

SUMMARY REPORT

# REVIEW OF NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY SCHOOL RUGBY.

New Zealand Rugby

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# INTRODUCTION

New Zealand Rugby (NZR) has recently adopted a rugby strategy for 2018 – 2020. One of the challenges identified was Secondary School Rugby and how to address the many issues facing rugby within that environment. The alignment of Secondary School Rugby within the wider NZ Rugby system is also a consideration. NZR aims for a teenage rugby delivery system that allows for as many players who want to play to do so, in an environment that develops a life-long love of the game and strength of character, at the same time as providing aspirational and developmental pathways. These pathways start the process of preparing talented players to play in successful teams in black.

NZR wanted the review to have a high degree of independence and following a contestable process, EdSol NZ, an educational consultancy company was contracted to carry out the work. The co-directors of Edsol NZ were the lead reviewers and they were assisted by Brent Anderson, former NZR Head of Community Rugby.

The reviewers established several work streams that included the formation of a project lead group, developing surveys for a range of stakeholders and organising a series of consultation meetings with secondary school students, Provincial Union (PU) and club personnel and school principals/school rugby personnel. Care was taken to ensure that the groups were inclusive in terms of gender and ethnicity. Several other meetings were scheduled with people who have a special interest in rugby for secondary school students in New Zealand including Super Rugby high performance staff, New Zealand Rugby Players' Association (NZRPA), NZR development and high performance staff, College Sport Auckland and SKY TV.

The passion people shared about rugby and Secondary School Rugby in particular was highly evident and there is a genuine willingness across the board to make the game better at this level. Secondary School Rugby is recognised as a great product at its highest levels but there are deep concerns regarding the sustainability of this success across the country. There is a strong case for a coherent strategy for Secondary School Rugby in New Zealand that addresses the many complex issues raised by stakeholders.

# THE CASE FOR CHANGE

There are compelling reasons for change in the organisation, administration and delivery of Secondary School Rugby. The reviewers met with many people around the country, received over a significant number of responses to surveys and were left with no doubt about the need for changes.

The current governance infrastructure of Secondary School Rugby is fragmented and confusing. There is a need to develop a governance structure to provide leadership in strategic direction.

The numbers of boys playing the game at secondary school is trending downwards at an alarming rate, especially considering that the overall secondary school roll has been steadily increasing in recent years. Decreasing numbers of players leads to fewer teams and problems in forming meaningful, viable competitions.

The girls' game, on the other hand, is experiencing strong growth in numbers which is generating a separate set of challenges in resourcing, coaching and acceptance within schools.

A relatively small number of schools are recognised as having very strong rugby programmes that promote high performance. The impact of these programmes is however creating disquiet and questionable outcomes.

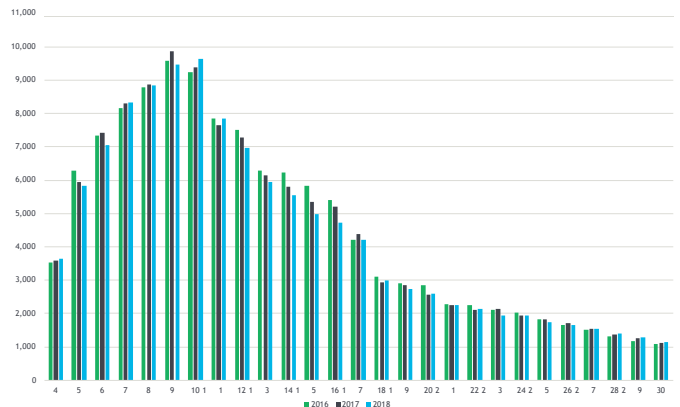
NZR has undertaken recent reviews and provided evidence and data that were relevant to the case for change. These include The Respect and Responsibility Review (2017), NZR Community Rugby Strategies (2004, 2008, 2013) and NZR participation data. The review also accessed the Sport New Zealand Secondary Aged Review (2018) and Colmar Brunton research from 2014 on Teenage Motivations to Play Rugby. This information, and the summary data graphs below, clearly highlight the drop off in player numbers in secondary school-aged students. In the NZR rugby strategy there is an Auckland-specific goal and we include some data for Auckland schools to highlight concerns although this trend is common across other regions.

## NUMBER OF SECONDARY SCHOOL RUGBY TEAMS

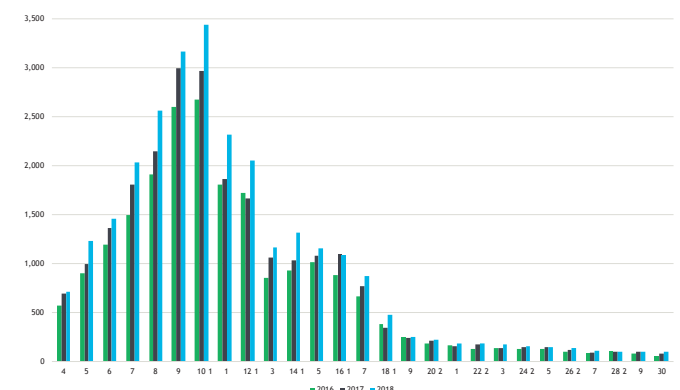
(BOYS AND GIRLS) AUCKLAND/NORTH HARBOUR

YEAR	AUCKLAND	NORTH HARBOUR
	NO. OF TEAMS	NO. OF TEAMS
2018	181	64
2017	188	71
2016	203	78
2015	204	87
2014	208	92
2013	225	na

## NEW ZEALAND MALE PLAYERS BY AGE



## NEW ZEALAND FEMALE PLAYERS BY AGE



# TERMS OF REFERENCE

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

These terms of reference have been developed with a view to setting out at a high level the nature of the challenge to be reviewed, identifying the personnel to be involved in the review, a time frame for it to be completed and the objectives of the review.

