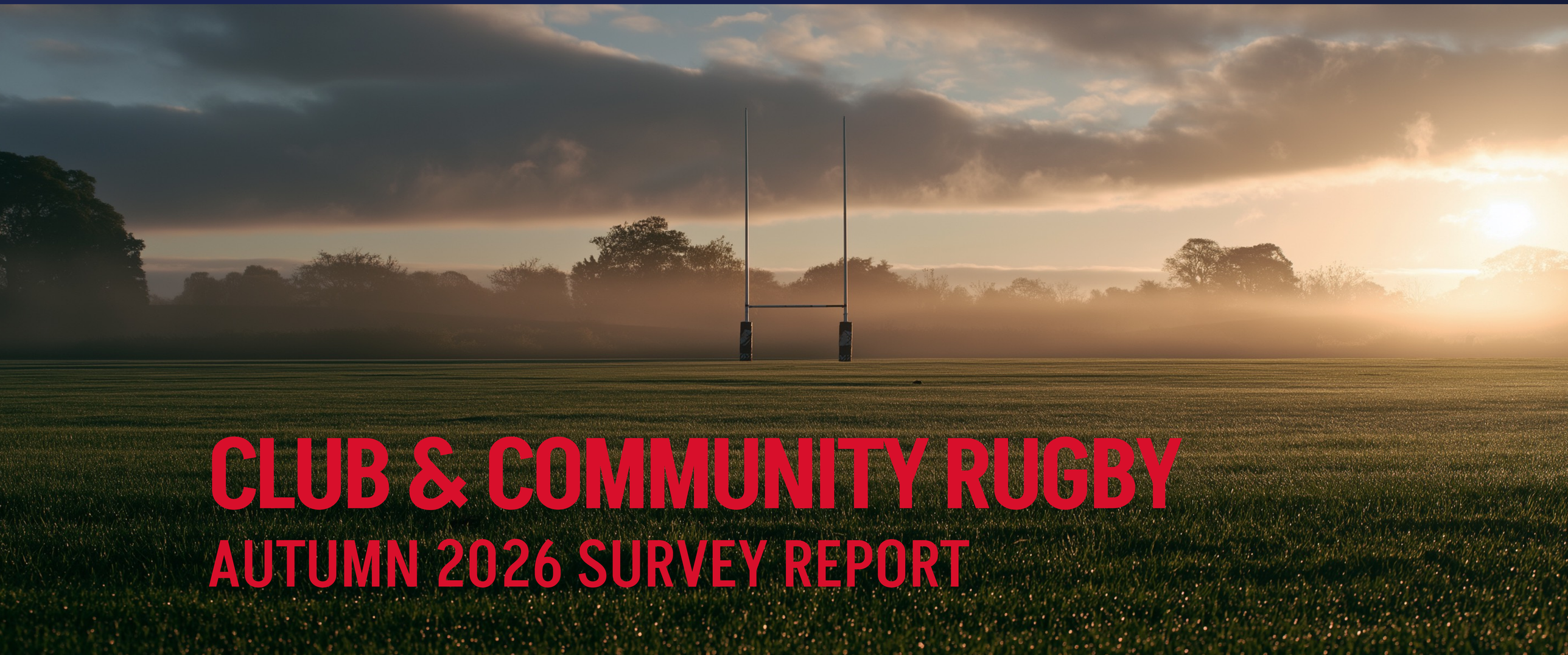
Lancashire RFU



CLUB & COMMUNITY RUGBY

AUTUMN 2026 SURVEY REPORT

To assess the health of community rugby in Lancashire and plan for its future growth and sustenance, we invited clubs to take part in a survey aimed at identifying the challenges they were facing ahead of the 2026/27 season.

This report provides an overview of the pre-season views and expectations held by club officials, which may differ from the club data recorded on GMS once the season commenced, but we have embraced them as indicators to the prevailing conditions for rugby.

Clubs organise the playing of rugby for a wide range of participants in various formats. No two clubs are the same. This survey offered freedom of expression and the opportunity to provide details of unique circumstances. Where possible we have looked to organise the diverse responses into common themes, in order to determine the direction of support with the maximum benefit to our club community.

Lancashire RFU

CLUB OVERVIEW

Lancashire
RFU

60 CLUBS PARTICIPATED

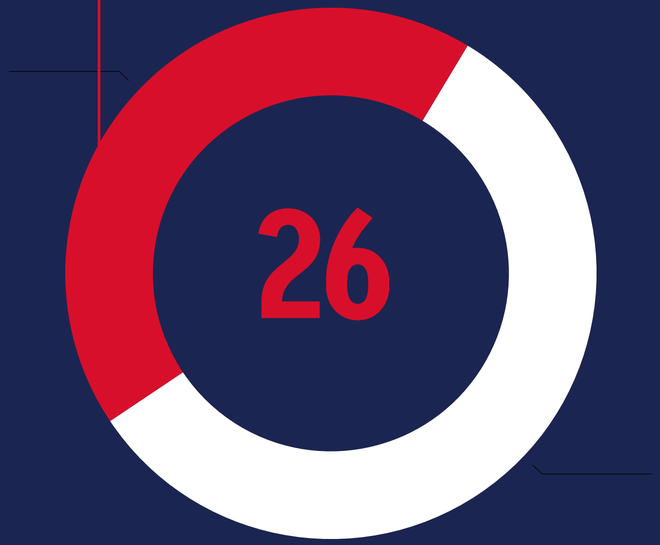
Responses were received over a 10 week pre-season period between July and September 2026.



Lancashire RFU

Aldwinians RUFC
Ashton Under Lyne RFC
Aspull RFC
Birchfield RUFC
Blackburn RUFC
Blackley RUFC
Blackpool RUFC
Bolton RUFC
Broughton Park FC
Burnage RFC
Burnley RUFC
Bury RUFC
Clitheroe RFC
Colne & Nelson RFC
Crosby St Marys RUFC
De la Salle RUFC
Didsbury Toc H RFC
Eagle RUFC
East Manchester RUFC
Eccles RFC
Firwood Waterloo RFC
Fleetwood RUFC
Flyde RUFC
Garstang RFC
Heaton Moor RFC
Lancaster Lionesses RUFC
Leigh RUFC
Littleborough RUFC
Liverpool Collegiate RUFC
Liverpool Medics RFC
Liverpool St Helens FC
Manchester FC
Merseyside Police RUFC
Mossley Hill RUFC
Newton Le Willows RUFC
North Manchester RUFC
Old Bedians RUFC
Oldham RUFC
Ormskirk RUFC
Orrell RUFC
Preston Grasshoppers RFC
Rochdale RUFC
Rossendale RUFC
Ruskin Park RUFC
Sedgley Park RUFC
Sefton RUFC
Southport RFC
St Edwards Old Boys RFC
Tarleton RFC
Trafford MV RFCC
Tyldesley RUFC
Typhoons RUFC
Vale of Lune RUFC
Warrington RUFC
West Park St Helens RFC
Widnes RUFC
Wigan RUFC
Wythenshawe RUFC

How many clubs are thriving with both Adult & Age-Grade Male & Female teams?

