



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

2019/20 AGM COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

Overview

Club communications must do far more than just keep members informed. They must contribute to raising the club's profile by attracting interest and generating pride in the club's activities, facilities, events and achievements; promoting all that we do and stand for in our community. Winning external attention and recognition for the club is crucial for its continued success.

Eccles RFC is situated in a sports saturated district.

To attract players, members, supporters and sponsors we must compete, not only against the eight Rugby Union clubs, but also four Rugby League clubs and numerous other diversions on our doorstep including football.

Active adult participation in Rugby Union in England has declined in recent years (35,000 players aged 16+ lost since 2016). The motivations for playing have changed from what they were 20 years ago and there are fewer games played each season.

To ensure its future prosperity and value to its community, Eccles RFC must present a clear identity of who it is and what it stands for, and it must work harder than its rivals to promote itself.

This season the club promoted two messages, across all its communication platforms, to underline principles we believe to be attractive and at the centre of what we offer:

- **RUGBY FOR ALL** - We believe rugby is an inclusive game for all shapes and sizes. There's a position for everyone and 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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Chairman: P. Thorpe 07766 512552
Hon. Secretary: M. Greenhalgh 07525 434790
Hon. Treasurer: M. Bateman 07843 756160
Fixtures Secretary: D. Edmondson 0161 7476697
Director of Rugby: S. Simpson 07935 403171

Sponsorship Secretary: A. Brunt 07743 825459
Communications Officer: C. Gaffey 07971 817375
Safeguarding Officer: H. Thorpe 0161 7902622
M & J section Chair: P. Fleming 07889 601558
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1. Social Media

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

Despite Covid-19 bringing an early end to the season, we have surpassed our target of **4,000 followers!** That's over 900 new followers, across all platforms, in 12 months. Not bad for a club with just under 300 registered members.

2019/20 TOTAL: 4,030 Social Media followers (+ 930 new followers since June 1st 2019)*

TWITTER: May 2020 1,679 followers (+235 new followers)

FACEBOOK: May 2020 1,561 followers (+279 new followers)

INSTAGRAM: May 2020 707 followers (+253 new followers)

LINKED IN: 46 followers **YOU TUBE:** 37 subscribers

*(Does not include the supporting Facebook Match Photos, Eccles Ladies or Eccles Colts SM activity, which would add approx 1,700 followers to the tally)

Analytics show our club followers are 65% Men / 35% Women, typically aged 25-34 living in Manchester and Salford. 18-24s are our 2nd largest group. Followers tend to be faithful to one platform (Twitter or Facebook or Instagram) so the club is effectively having to build three communities, rather than focus resources and efforts into one.

Activity and response levels spiked in the autumn (World Cup and Club of the Year Awards) and surprisingly spiked again during the spring Coronavirus lockdown (old Eccles team photos). The influx of new M&J parents, in particular U6s, made a noticeable contribution and our (non-funded) SM activity occasionally out-performed the North West's big semi-pro clubs by as much as treble their engagement rate! (we hit over 5,000 reactions one week!).

However, overall, the rate of growth and levels of engagement were lower than those seen last season, when we had 1XV promotion and colts chasing silverware to sustain interest.

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Eccles' social media growth has been organic so far and I suspect we are reaching a plateau. This season, some of our neighbouring clubs have raced up the SM rankings by investing funds (buying followers) rather than in creativity / frequency to spread their message. In the near future the club may have to consider spending money to increase SM exposure.

Eccles slipped down in the North West Facebook rankings this season, but we are still top 10 and +90 new page likes would see us hop Bolton, Burnage, Waterloo and Orrell to join Broughton Park, Vale of Lune, Oldham and Preston Grasshoppers in the Top 5.

This season #Homegrown youth success stories and club history content have continued to get more social media interest and comments than senior rugby.

2. Website

The new website, launched July 1st 2019, is our online clubhouse. It's where we keep everyone informed on the detail of our news, activities and events, all in one place.

Building and populating the site was a big project but it's now fully functioning and virus free. Each team has its own devoted section.

All Sponsors are celebrated and provided with links to their websites.

Our 'Rugby For All' and 'Homegrown' messages are prominent throughout.

The new website uses the RFU GMS to manage our online membership registration and electronically 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 our RFU International ticket allocation).

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3. Match Programme

The club's match day programme has traditionally been used to publish team sheets and promote our sponsors to spectators.

This season we encountered problems with print production with late submissions and late player commitment for team sheets resulting in missed deadlines and blank pages.

The effort expended in creating it each week is high and demand for it is low - the club is often left with a half a box of unsold unread copies each fixture.

As a solution to this waste, this season we tested a digital edition of the programme which can be read on mobile devices, giving the club and sponsors increased exposure a bigger audience beyond the touchline, the advantage of clickable online content and easy online archiving for past editions.

With social media now the accepted platform for publishing team news, next season we intend to move with the times and replace the printed programme with a digital version which we hope will attract and further increase sponsorship income. If this comes to fruition, the digital match programme will be provided FREE to all sponsors and all subs-paid members.

4. Community Communications

Having won 2019 Salford 'Club of the Year', community comms were high on our list this season. A successful Beer & Gin Festival and the full house World Cup matches showed the potential for new members from our locality. However, plans for distributing 2,000 flyers this preseason to promote facilities and recruit are on hold until Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

5. Internal Club Communications

Response to volunteer recruitment remains poor with several posted roles still vacant. WhatsApp and Heja continue to be the most useful tools for group communications.

To improve fraternity and conversation between the Junior and Senior sections, coaches meetings were held on Sat 17th Aug and Sun 24th Nov, which 10 of 13 teams attended.

The club presented its plans for the season ahead, encouraged participation in RFU coaching courses, and provided a forum for recruitment and other issues.

These meetings lead to presentations to M&J parents groups and in turn this resulted in a new sponsorship deal. So, a very worthwhile exercise worth repeating in the future.

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Thank you

That concludes the Communications and Sponsorship report for 2019/20 season. For details of Sponsorship activity and income, please see the Sponsorship Report. This season may not have been the most rewarding on the pitch, but as has been proven many times since 1897, everything prospers with effort.

My thanks to Sam Simpson who provided the drive behind the player sponsorship campaign and to Club Captain James Wright for his dependable weekly assistance with senior team information; and for their joint support with the coaching pre-season presentation.

My thanks also to Ladies Captain Siobhan Mullen and her teammates for maintaining the high standard of Ladies social media.

My thanks to Phil Saunders-Hall and Rob MacDonald who volunteered their skills and assistance with match photography this season. The result was an increase in great images and a brand new popular Eccles RFC Facebook Match Photo page.

My thanks to all those who supplied match reports and submissions to the match programme. We are still some way off achieving reports for all teams but there was an improvement in enthusiasm this season which I'd like to recognise.

Thanks to also Heather Thorpe and Mark Baines for their support recording scores and inputting data in GMS.

And my thanks to our club archivist Sheila Thomas, who made an invaluable contribution this season to keeping the proud history of the club alive and relevant.

CG.

Chris Gaffey, Eccles RFC Communications & Sponsorship.
May 31 2020.

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