## 3.2 BACKGROUND: THE NATURE OF THE CHALLENGE

It would be easy to categorise the challenge as being the high rate of drop out during the years at secondary school and who have just arrived into Year Nine and the low conversion rate from secondary school rugby to club players. However, the position is a lot more complicated than that and will require a thorough and wide-ranging review to understand the various factors within the secondary school environment that contribute towards that fundamental issue.

Separate consideration should also be given to two separate aspects of Secondary School Rugby; namely 'Participation' and 'Performance', with reference to boys and girls in each. In no particular order, the key factors that the review will need to consider in which to form recommendations are as follows:

### **What are NZR's objectives for teenage rugby?**

### **What are the roles of NZR, provincial unions and schools themselves?**

Specifically;

- Who is responsible for the governance of Secondary School Rugby?
- What is the optimal PU and school working relationship?
- How do we better align the New Zealand Secondary School Rugby Union (NZSSRU), New Zealand Secondary School Sports Council (NZSSSC), PUs, clubs and schools?
- How can NZR and PUs support the agreed objectives and what resources, including financial, are required to enable this? This should include consideration of the Rugby Administrator In Schools (RAIS) funding model.

### **How can the respective parties maximise participation in rugby?**

Specifically;

- How can we improve retention rates of players throughout their time within the secondary school system (and foster a love of rugby that they will carry beyond their school years)?
- How can rugby generate meaningful, fair competitions within secondary schools?
- How does rugby better manage integrity issues such as supplement use together with the health and safety risks of playing Secondary School Rugby e.g. concussion, injuries, non-compliance with eligibility regulations etc.?
- How can schools ensure that there are inclusive, fun and safe environments for secondary school children to enjoy rugby?
- Accepting the view that quality of coaching is a key determinant in the player's experience and thus retention, what unique skills are required to coach teenage rugby players?
- Is the current secondary school system for delivery of rugby to all teenage participants the best model, or are there alternative game modifications and delivery options that might better serve the game and its participants?

## **How can the respective parties maximise the performance pathway for aspiring players?**

Specifically;

- What influence are player agents having in the secondary school environment?
- What is the role of “winning” in a secondary school environment?
- What impact is the broadcasting of secondary school rugby having and the nature of the broadcast ‘ownership’?
- What is the role of a high performance pathway within Secondary School Rugby and the dominating practices (poaching, enticing) of the ‘Rugby’ schools?
- What is the optimal season length and playing structure for “high performance” school rugby players and teams?

## **Many of these issues apply equally to school boys’ and girls’ rugby but in addition to these issues and in particular for school girls’ rugby:**

- How to generate sustainable competitions within particular regions.
- How to build rugby programmes (pathways) for girls in either ‘co-ed’ or ‘girls only’ schools.

In order to provide a sound framework of evidentiary information to assess the school landscape, a survey completed by key stakeholders including students and parents/guardians would be an appropriate starting point.

## **The following areas are out of scope for this exercise:**

- Secondary schools’ right to deliver teenage rugby – the review will not question whether secondary schools have a right to deliver teenage rugby. However, it should consider whether other entities such as clubs could have a role in the delivery of teenage rugby;
- Sovereignty of Competitions - determining provincial and regional competitions’ make up and format is outside the scope of this review although it is anticipated that it will generate evidence-based recommendations on the optimal structure and duration of competitions and performance rugby programs.

## **3.3 SUMMARY**

The objective of the review is to investigate these issues and any others that are incidental to those set out above and to report to NZR on the options available to address and resolve these issues and to provide recommendations on a proposed course of action for NZR to build a sustainable, robust and successful model for Secondary School Rugby for boys and girls across New Zealand.

The review should note the recent recommendations in the NZR Respect and Responsibility Review, pertaining to the role Secondary School Rugby plays in the development of the capability and success of its people along the performance pathway, including but not limited to:

- Adoption of an agreed ‘Charter’
- Incorporation of Individual Development Plans (IDPs) and NZR’s ‘Six Pillars’ development framework for players (Physical, Nutrition, Technical, Tactical, Mental and Leadership/Holistic)
- Clearly defined Disciplinary Framework

# PROCESS OF THE REVIEW

## 4.1 PROJECT LEAD GROUP

A project lead group was formed to support the review process, critique and comment on findings, survey questions and results, focus group outcomes and to provide their own thoughts and perspectives. Those invited to the team represent a cross section of stakeholders and were as follows –

- Garry Carnachan; CEO, NZSSSC
- Roger Wood; Secondary School Sport Manager, Sport New Zealand
- Tim O'Connor; Headmaster, Auckland Grammar School\*
- David Hunter; Principal, Taieri College
- Gerry Davidson; Deputy Chairman, NZSSRU
- Blair Foote; CEO Waikato Rugby Union
- Corey Kennett; CEO Horowhenua-Kapiti Rugby Football Union
- Emma Weenink Community Rugby Manager, Canterbury Rugby Football Union\*\*
- Anna Darling; Hurricanes Region Women's Rugby Development Manager
- \*Pat Drumm, Headmaster Mt Albert Grammar School (replacing Tim O'Connor)

\*\* George Vance, Secondary School and Women's Rugby Manager, Tasman Rugby Union (replacing Emma Weenink as PU representative – Emma transferred to NZR staff but remained on the project lead group)

## 4.2 PROJECT REFERENCE GROUP

A project reference group was formed to gain feedback from a wider range of people and included the project lead group as well as –

- Marie Gordon; Principal, Hamilton Girls' High School
- Alan Munro; Principal, Matamata College
- Shannon Paku; CEO Manawatu Rugby Union
- Paul Veric; Headmaster, New Plymouth Boys' High School
- Josh Willoughby – CEO Poverty Bay Rugby Football Union
- Gordon Noble-Campbell; Chairman, Hurricanes Youth Rugby Council