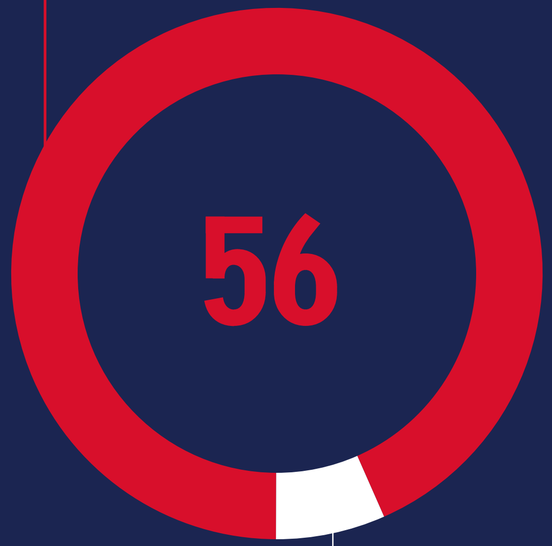


How many players do clubs EXPECT to register with them this season?

Under 50 players	**(22%) 13 clubs**
50-100 players	(18%) 11 clubs
100-200 players	(13%) 8 clubs
200-300 players	(25%) 15 clubs
300-400 players	(12%) 7 clubs
Over 400 players	(10%) 6 clubs

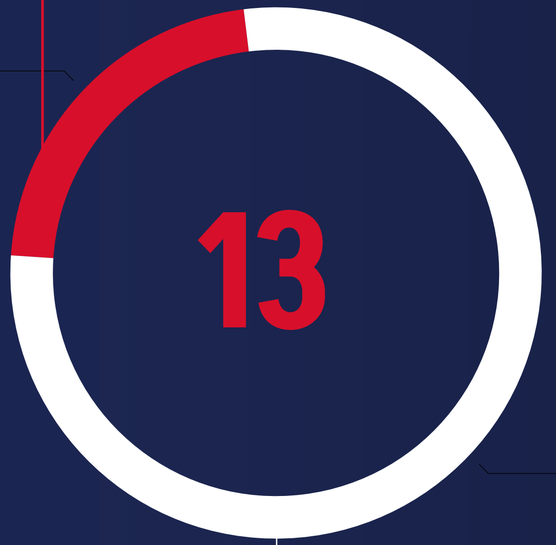
Lancashire RFU

How many clubs will be fielding a Senior Adult Male Team this season?



4 clubs will have no men's team

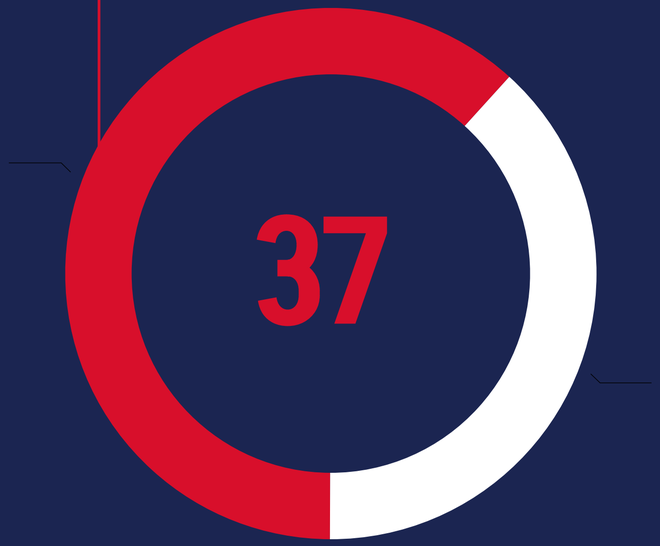
How many clubs are surviving with a single Mens team?



18 clubs are fielding 2 mens teams
21 clubs are fielding 3 mens teams
4 clubs are fielding 4 mens teams

Lancashire RFU

How many clubs will be fielding Men’s teams in RFU Leagues?

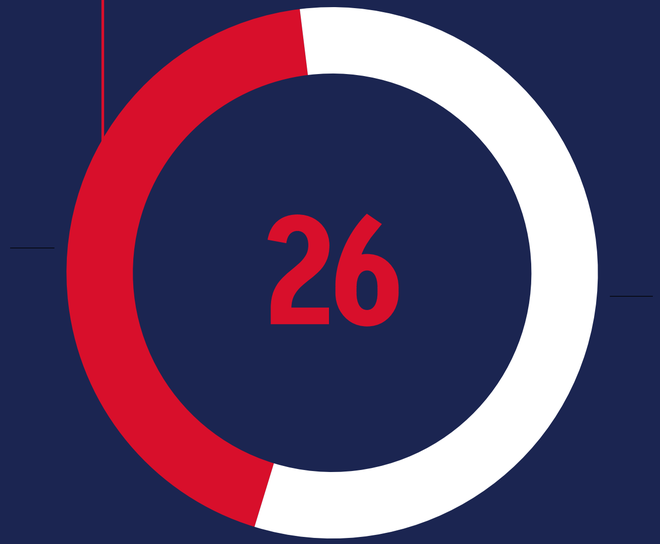


What are the Men’s 1XV playing levels of Lancashire clubs?

4 clubs in RFU Level 4 (National 2)
3 clubs in RFU Level 5 (Regional 1)
4 clubs in RFU Level 6 (Regional 2)
10 clubs in RFU Level 7 (Counties 1)
9 clubs in RFU Level 8 (Counties 2)
7 clubs in RFU Level 9 (Counties 3)
10 clubs in NOWIRUL Div 3
5 clubs in NOWIRUL Div 4
2 clubs in NOWIRUL Div 5
1 club in NOWIRUL Div 2
1 club in IGR League.
4 clubs have no men’s team

Lancashire RFU

How many clubs will be fielding an Adult Female Team this season?

