girls Lancashire county selection being a highlight.



OPERATIONS

Each season we set out with the ambition to have more people playing and enjoying rugby at Eccles than the previous year and in doing so, drive the club towards becoming a successful and sustainable business. As the rugby reports cover in more detail, our Mini & Juniors have continued to thrive and grow with good numbers in our boys and girls teams, but we have struggled to maintain the forward momentum of recent seasons in our Senior Mens and Womens teams.

Good progress was made this season with the registration of players on GMS and the recording of fixtures and match data by Electronic Match Cards (EMCs). As a club, we are certainly heading in the right direction as the administration of the game becomes further digitised. Next season GMS player registration and EMCs will be mandatory for anyone playing contact rugby. Recruiting team managers to take care of this will be essential if we want to provide an enjoyable, hassle free rugby experience for our players.

This season the club executive has explored various new business opportunities for hiring out the club's assets in order to put us in a stronger position to compete in these economically difficult times. The Treasury report will provide members with more details on the club's financial position, which has benefitted this season from a few unique, non-reoccurring earnings. I will not comment on revenue here, other than to recognise the rising costs of delivering a quality rugby experience for our members and the enormous benefit the club enjoys from having a loyal and enthusiastic volunteer work force, without which it could not host the various events, which provide an invaluable source of income.

On the subject of volunteers, Saturday afternoon match days and Thursday morning work parties are both desperately in need of more support. If the club is to continue to improve and be fit for the future we need more members willing to step forward and play their part going forward.

As a final note on club operations, I would like to highlight the enormous amount of time that had to be invested this season by club officers into dealing with discipline cases, specifically allegations of match official abuse during age-grade games and allegations of assault levied against parents entering pitches, resulting in match abandonments. This experience has served to remind us of the club's responsibility for the safety of players, the behaviour of spectators and the importance of upholding the values of respect and sportsmanship. The club has invested in mobile spectator barriers which must be used for ALL matches by ALL teams. This topic is something we'll be discussing further in our pre-season preparations for next season.



GROWTH

2025/26 Membership recorded on GMS

- **Total Members 583** (-69 fewer members than last season)
- **Men 60** (-40 fewer players than last season)
- **Women 28** (-3 fewer players than last season)
- **Walking 15** (-3 fewer players than last season)
- **Age-grade 386** (U6-U16 346, U18 Colts 32, U18 Girls 8) (+35 more than last season)
- **Non Playing Members 94** (Social 62, Non Player 25, Honorary 7) (-58 fewer).

The club's Mini & Junior section has continued its steady growth.

There are good numbers across almost all teams and the retention of a U18 colts team and the addition of a U12 girls team has had positive influence on the figures.

The club has lost adult members across all categories this season.

104 players and non players left the club or did not renew their membership.