## 4.3 SURVEYS

Surveys were developed and distributed to the following stakeholder groups

– (numbers of respondents in brackets) –

- Secondary school principals (113)
- Secondary School heads of rugby/sports coordinators (95)
  - PU personnel (72)
  - Secondary School rugby coaches/managers (71)
  - Parents/guardians (95)

## 4.4 FOCUS GROUP CONSULTATION MEETINGS

The reviewers met with separate groups of students, PU/club personnel and Secondary School Rugby personnel/principals at each of the following venues: Dunedin, Christchurch, Nelson, Wellington, Napier, Hamilton and Auckland. At each venue it was notable that people had travelled long distances to attend and consequently a wide-range of the PUs and local schools were involved in the consultation process. The various groups represented a good cross section of the New Zealand Rugby community – male, female, rural, urban, Pakeha, Māori and Pasifika.

Total numbers of participants at these meetings were –

- Students – 69
- PU/club personnel - 93
- Secondary school rugby personnel/principals – 133

## 4.5 PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS

Members of the public were invited, via information on the NZR website and a related media release, to make submissions. Only seven were received.

## 4.6 CONSULTATION MEETINGS WITH ASSORTED INTEREST GROUPS

A number of meetings were held with people and organisations who have an interest in and/or understanding of aspects of Secondary School Rugby and were not represented at the focus groups. These included –

- The NZRPA
- College Sport Auckland
- High performance staff from each Super Rugby franchise
- NZR high performance, professional rugby, women's rugby and respect and inclusion staff
- SKY TV
- Māori rugby – NZR National Māori Development Manager
- Player Agents
- Others who have had high involvement in Secondary School Rugby.



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The review team recommends that the following Guiding Principles are adopted by all stakeholders in Secondary School Rugby in the setting of strategic direction, policies and operational decisions.

Students are at the centre of decision making

As many students who want to play, can play

- Safety is paramount
- Opportunities are provided to allow participants to achieve their aspirations
- Schools and clubs do not need to be mutually exclusive in the delivery of teenage rugby
- Resources and opportunities need to be equitable for all
- Respect that schools are sovereign bodies acting as separate crown entities
- Competition design must ensure meaningful games occur for all
- NZR's 'The Rugby Way' (Te Ara Ranga Tira) charter is the guiding document as to how all parties behave
- National Policies are to be adhered to.

# REPORT FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

# 6.1 Governance

## 6.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Effective organisations have a strong governance infrastructure which details the purpose and processes that contribute to success. There is agreement across all stakeholders that a clear single-focus governance structure for Secondary School Rugby is adopted. The current structure is fragmented and confusing.

## 6.1.2 ANALYSIS FROM CONSULTATION

*“Secondary School Rugby is an opportunity that should remain available for all young New Zealanders” - School Principal*

The lack of an overarching governance body for NZ Secondary School Rugby is a message that was consistently reinforced by the full range of stakeholders. In terms of governance, we mean the leadership and setting of the strategic direction for the sport at secondary school level, as well as establishing effective policies. Having a unified vision and associated values are key aspects of the strategic direction. Stakeholders realise that they have a responsibility to collaborate and cooperate to determine actions that will build and grow the game in the context of their region and within any charter that has been determined by a governing body. There was a willingness expressed by participants to co-construct solutions.

All groups were asked about who should have the role of governing Secondary School Rugby – who or what group should have the over-arching control of rugby for secondary school boys and girls thereby having responsibility for setting the strategic direction and key policies. A significantly large majority thought that NZR should own this main governance role – the “sport owns sport” concept.

*“Many parties are involved – NZR, NZSSSC, NZSSRU, PUs, Schools – all have an important role to play in retaining & growing teenage rugby for both boys & girls” - PU official*

The diverse range of contexts across the country will necessitate a range of local operational solutions all of which should be closely aligned to the vision and values of the overall strategy. Sitting under this governance structure, a number of models were put forward that were designed to meet these operational aspects. The models were varied depending on the regional contexts but all included input from PUs, schools and/or school associations including NZSSSC and principals. The landscape is very complex with the following groups all currently having an input into Secondary School Rugby across the country -

- PUs
- PU teenage and Junior Advisory Boards (JAB) committees
- PU girls’ rugby committees
- PU Secondary School Rugby committees
- NZSSSC
- NZSSRU
- Regional secondary school sports organisations – (College Sport for example)
- Principals and Principal Associations
- Board of Trustees (BOTs) (lesser role)

It is acknowledged that these various bodies perform important functions and are reliant on the goodwill of enthusiastic people who have the best interests of rugby at their heart.

Schools want a model that reflects the collective vision of the majority of schools – where the values of fairness, accessibility and inclusiveness that produce good people first and foremost are paramount. It is recognised that Principals are key people in the process moving forward.

PUs see that they should have an active involvement as they generally have the role to administer and govern all rugby in the province.

### 6.1.3 KEY THEMES

*“It is important to foster and enhance the development of relationships between schools and the Provincial Unions” - School Principal* ”

Governance of Secondary School Rugby is currently fragmented and confusing.

There is consensus that NZR should have a leadership role in a governance structure.

There is agreement that clear roles and responsibilities need to be established for all stakeholders – schools, PUs and school rugby administrative bodies.

There is a need for an encompassing rugby strategy for secondary schools that has a focus on development, opportunity and pathways for all and establishes some core values.

It is acknowledged that there are enthusiastic, well-meaning people involved across all of the existing administrative bodies.

These groups should work together as a ‘rugby family’ in a cooperative, collaborative way that is aligned to a shared vision.

The diverse range of contexts across the country will necessitate a range of local operational solutions all of which should be closely aligned to the vision and values of the overall strategy.