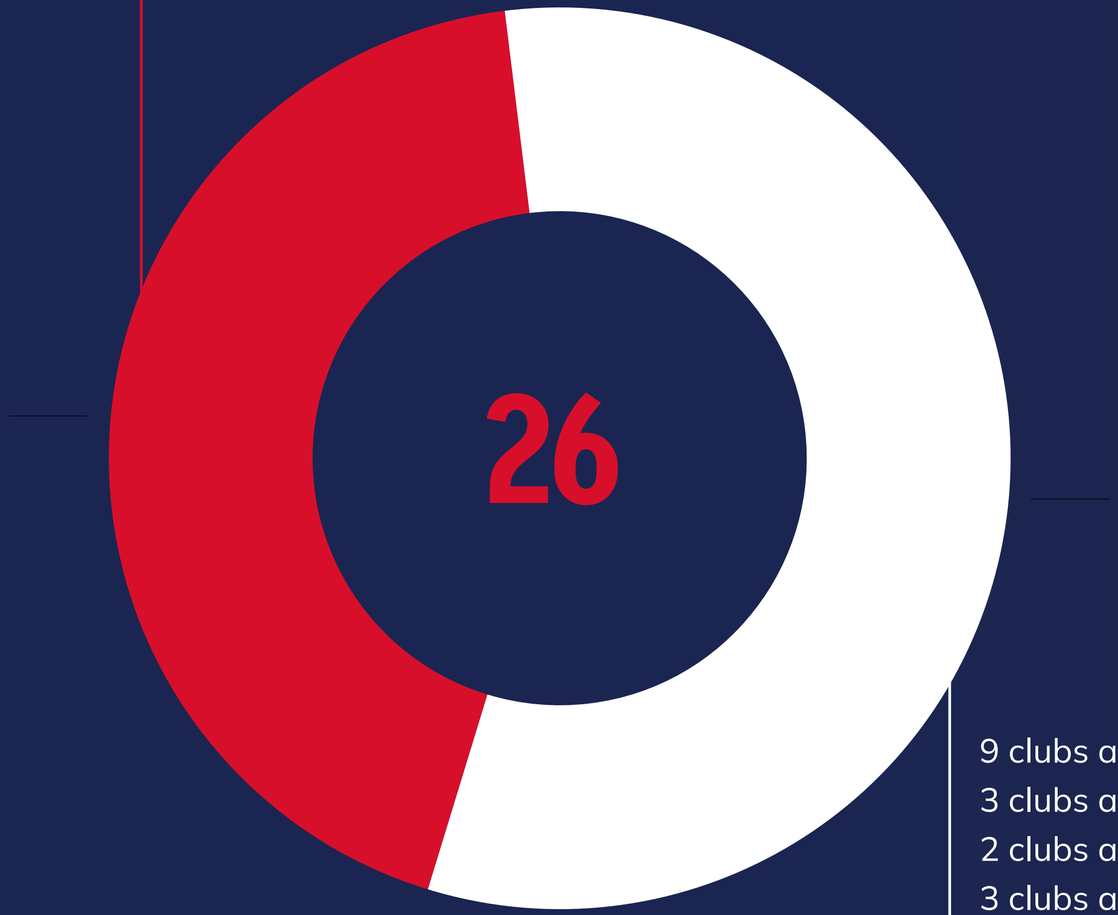


What are the Women's team playing levels of Lancashire clubs?

1 club in RFU Championship 2
4 clubs in RFU National Challenge 1
7 clubs in RFU National Challenge 2
11 clubs in RFU National Challenge 3
34 clubs have no women's team

Lancashire RFU

How many clubs will be fielding a full set of Minis (six or more teams U6-U11) ?

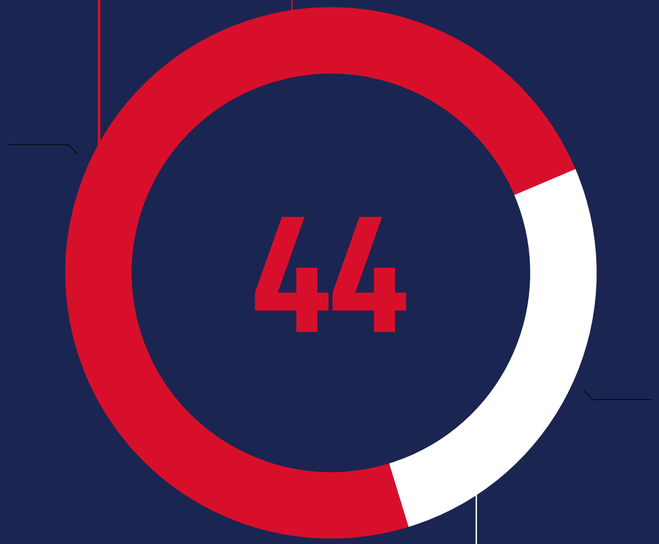


9 clubs are fieldina 5 Minis teams
3 clubs are fieldina 4 Minis teams
2 clubs are fieldina 3 Minis teams
3 clubs are fieldina 2 Minis teams
3 clubs are fieldina 1 Minis team

Lancashire RFU

How many clubs will be fielding Junior Boys Teams (U12-U18) this season?

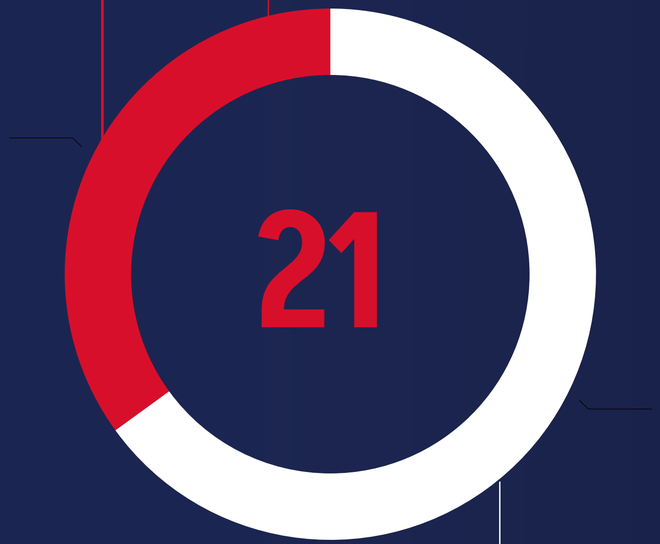
Only half (23) of these 44 clubs will have Colts teams.



16 clubs (27%) do not have Junior boys teams

How many clubs will be fielding Junior Girls Teams (U12-U18) this season?

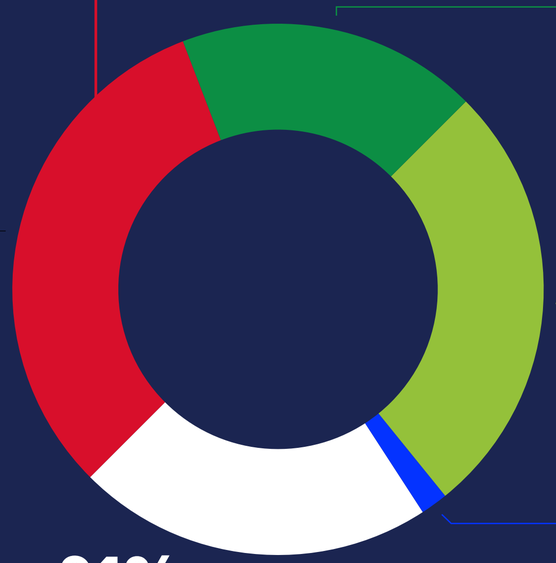
More than half (13) of these 21 clubs run 3 or more girls teams.



39 clubs (65%) do not have Junior Girls teams.

Lancashire RFU

How many volunteers are involved in running clubs?



16 Clubs
50 -100
volunteers

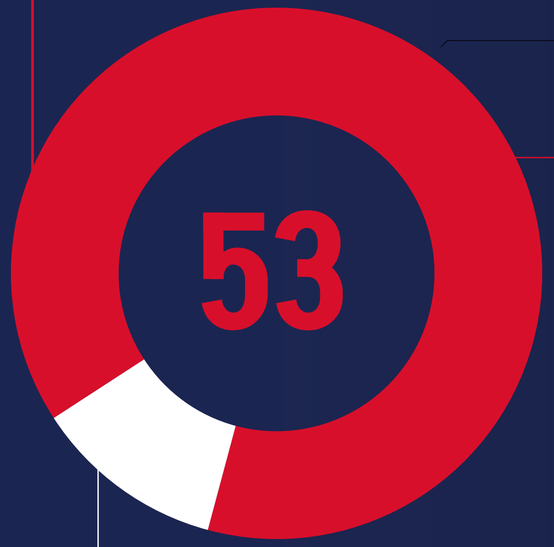
11 Clubs
20 -50
volunteers

1 Club
Over 100
volunteers

19 Clubs
10-20
volunteers

21%
13 Clubs
1-10
volunteers

How many clubs have ERCA / Level 2 qualified coaches?