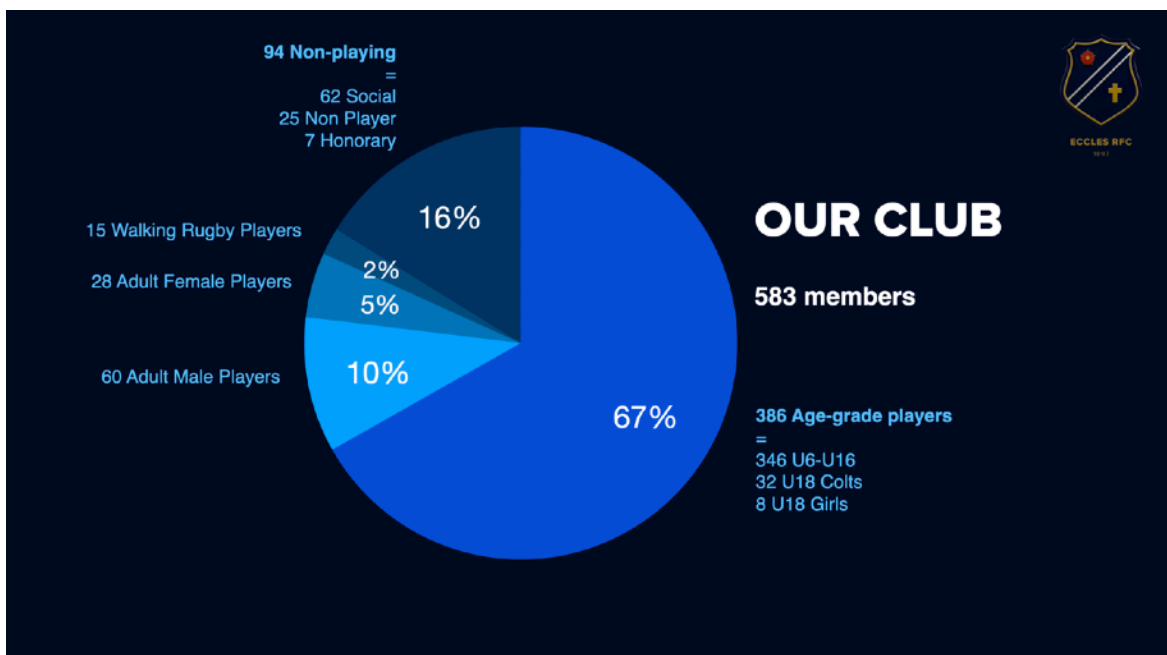
The club's membership is 78% male (455) 22% female (128).

This reflects a slight increase in girls player recruitment this season.

The club has 489 active players.

This represents an overall decrease from 500 players last season, with the loss of 40 male adult players being the most significant factor.

There are many challenges facing the community game and the decline in Mens participation mirrors the national rugby landscape. The reasons for this decline at Eccles and how we tackle it, is something we will discuss following the AGM.





PURPOSE

Eccles RFC remains an ambitious, progressive club committed to our inclusive “Rugby for All” principles and our policy of cultivating talented “Home Grown” players.

The purpose of our Mini & Junior rugby programme is to identify, nurture and develop young talent for our senior teams.

If we want the club to play at the highest level possible, we need to build resilient senior squads with depth. The preparation and transition of our U18 Colts and our U18 Girls into our adult teams will remain an essential factor in the club’s future success.

As the Mens Rugby report highlights, more than 10 young men were lured away during the summer to paid playing opportunities at other clubs. In addition, the catalogue of injury casualties we suffered during the 24/25 season has continued to be a major factor this season in the ability of the club to field competitive teams in what are demanding competitive competitions. The consequence of a rapid rise, earning promotions for all four teams two seasons ago and depleted numbers left us exposed this season. The 4XV and the 3XV bore the brunt of these difficulties and both teams folded before we made it to Christmas. By the end of the season we were struggling to field a competitive 2XV. In contrast to this, our 1XV got off to a strong start with 7 wins, but home and away defeats to Wilmslow and Warrington, who were both promoted, were decisive. A commendable 3rd place finish for the 1XV was a realistic prospect but 3 avoidable defeats during the winter and a loss on the last day of the season resulted in a 4th place finish with 14 wins from 22 games, a position we can build on next season.

Our women's team showed courage and determination playing at a promoted level but ultimately suffered 14 defeats and 0 wins to finish bottom of their division. Despite this, they have reported an unbroken spirit and are looking forward to improving and recruiting new players next season, which will be the 30th year of existence for the team.

Player recruitment and retainment is influenced by the standard of facilities and coaching we can offer, the club atmosphere and culture we create, and the success we achieve on the pitch by championing an entertaining, attractive, attacking style of play. We’ll be discussing how we improve on all these factors during pre-season.



COMMUNICATIONS

@EcclesRugby

June 1 2026 Total followers: 7060 (+436 gain in 12 months)

X: 2111 followers (-16 loss in 12 months)

Instagram: 2093 followers (+251 gain in 12 months)

Facebook: 2856 followers (+201 gain in 12 months)

The Website and Social Media continue to be the primary methods for keeping the outside world informed of club news. A strong Social Media presence helps the club to grow its community, promote its activities and raise its public profile. By increasing the club's online visibility we increase our appearance in search results.