Schools and PUs are important for each other in the growth and development of the game.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- A** NZR is the governance body for Secondary School Rugby and establishes an advisory group that develops the overall vision, values and strategy for Secondary School Rugby in New Zealand. Logically this group is the NZSSRU therefore –
- B** The NZSSRU becomes the advisory group subject to its composition and function meeting governance best practice regarding representation, diversity, skill sets and any other NZR requirements including appointed membership. It is accepted that this will require a significant overhaul of the constitution, form and function of the current NZSSRU to enable the group to undertake new responsibilities in addition to their existing work. This group will require assistance with liaison and operational matters and therefore –
- C** NZR establishes a full-time position, Manager of Secondary School Rugby, reporting to the Head of Participation to lead the development of Secondary School Rugby in New Zealand. This will include liaison with and operation of the advisory group and collaboration with all stakeholders.
- D** The advisory group shall:
  - be appointed by NZR and reflective of key stakeholders.
  - establish the vision and strategy for Secondary School Rugby and determine, define and clearly communicate the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.
  - be accountable for the implementation of the agreed strategy.
  - develop and implement policy.
  - report quarterly to the NZR on strategic outcomes.
  - report regularly to all key stakeholders.
- E** A system of recognising schools that exhibit good practice across their rugby programmes is developed and implemented.

## 6.2 BOYS' RUGBY

### 6.2.1 INTRODUCTION

*"Development of players is a key part of any sporting activity in schools. To this end, having experienced, trained coaches is vital to school rugby – player safety, enjoyment, retention, recruitment and participation is all rolled up into this" - School Principal*

Rugby continues to be a part of life for many young New Zealanders and provides adolescents with the opportunity to develop character, competencies, team and personal skills and a sense of community. It is a concern that fewer boys are now experiencing the benefits that rugby can provide. The terms of reference refer to participation grades but there was general disagreement with the term and the notion that boys become categorized as either participation or performance players. The decision was therefore made to refer to this section as simply "Boys' Rugby"

### 6.2.2 ANALYSIS FROM CONSULTATION

Schools and PUs share some concerns about the accessibility of appropriate rugby opportunities for all secondary school boys in their region.

#### COACHING

The availability of coaches is seen by many as being key to providing these opportunities at this level but it is increasingly difficult to find teachers prepared to take on the role. Variability in coaching competencies and knowledge of the game presents as an issue in many areas. It is widely acknowledged that parents and club personnel are welcomed as coaches of teams in many schools.

#### RESOURCING

Most of the schools involved in the consultation process agreed that their rugby programme is relatively well-resourced and that the game is an affordable sport for most.

### COMPETITION FORMATS

There is a wide variety of views from stakeholders on competition formats in secondary schoolboy grades across the country. Whether the competitions are age-only, weight-only, or have age-weight limits, allow combined teams or not, club only or allow club teams in school competitions – provided for a full range of views and lots of anecdotes of perceived unfairness. Parents however, were unified in their desire for safety to be paramount in any rugby competitions their children are involved in. There was also agreement that competitions need to be meaningful and that high-scoring, one-sided matches are of no benefit to either team.

### TOURNAMENT WEEK

Tournament week is recognised as an opportunity that currently only caters for very top First XV's and Under 15 teams. There is scope for a wider range of regional boys' rugby events to be held during this week to cater for any school that wants to enter.

### RULES AND MODIFICATIONS

Discussions and feedback also centred on forms of the game such as 10-a-side, quick rip and using modified rules (Domestic Safety Law Variations – DSLV) as a way to promote rugby in schools that have low participation. Touch rugby is a form of the game that is popular and safe yet sits outside of the 'rugby umbrella'.

### RUGBY ADMINISTRATOR IN SCHOOLS

The issue of Rugby Administrator in Schools (RAIS) funding generated some predictable debate in that whoever receives the funding is in support of it. The majority of schools that receive the funding directly assert to the benefit of the resource and advocate strongly for the continuation of that model. Those schools that have had RAIS in the past and the funds are now held centrally by the PU are unhappy. Some school respondents were unaware of RAIS and believe that they should perhaps be entitled to it. PUs who hold the funds centrally believe that this is the best way to manage the administration of Secondary School Rugby in their province. Clear roles and responsibilities are lacking as the RAIS system has evolved over time and variances to the original concept of the scheme have come into use.

## STUDENT VOICE

Students willingly offered their views on issues and the following are reasons they gave for why some leave the game during their secondary school years. These comments are consistent with those expressed in previous NZR surveys. Very few of the students have previously been asked to comment on their rugby experience within their schools. A summary of their comments -

- No suitable grades – a big step in some schools from junior grades to First XV.
- Eligibility rules – e.g. of too many dispensations or not enough flexibility.
- The competition is not suitable – too few teams etc. and one team dominates.
- Becomes too competitive – would like a social grade.
- Some players lose confidence – getting consistently beaten by large scores – lose enjoyment and motivation.
- Media influence on concussion.
- Influence of increasing numbers of bigger, more physical players – makes it difficult for smaller players to compete.
- Not wanting to get “smashed” /injured.
- Being too small.
- Some grow at different rates – late developers get left behind.
- Some not prepared to put in the extra work that is required to progress in the game.
- Play for the school from Year 7 or Year 9 and want to be in the First XV but new players are brought in on scholarships.

*“Rugby helps you become a better person because it helps you to release stress, keeps you active, helps you to control your emotions and to socialise” - Student*

- Some take up other sports – basketball.
- Previous coach treated them badly.
- Sport and rugby are not a strong part of the school’s culture.
- Social life becomes more important for some.
- Get a part time job – Saturday work.
- Busy with school work.

The comments of the students reinforce previous work in this area and closely aligns with the recent Sport New Zealand ‘Secondary School Sport Study’.