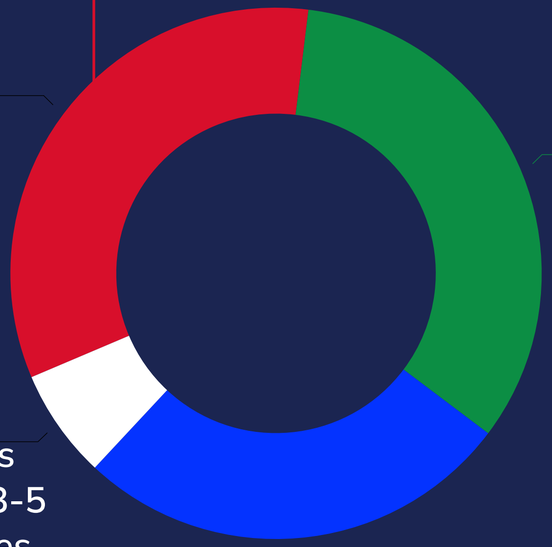


15 clubs have 1-2 qualified coaches
15 clubs have 3-5 qualified coaches
15 clubs have 5-10 qualified coaches
8 clubs have 10-20 qualified coaches

7 clubs do not have a qualified coach

Lancashire RFU

How many clubs have qualified referees in their membership?



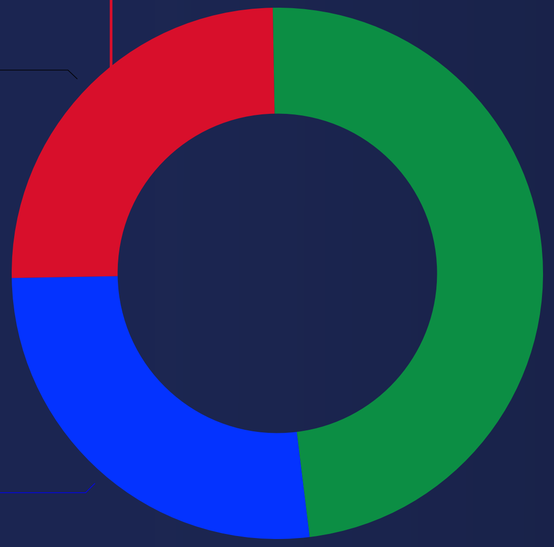
20 Clubs have 1-2 referees

20 Clubs have no referees

4 clubs have 3-5 referees

16 Clubs have 3-5 referees

What is the preferred social media platform by clubs?



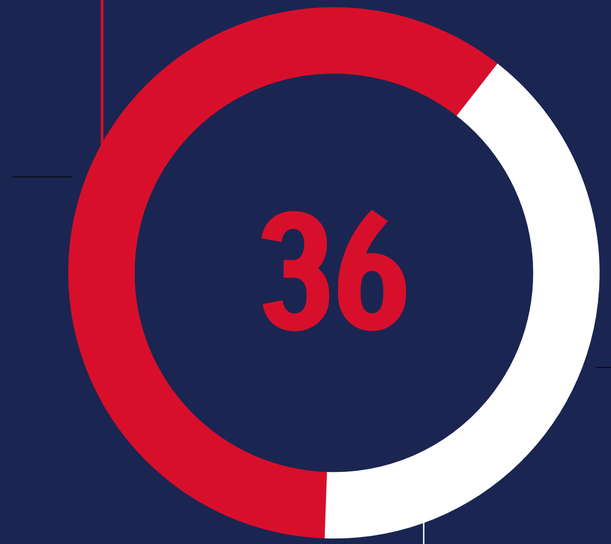
Instagram

Use all Platforms

Facebook

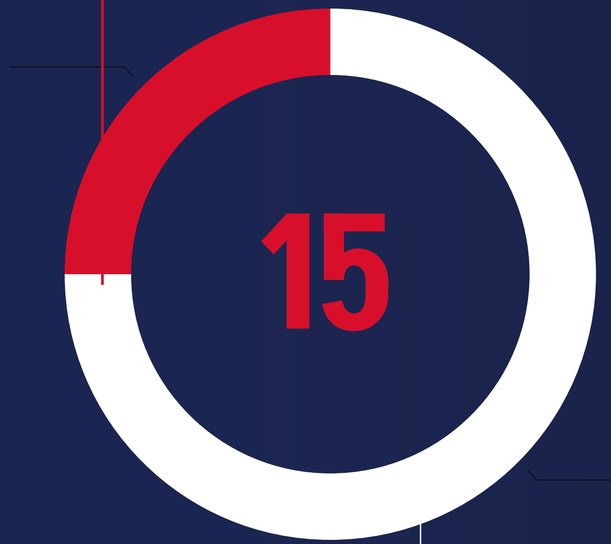
Lancashire RFU

How many clubs are engaged with at least one local school?



24 clubs (40%) have no connection with their local schools.

How many clubs have a relationship with a University?



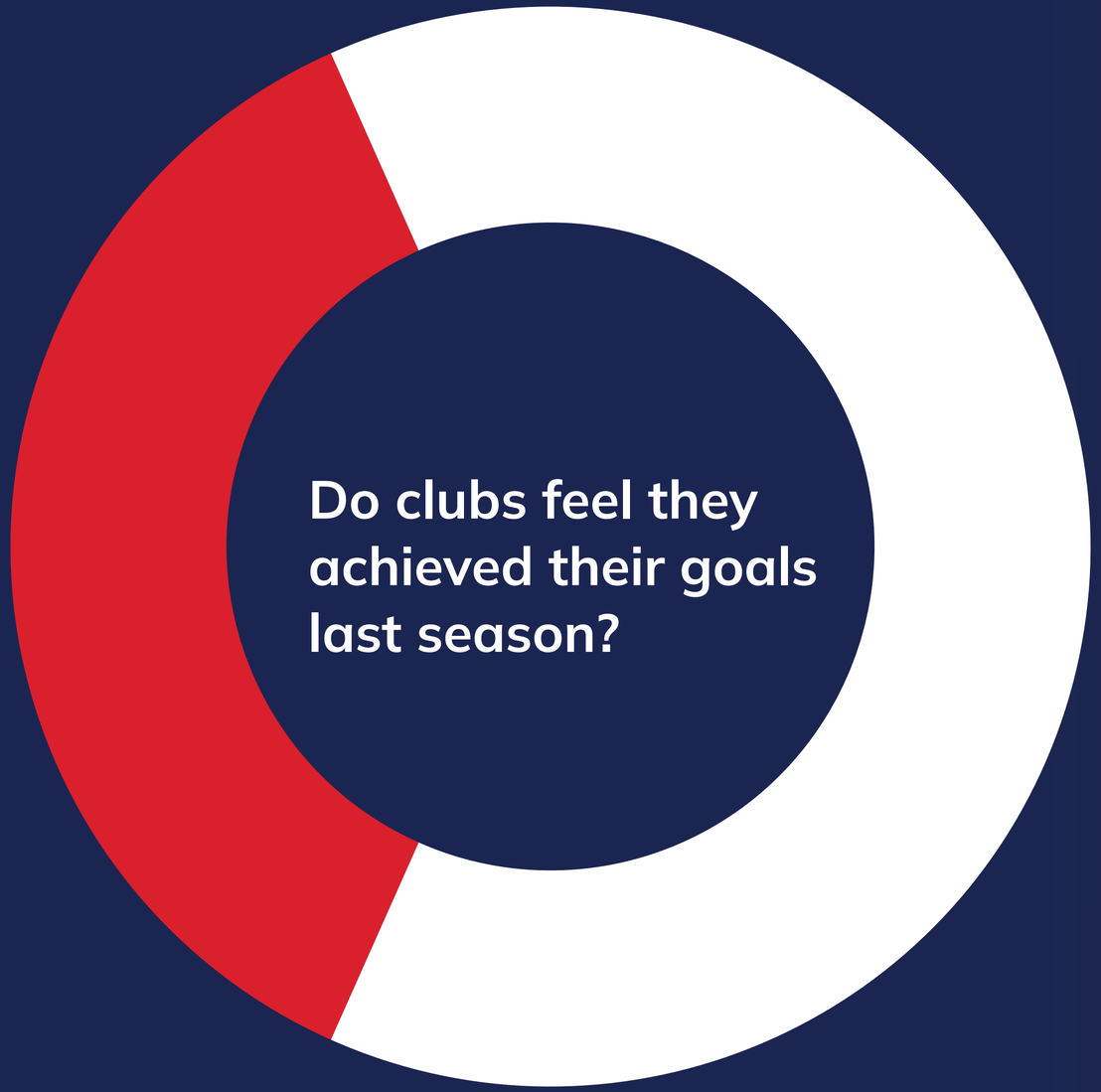
45 clubs (75%) have no active engagement with their local Universities.