This season the club's main social media channels have attracted over 400 new followers to take our overall total over 7,000 followers. These figures do not include the additional 3,000+ followers of the M&J, Womens and Mens Rugby social media accounts which make a big contribution to the club's online profile.

Although this is an impressive online audience for a community club, our social media growth has slowed down this season and our local rivals are catching up. I'll be looking for fresh volunteer contributions next season from those members that are passionate about content creation, writing match reports, taking photos and would like to get involved in promoting the club.

Next season we'll also be looking for new input from our members to invigorate our match programme, both with its content and sponsorship. If your business or employer would like to connect with our audience please get in touch with me directly.



FACILITIES

We've encountered vandalism again this season and we need to take another look at our security measures and camera systems to ensure we are protecting the club's assets as well as we can.

The part refurbishment of the bar area has made a positive contribution to the social atmosphere at the club, but a lack of funding has again prevented us from completing the refurbishment this summer and we'll be looking to implement a fun raising plan this season to help achieve it in summer 2027.

Another area requiring attention is the overflow parking situation which deteriorates during the wet winter months. We have explored how to improve the stability and drainage of the ground with the local authority who own the land. We intend to submit planning permission for the installation of a grid system and we hope to update members on how the work will be funded in the autumn.

Members will be pleased to hear we have negotiated an extension to our partnership agreement with St Patricks to secure our long term access and use of the school pitches. In addition, the contractor who has responsibility for the maintenance of the pitches has appointed a new facilities manager in the past 12 months with communication and responsiveness to reported issues improving.

This summer we hope to install a footpath at the side of the 3G pitch to reduce the wear from foot traffic on the grass pitch and we hope to install a digital scoreboard, with the support of donations / sponsorship.

These plans and improvements reflect the ambition of the club. I hope members are excited by them and will give their enthusiastic support as we work to achieve them over the coming months.

The club executive is fully aware of the potential funding opportunity presented by the Government backed Pride in Place scheme that intends to invest £20m into community led regeneration in Peel Green and are actively working behind the scenes to give the club the best chance of benefitting.



OBJECTIVES

I believe there are 6 areas of focus for the club next season:

1. Grow Mens Rugby

- Support players and coaches as they build new teams.
- Recruit team managers to take on the off-field administration.
- Support Colt's transition to adult rugby

2. Grow Womens Rugby

- Make the most of the opportunities to maximise recruitment
- Recruit a new coach
- Support Girl's transition to adult rugby

3. Progress Mini & Junior Rugby

- Increase engagement in RFU coaching CPD so that player experience and team performances continue to improve.

4. Progress facility development

- Create environments that members want to spend time in and are proud of.
- Raise funds / explore financing options to complete the Bar Social Space Project.
- Raise funds / explore financing options to address the Overflow Parking issues.
- Install Digital Scoreboard and new pathway near 3G pitch

5. Improve Volunteer recruitment, retainment, membership

- Investigate the obstacles to getting involved
- Ensure volunteers have the equipment, training and clothing they need
- Secure deputies for key roles / succession planning

6. Continue prudent management of finances

- Manage and reduce costs where possible.
- Explore new opportunities to generate revenue including facilities hire
- Increase sponsorship income.

Finally, I would like to thank the club's loyal sponsors for their continued and valued contributions this season. The economic climate is very tough for business and will probably continue to be so for some time. The club could not provide rugby for its community without your support and we appreciate your commitment.

In concluding, I'd like to emphasise that the success of a club is built on teamwork. The more we think and act collaboratively and cooperatively, with clear communication, the more likely we are to succeed and achieve our goals. The more we pull in the same direction, the more enjoyable the experience at the club will be. There is no limit to what can be achieved when people work hard together.

Chris Gaffey // Chairman // June 2026