## 6.2.3 KEY THEMES

Genuine partnerships need to be formed with schools, PUs and clubs - a rugby family concept.

There is a weakening of competitions in many provinces because of a range of issues many of which are related to the provincial context.

*“At our school we have focused on rugby being for the benefit of playing sport with your mates. This has benefited us as a school.... and we have had growth in rugby as a result” - School Principal*

Forms and formats of the game need to be aligned with an overarching vision and take context into account.

Player safety is paramount.

Student voice should be gathered in the review and development of local and regional participation grade formats.

The availability of coaches and recruitment of coaches is a key driver. Rugby remains as a sport that is accessible and affordable for all.

The distribution of RAIS funding is not well understood or communicated in many regions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- A** NZR establishes a clear definition of which grades are considered performance grades, with all other grades recognised as existing primarily to maximise the appeal and benefit to participants. NZR should also establish what constitutes the participation characteristics for Secondary School Boys' Rugby.
- B** Growing participation in boys' rugby is a component of a NZR Secondary Schools' Rugby strategy. A collaborative approach involving schools, PUs, stakeholders and clubs is required. The Guiding Principles as per section four of the report are central to the strategy development.
- C** The NZR funding of Secondary School Rugby is maintained at current levels. RAIS is a component of this funding and needs to be redirected to areas of greatest need, namely to support meaningful competition development and or coach recruitment and development. Furthermore, in the interests of equity, the support should be targeted at those schools that are challenged in terms of relative rugby participation. The value of the resource is diluted by allocating a relatively small amount equally to each school. It is recognised that there is opportunity for the RAIS funding to be applied to support further growth in rugby participation in girls' schools. (Note – the term RAIS, Rugby Administrator in Schools, does not accurately reflect the proposal that the funding should be directed to coach recruitment/development rather than general administrative duties).
- D** The current funding for RAIS is retained, allocated at the same amount per PU as allocated in 2018. The 75:25 NZR: PU contribution split is also maintained. NZR, in consultation with individual PUs and the Secondary Schools, develops an allocation and delivery method that targets meaningful competition and coach recruitment/ development in schools that are challenged in terms of relative rugby participation levels. Accountability of RAIS funding is essential and will include evidence of collaboration, transparency and links to national and local strategy.
- E** NZR develops guidelines for PUs and schools on the formats and forms of secondary schoolboy rugby grades. This might include, but is not limited to –
- Introducing a set of Domestic Safety Law Variations (DSLVL) rules to enhance safety.
  - Developing format rules that promote enjoyment, fairness and even competitions.
  - Offering other forms of the game such as Quick Rip, 7's, 10's to provide other playing options.
  - Shorter playing seasons for some formats.
  - Intra-school competitions are offered and players count towards registered playing numbers.
  - 'School year level' based grade format rather than 'age-grade' formats are offered.
  - Student voice is included in the development of forms and formats of the game.
  - Reflecting the pillars (Pou) of The Rugby Way, with a focus on character development and the general wellbeing of all participants in secondary schoolboys' rugby programmes.

- F** Schools, PUs and clubs collaborate on recruiting coaches for secondary schoolboy teams and also ensuring coaches receive good induction and access to relevant resources and training specific to coaching teenagers. NZR should give consideration to whether RAIS funding can be re-directed to incentivising this collaboration.
- G** Establish role models/aspirational links with professional rugby through the formation of ambassadors for secondary school rugby through the professional ranks.
- I** Administration templates for individual schools are developed and distributed.
- J** Tournament week events are expanded to provide aspirational opportunities for a wider range of schoolboy teams and formats.
- K** NZR needs to ensure rugby development resources (coaching, respect and responsibility templates, performance modules, health and safety procedures etc.) are shared with the intended recipients in the most effective manner possible. This could include direct correspondence with schools and or coaches from NZR. Efficient and timely communication via digital technology, establishing connections with teacher subject associations (e.g. Physical Education New Zealand) and finding 'champions' of good practice to share their stories are further examples.



## 6.3 GIRLS' RUGBY

### 6.3.1 INTRODUCTION

*"Our coaches used to supply strapping tape but this year the girls had to provide it themselves" - Player*

Girls' rugby is relatively new at secondary school level and provides young women with another team sport that contributes positively to lifelong skills and personal qualities. The rapid expansion of the girls' game at secondary school level provides both challenge and opportunity in terms of playing, administering and coaching.

### 6.3.2 ANALYSIS FROM CONSULTATION

#### RESOURCING

There is consensus amongst stakeholders that Girls' Secondary School Rugby is under-resourced, in terms of both material resources and coaching. Many anecdotes were received along the lines of the girls' team getting the "hand me down" set of jerseys, not having suitable fields to train on and not receiving the same level of recognition as the boys' teams within their schools. Although many of the girls regarded that they were treated somewhat as poor relations they were certainly passionate about the game, very resourceful and strong negotiators. PUs do have dedicated resources for girls' rugby and see an active involvement with schools as being important to sustain growth in the game.

*"The girls' teams get the jerseys numbered 16 – 24 from the last year's boys' teams...and they don't fit properly!" - Player*

#### COACHING

Sourcing suitable coaches and retaining them is widely viewed as a barrier to the ongoing growth and development of the girls' game. Those schools that have a well-qualified coach invariably perform well in their competition. Girls' rugby programmes are however, often reliant on just one person and if they leave or stop their involvement then the programme falters.

#### COMPETITIONS

Competitions are often limiting with a significant number of responses indicating that competitions were not meaningful or well organised. Very few schools have more than one girls' team and it is reasonably common for year 9 and 10 students to be playing with and against much older year 12 and 13 girls. The other variability relates to previous rugby experience. Many girls enter the code at secondary school level with limited knowledge of the rules and required skills. Depending on this variability, both within teams and between them, there are often significant mismatches in competition games. It is also noted that there were examples given of some schools, including girls' only schools, not allowing rugby. One reason given was that rugby would take players away from the school's existing sporting choices and weaken those codes.