Lancashire RFU

CLUB AMBITIONS

Lancashire
RFU

Do clubs feel they achieved their goals last season?



22 CLUBS
NO

38 CLUBS
YES

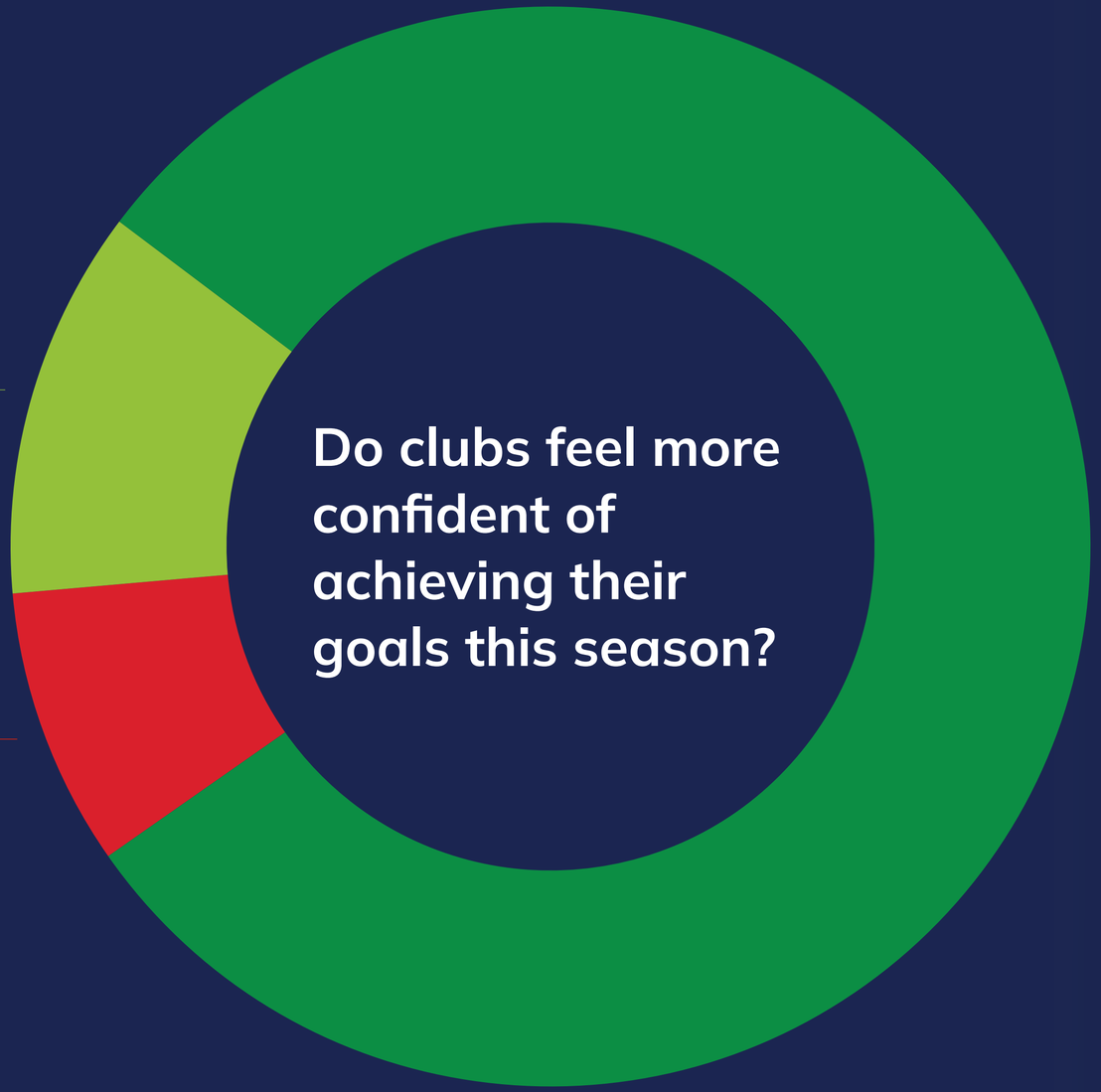
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7 CLUBS