#### PATHWAYS

*"I stopped playing when I got to year 9 because I had to play with the big girls" - Player*

At present there are options of 7s, 10s and 15s game formats across the country for secondary schoolgirls' rugby. In provinces with smaller numbers of girls playing the game 10-a-side has become a popular format but there is no pathway beyond the provincial level. There is a pathway for 7-a-side through to the 'Condor 7s' and in 15s there is the opportunity to progress through to the 'National Top 4' tournament. These pathways are all for open age (under 18) and there is a case to implement a strategy to develop under 15 grades and a pathway at this level.

#### PERFORMANCE

In terms of "Performance" rugby, in a girls' secondary school context, it was recognised that it was only a relevant concept in a very small number of schools, in particular those that contest either the Top 4 or Condor 7's on a regular basis. In their local competitions these schools are significantly better than their competitors and issues around the meaningfulness of competitions exist as they do for boys' rugby. Consultation has highlighted the need for PU Under 18 representative play to provide opportunities for girls, not at strong girls' rugby schools, to develop through higher level competition.

The NZR 'Women's Rugby Strategy (2015 – 2021)' was considered alongside this review. There is a strong emphasis in the strategy to grow the team supporting Women's Rugby. Providing the game in forms, formats and times that appeal to the participants is also occurring with 10's, 12's and non- Saturday playing times being very prevalent.

The growth strategies over time should help address issues as more schools develop stronger programmes. It is felt that there was no need to double up on the work streams contained in that Strategy.

*"By the time they finish secondary school the best players have enjoyed competitive rugby and some have forged strong links to senior women's club teams. This is a very good model" - School Principal – Girls school*

### 6.3.3 KEY THEMES

Those actively involved in Girls' Secondary School Rugby are passionate about the game, show initiative, solve problems and engage in activities for the good of the game rather than a result.

The availability of coaches and recruitment of coaches is a key driver. There is no dedicated rugby for year 9 and 10 students.

The variation in age and ability can compromise safety and having meaningful games.

*"The local girls' competition offers no adequate level of competition for our 1st XV girls' team. We have to look at other regions to find adequate games" - School sports coordinator*

Resourcing of the girls' game at an individual school level is often at a lower level to what the boys' experience.

Pathway opportunities for talented players are less evident than in the boys' game.

### 6.3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- A** Girls' rugby is a component of a NZR secondary schools' rugby strategy.
- B** NZR develops guidelines for PUs and schools on the formats and forms for Girls' Secondary School Rugby. This might include, but is not limited to –
  - Developing format rules that promote enjoyment, fairness and even competitions.
  - A consideration of the length of the playing season for some formats.

- Developing forms of the game that acknowledge the variability in age and ability within the girls' game and how new players are inducted into the game.
- Priority given to developing year 9 and 10 opportunities.
- Introducing a set of DSLV rules to enhance safety.
- Consideration of forms of the game such as Quick Rip, 7's, 10's to provide other playing options.
- A consideration of intra-school competitions.
- A consideration of school year level-based formats.
- How to include student voice in the development of forms and formats of the game.
- Reflecting the pillars (Pou) of The Rugby Way with a focus on character development and the general wellbeing of all participants in secondary schoolgirls' rugby programmes.

- C** Schools and PUs are to consider and enact the NZR Respect and Responsibility Review finding on equitable provision of resourcing for female players.
- D** Measures are established and implemented to ensure equitable resourcing of girls' rugby in co-ed schools.
- E** Adequate resourcing exists across schools where girls' rugby is a "new" sport for the school.
- F** Parental education resources on girls' rugby programmes in schools are developed and implemented.
- G** Schools, PUs and clubs collaborate on a strategy to recruit coaches, officials and administrators for secondary schoolgirl teams and to also ensure coaches receive good induction and access to relevant resources and training specific to coaching teenage girls and noting that many of the players will be complete novices to playing the game.

## 6.4 PERFORMANCE

### 6.4.1 INTRODUCTION

Performance rugby programmes are provided by many schools but the quality of experience across the country is variable. Performance is a complex concept including character, athlete and team development but, in a secondary school context, needs to also consider other demands on participants. At pinnacle events for schoolboy First XV rugby there is very strong public following and a growing media interest.

*"...Secondary school teams are significant contributors to our high performance teams, those players then leave to play for clubs where the professionalism is not there – it is seen as a backward step for some of these players..." - PU Official*

### 6.4.2 ANALYSIS FROM CONSULTATION

There is wide acknowledgement that First XV rugby plays a significant role in the overall landscape of rugby in New Zealand. It is highly competitive, has a strong following, is generally well-resourced and provides a pathway into performance rugby post school. Schools recognize the positive effect that a strong rugby programme has on the culture of their schools. Traditional fixtures and competition Finals generate large crowds, activate Past Students' Associations, provide a popular showcase for the game and promote the participating schools in a positive light.

Strong rugby schools more often than not have a well-developed programme that includes either junior academies or a top Under 15 team. These programmes are also generally well-resourced with the boys receiving good coaching and the opportunity to play teams outside of their province. Students who receive rugby scholarships often receive a wider and beneficial education experience in addition to their rugby aspirations.

Despite these positive outcomes, many respondents in the consultation process, either via surveys, submissions or in meetings, expressed concerns about the direction that First XV rugby is heading across a number of regions. The issue is one of balance:

- The balance between schools developing their own talent versus bringing in talented players from other schools, provinces and countries (whether enticed or advised).
- The balance between boys having to devote considerable time to their rugby versus their education and other pursuits and interests.
- The balance between having a few high performing teams versus having a wider spread of talent and more even competitions.

Several people wrote or spoke at length about how performance rugby programmes at certain schools impact negatively on their region or their own schools. In general, they view the pooling of talent into a few strong rugby schools as a significant factor in the decrease of numbers playing the game because of flow on effects of, for example, uneven competitions.

Others, including players themselves, expressed concern about the time commitment required in some First XV programmes and on restrictions placed on involvement in other codes. Representatives of the Super Rugby franchises, NZRPA and NZR also questioned how well many performance programmes at strong rugby schools prepared players for a pathway into the professional ranks. There was agreement that more should be done on basic skill development and the holistic development of young men to enable highly talented players to transition and stay in the game. They believe that a sense of self-entitlement is too prevalent in many of the talented young players that they are introduced to.

### 6.4.3 KEY THEMES

First XV rugby is a great product that has a strong following, strong traditions and provides a pathway into the professional game.

Strong rugby schools resource their rugby programmes to a high level and provide players with opportunities to develop their talent through good coaching and games against other strong rugby schools often outside of their province.

*“As a traditional boys’ school we have a proud rugby tradition. The expectation on us to provide players with the best rugby programme is immense. Schools are not funded to provide elite rugby programmes but the expectation is that we do provide this otherwise students look to leave the region”. - School Principal*

Cross-provincial competitions provide good opportunities for players but can be expensive to take part in and travel demands can compromise studies.

There is widespread concern over the impacts of player recruitment into selected schools. Some of these consequences maybe unintended.

The perceptions that players are being over-trained, have a sense of entitlement and are denied other sporting opportunities are widely expressed.

Pathway opportunities for talented school girl players are less evident than in the boys’ game.

Performance rugby programmes in schools need to consider the wellbeing and holistic development of all participants.

NZR’s The Rugby Way is not yet widely referenced by coaches, administrators or players.

Parents are acknowledged as being positive contributors to rugby programmes in schools but may not be aware of the wider impacts of choosing a school for rugby reasons.

### 6.4.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

#### BOYS’ PERFORMANCE

- A** Performance pathways are a component of a NZR Secondary Schools’ Rugby strategy recognising that there is a link to the NZR strategy on performing at pinnacle events.
- B** NZR develops guidelines for a performance model for rugby in secondary schools. The model might include but is not limited to –
  - First XV and junior academy-type programmes.
  - A consideration of the NZR Respect and Responsibility Review in the development of associated policies.
  - Adherence to the relevant Guiding Principles as per section 4 of this report.
  - A focus on the NZR ‘Six Pillars’ of development framework to ensure the overall wellbeing of players in secondary school rugby programmes.
  - A determination of the optimal number of training sessions per week, the number of games per season and the length of the season.
  - A consideration of the demands placed on those players selected for representative teams.
  - The promotion of multi-sport involvement.
  - The promotion of multi-level pathways.

**C** NZR develops guidelines for secondary schools and associated rugby administrative bodies on ethical and inclusive policies that promote performance rugby opportunities for all schools that aspire to have a performance programme. Consideration to be given to

- Numbers of new to school players.
- Player transfers and enticements.
- Selection of even teams in grades where schools have more than one team entered.

The reviewers believe the challenge will be introducing these guidelines into competition regulations in a manner that does not involve onerous compliance costs and also without undermining or retarding those schools that invest in and deliver quality rugby development programs for aspiring players.

**D** Parental education resources on performance rugby programmes in schools are developed and implemented.

**E** Schools investigate the opportunities available in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to use rugby contexts as part of performance rugby players' learning programmes.

## GIRLS' PERFORMANCE

**A** Performance pathways for girls are developed:

- NZR High Performance Rugby develop a Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) programme for First XV girls.
- A PU Under 18 representative tournament is established for 15 a-side rugby.
- All PUs to provide suitable access to First XV girls' competitions and these are appropriately resourced.
- Schoolgirl teams gain access to Condor7s via competing in PU competitions.

**B** For those schools offering or wish to offer a Performance programme for girls, then NZR develops guidelines for a performance model for rugby in secondary schools. The model might include but is not limited to:

- First XV and junior academy type programmes.
- A consideration of the NZR Respect and Responsibility Review in the development of associated policies.
- A focus on character development and the general wellbeing of all participants in secondary schoolgirl performance rugby programmes.
- A consideration of the optimal number of training sessions per week, the number of games per season and the length of the season.
- A determination of the demands placed on those players selected for representative teams.

**C** Schools and NZR investigate the opportunities available in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to use rugby contexts as part of rugby players' learning programmes.

# SECONDARY SCHOOLS RUGBY FOR MĀORI

Māori students have traditionally been significant contributors to boys' and girls' secondary school rugby in both participatory and performance categories. A national strategy for Māori rugby was established following a 2012 review.

The concept of Māori succeeding as Māori flows from this strategy through the use of Māori contexts and Taha Māori. It has potential to support young Māori and to keep them engaged and enjoying success in school in a sporting context. The terms of reference did not include specific reference to Māori but the reviewers included this section because of the strategic work that secondary schools are doing for Māori.

A national 'Māori Development Manager' has included in their brief the promotion, development and identification of talented secondary school aged Māori boy and girl rugby players. Residential marae-based, Under 18 camps are held in the North, Central and Southern regions and cater for talented Māori players but excludes those who have been selected for Super Rugby Under 18 camps. A national Māori Under 18 team camp follows with a team selected, that in recent years have played matches against the New Zealand Barbarians and Fiji Schools teams. A camp for Māori girls was held for the first time in 2018.

The camps, known as 'E Tu Toa', are run in a Māori context with a key theme being that the participants enjoy this rugby experience "as Māori". The values of Manaakitanga and Whanaungatanga underpin the programme activities and the kaupapa to "encourage young Māori rugby talent to stay in our game, identify and develop this talent both on and off the field within Kaupapa Māori and provide a genuine pathway from regional tournaments to academies and higher honours."