YES VERY

5 CLUBS

NO



48 CLUBS

YES

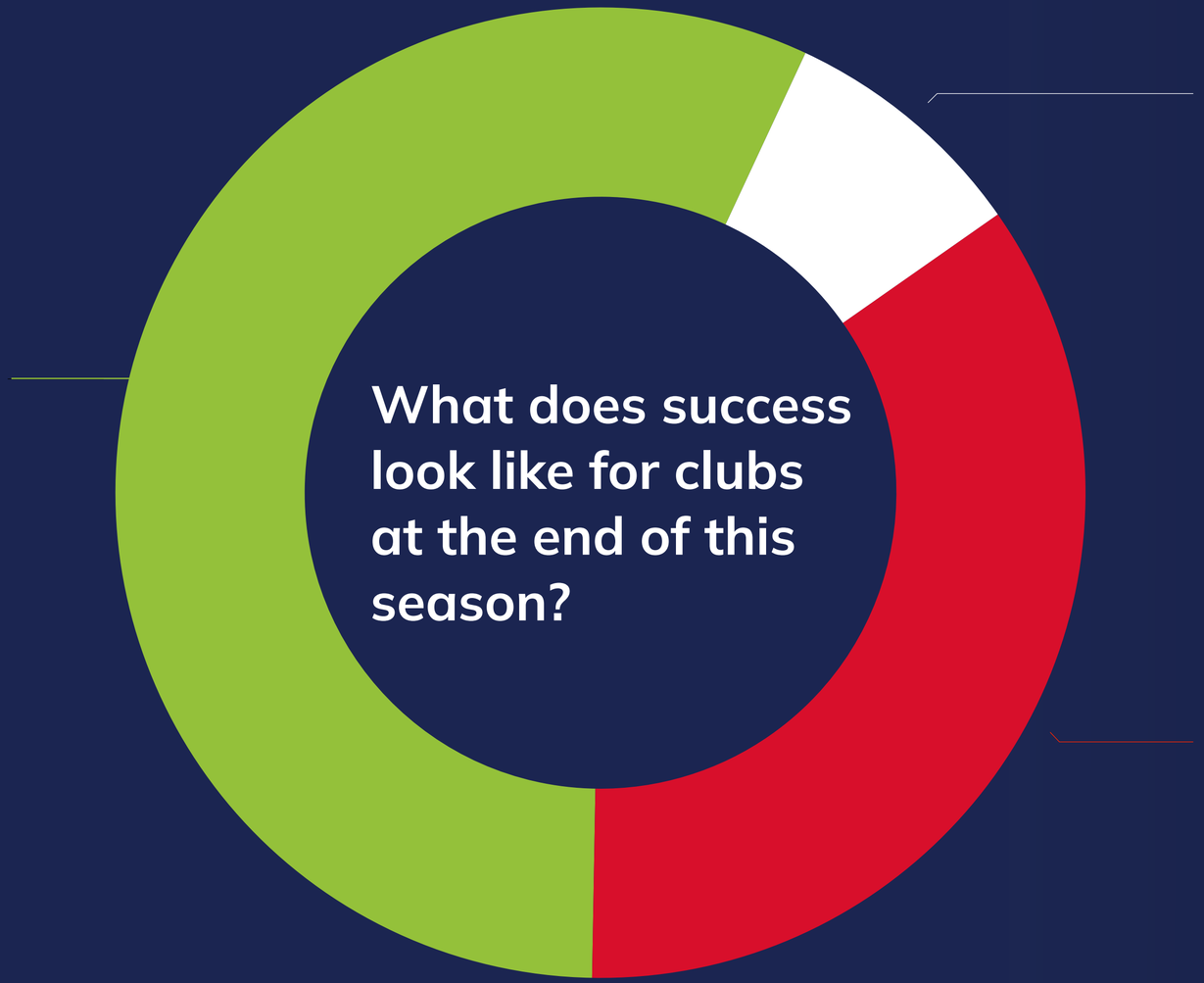
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GROWTH

Promotion
Stronger Squads
Mens Recruitment
Womens & Girls Recruitment
Volunteer recruitment
Improved Colts transition
Improved experience
Improved facilities
Installed equipment
Increased profitability
Increased sponsorship
Increased Membership
Strengthen community links

34 CLUBS

Were positive, confident and ambitious with their targets.



SURVIVAL

Fulfil fixtures
Field full teams
Not make a loss
Complete the season
Break even
Keep afloat

5 CLUBS

Expressed existential goals.

SUSTAIN

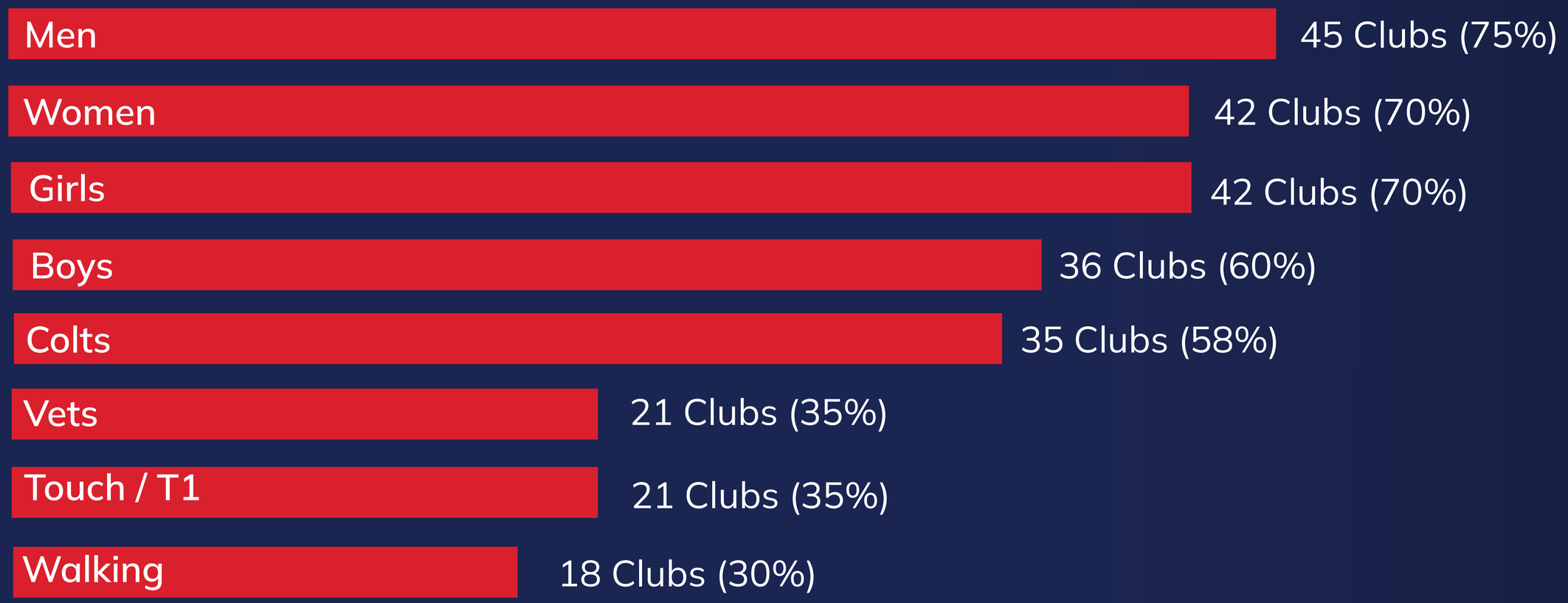
Consolidate position
Same as last year
Maintain status
Maintain teams
Retain Players
Steady growth
Participate
Compete
Continue
Mid table finish
Happy members

21 CLUBS

Were cautiously optimistic with their aspirations.

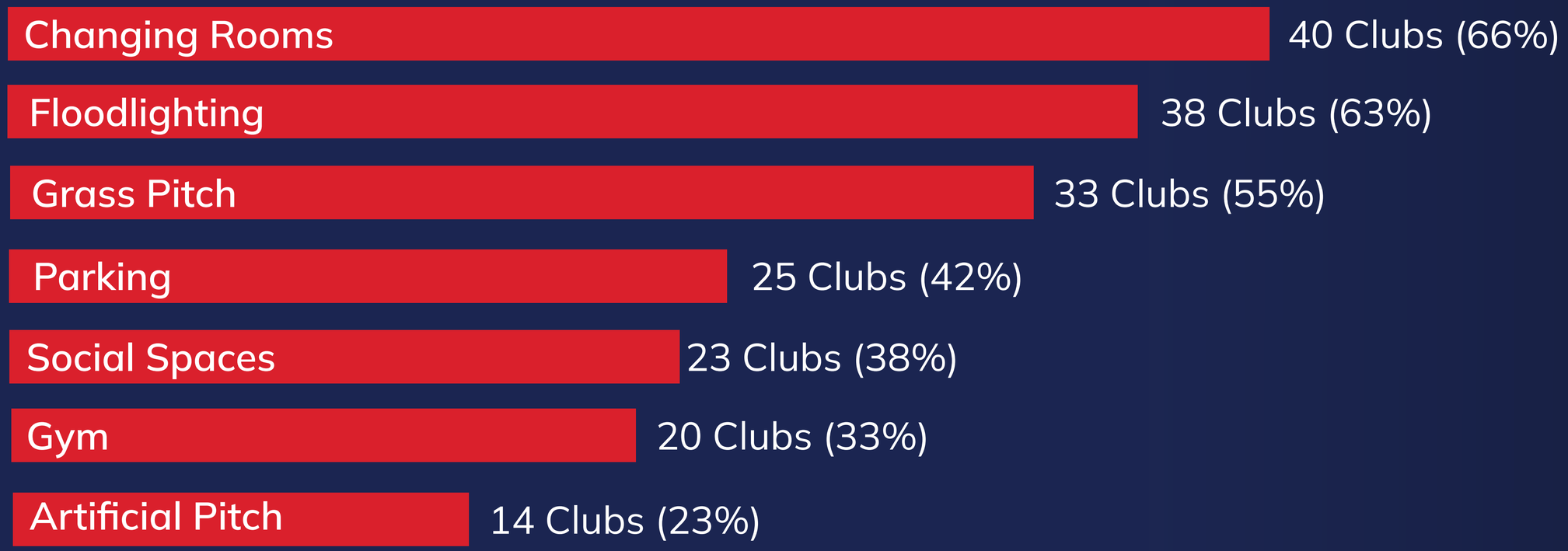
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What aspects of Rugby would Clubs like to develop ?



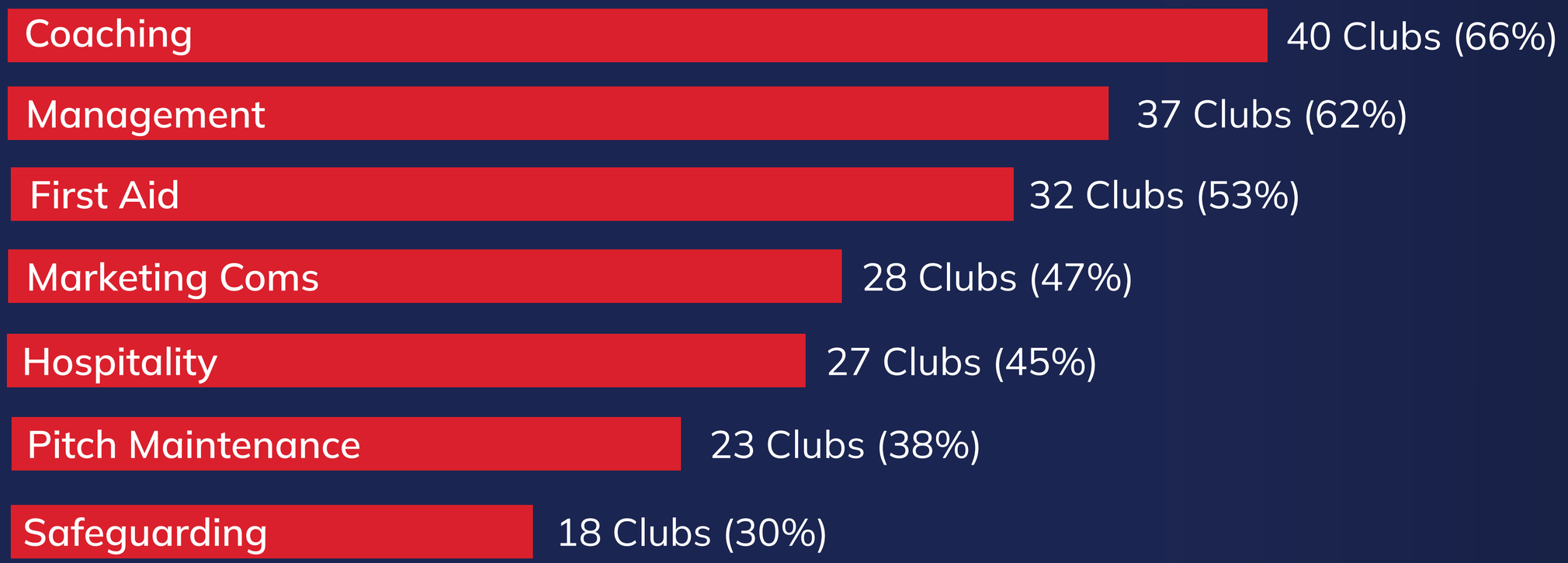
Lancashire RFU

What aspects of their facilities would Clubs like to develop ?



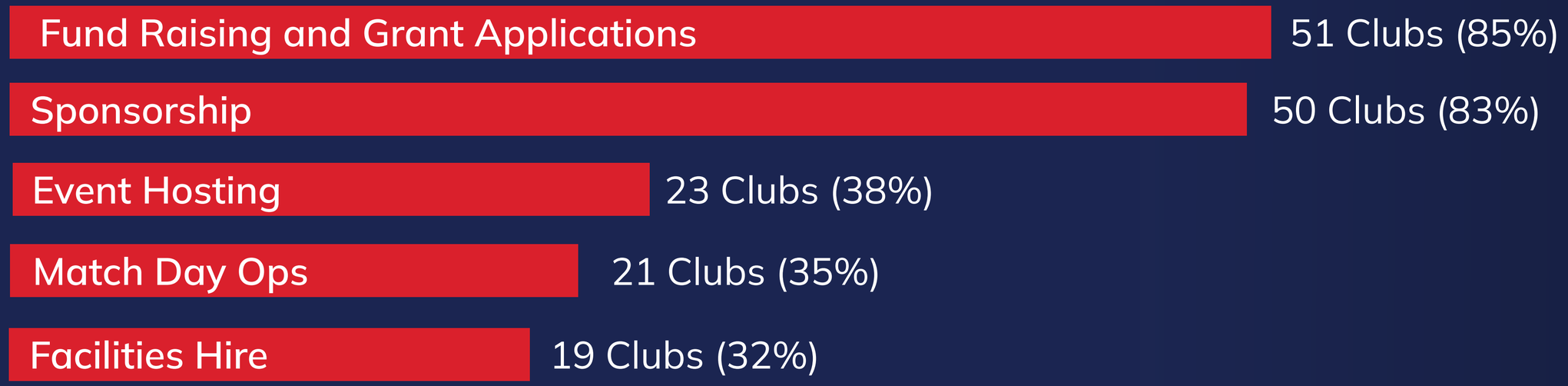
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What aspects of volunteer support would Clubs like to improve ?



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What areas of business would Clubs like to develop ?