Rugby skills and abilities are developed and used as the context to develop character and a greater understanding of being Māori through explicit exposure to the following values –

- Rangatiratanga – Sovereignty, coming together as one.
- Mana Motuhake – Identify who we are and where we come from.
- Ta Wharautia – To protect and shelter each other.
- Nga Taonga Tuku Iho – Understand our past to proceed forward with clarity.
- Kokiritanga – Engage with our young to grow and develop them into great leaders.
- Pupuri Te Mauri – Establishing and maintaining strong connections.
- Taaua Ki Te Tu – Stand strong for what is right and what we believe in.
- Whakarangatira – Respect core values to stay strong to the Kaupapa.

In addition to the E Tu Toa camps a one day, three hour programme for 15 – 16 year old Māori boy and girl rugby players, known as 'E Tu Rangatahi', has been introduced as an in-school programme. This shortened programme has a combination of "on-field" skills and drills and "off-field" core values and is also delivered in a uniquely Māori context.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- A** NZR investigates how the E Tu Rangatahi programme could be expanded to sit alongside the work that secondary schools do to support Māori learners.
- B** NZR investigates how the E Tu Rangatahi programme, or a similar programme, is developed to also provide regular opportunities for girls

# SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides an overview of the key recommendations in a summary format.

## 8.1 GOVERNANCE

- 8.1.1 NZR establishes an advisory group for Secondary School Rugby in New Zealand.
- 8.1.2 The NZSRU becomes the advisory group.
- 8.1.3 NZR establishes a full-time position, Manager of Secondary School Rugby, to lead the development of Secondary School Rugby in New Zealand.
- 8.1.4 A system of recognising schools that exhibit good practice is developed and implemented.

## 8.2 BOYS' RUGBY

- 8.2.1 Define performance grades, with all other grades recognised as existing primarily to maximise the appeal and benefits to participants.
- 8.2.2 RAIS funding is redirected to meaningful competition development and/or coaching, with a focus on schools with low rugby participation.
- 8.2.3 Develop guidelines on non-performance grades;
  - DSLVR rules for safety, other forms of the game, shorter playing seasons, etc.
- 8.2.4 Schools, PUs and clubs collaborate to recruit and develop coaches.
- 8.2.5 Tournament week events are expanded to provide opportunities for a wider range of schoolboy teams and formats.

## 8.3 GIRLS' RUGBY

- 8.3.1 Enact the NZR Respect and Responsibility Review recommendations;
  - Equitable resourcing of girls' rugby in co-ed schools;
  - Adequate resourcing in schools where girls' rugby is a "new" sport.
- 8.3.2 Parental education resources developed and implemented and to also ensure coaches receive good induction and access to relevant resources and training specific to coaching teenage girls and noting that many of the players will be complete novices to playing the game.

## **8.4 PERFORMANCE**

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- 8.4.1** Develop guidelines for performance rugby programmes in schools.
- 8.4.2** Develop performance pathways for girls:
  - LTAD for First XV girls, U18 representative tournament, suitable First XV girls' competitions.
- 8.4.3** Develop guidelines on ethical and inclusive policies for all schools that aspire to have a performance programme:
  - Numbers of new to school players, Player transfers and enticements, etc.
- 8.4.4** Parental education resources on performance rugby programmes.
- 8.4.5** Investigate the opportunities available in the National Qualifications Framework.

## **SECONDARY SCHOOLS RUGBY FOR MĀORI**

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- 8.7.2** NZR investigates how the E Tu Rangatahi programme could be expanded to sit alongside the work that secondary schools do to support Māori learners.
- 8.7.2** NZR investigates how the E Tu Rangatahi programme, or a similar programme, is developed to also provide regular opportunities for girls.



# CONCLUDING REMARKS

Many of the challenges facing Secondary School Rugby in New Zealand are indeed complicated and wide ranging. In terms of moving forward and getting to a situation where Secondary School Rugby is recognised as being integral and fully aligned to the NZR Strategy, the recommendations made in this report should be implemented.

The processes and personalities that sit behind the recommendations will, however, be the key to their sustainability and success. The current organisational structure for secondary school rugby is disjointed with some key decisions made on an ad hoc basis with no alignment to a national or even regional strategy. Establishing a strong vision, associated values and a coherent strategy is essential to guide the ethical and moral behaviour of all stakeholders.

Many people believe the problem is difficult, but the solutions are relatively straight forward although the right person or people developing the strategy and leadership required will be important. Problem solving creatively will be the key in the first six months then building some accountability and true collaborative partnerships will be needed.

There will be a challenge for many to look beyond their immediate involvement in Secondary School Rugby and think about the big picture future of the game. Specifically, there should be a philosophy of:

- Development of players and the game having priority over results.
- Ensuring inclusion, fairness and accessibility.
- Being participant-focused with an emphasis on enjoyment and fun.
- Promoting the value of rugby as a vehicle to enhance the holistic development of young New Zealanders.
- Allowing the participants to have a voice in how the game is organised rather than having adults make all of the decisions.
- Constant review and reflection with a commitment to continuous improvement.

NZR should play a leading role in brokering collaboration and the formation of authentic, sustainable relationships between all of the stakeholders involved in Secondary School Rugby. Cooperation between schools and PUs is essential with opportunities for significant mutual benefit. Being a well-resourced organisation, NZR, has the potential and ability to assist schools in the delivery of their rugby programmes but schools themselves must be prepared to invest time and effort.

Implementation of the recommendations made in this report should see greater alignment in all aspects of the delivery of Secondary School Rugby in New Zealand. Rugby at this level is critical in the ongoing success of our national game and its ability to unite and inspire young New Zealanders.