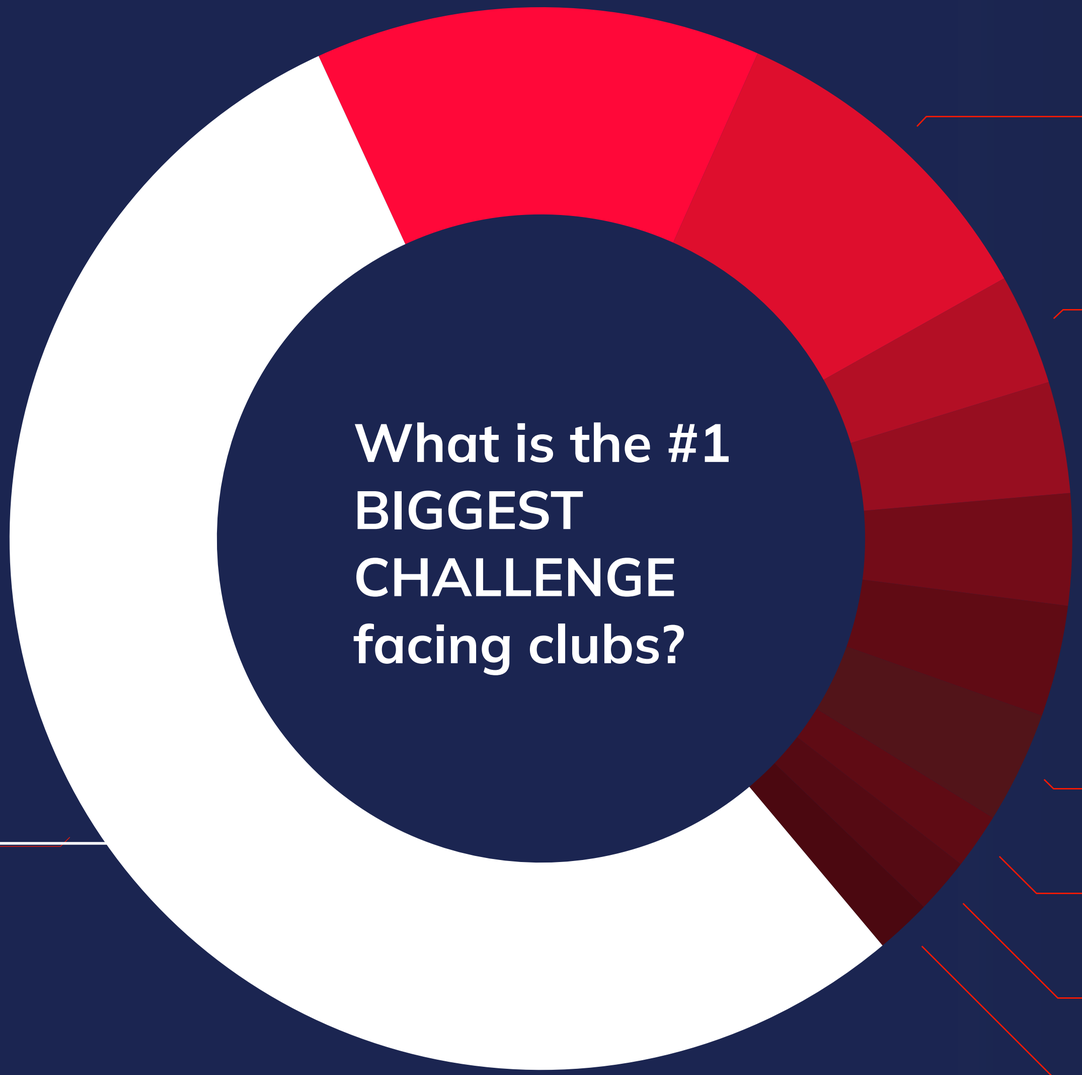


Lancashire RFU

CLUB CHALLENGES

Lancashire
RFU

What is the #1 BIGGEST CHALLENGE facing clubs?

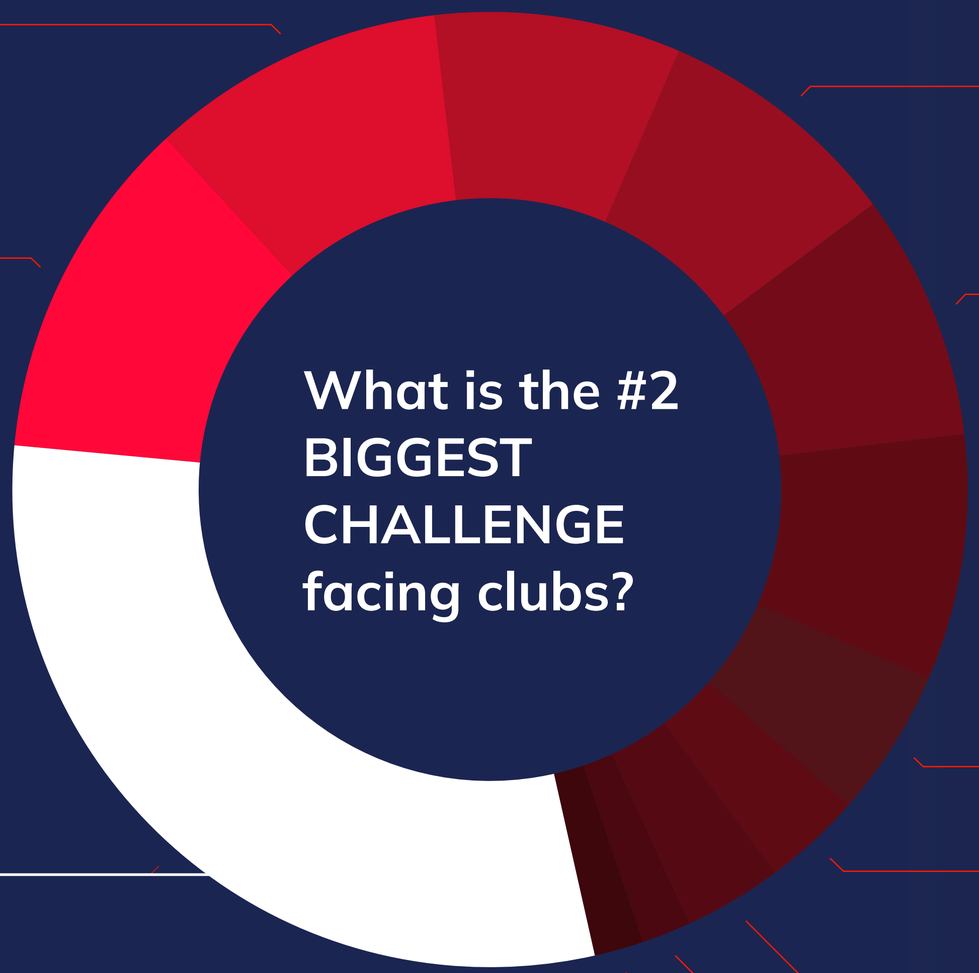


32 out 60 Clubs identified retention & recruitment of Male Adult Players as their greatest concern.

- Financial / Funding / Sponsorship Concerns (8 clubs)
- Pitch Concerns (6 clubs)
- Facilities Improvements (3 clubs)
- M&J Rugby Retention & Recruitment (2 clubs)
- Qualified Coaches (2 Clubs)
- Volunteer recruitment (2 clubs)
- Floodlights (2 clubs)
- Inflexible Competitions (1 club)
- Discipline (1 club)
- Social engagement (1 club)

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What is the #2 BIGGEST CHALLENGE facing clubs?



Colts Transition (6 Clubs)

Financial / Funding / Sponsorship Concerns (8 clubs)

M&J Retention / Competing with RL (5 clubs)

Volunteer recruitment (5 clubs)

Facilities Improvements (5 clubs)

Women & Girls Recruitment (3 clubs)

Pitch Concerns (3 clubs)

RFU Admin GMS EMC (2 clubs)

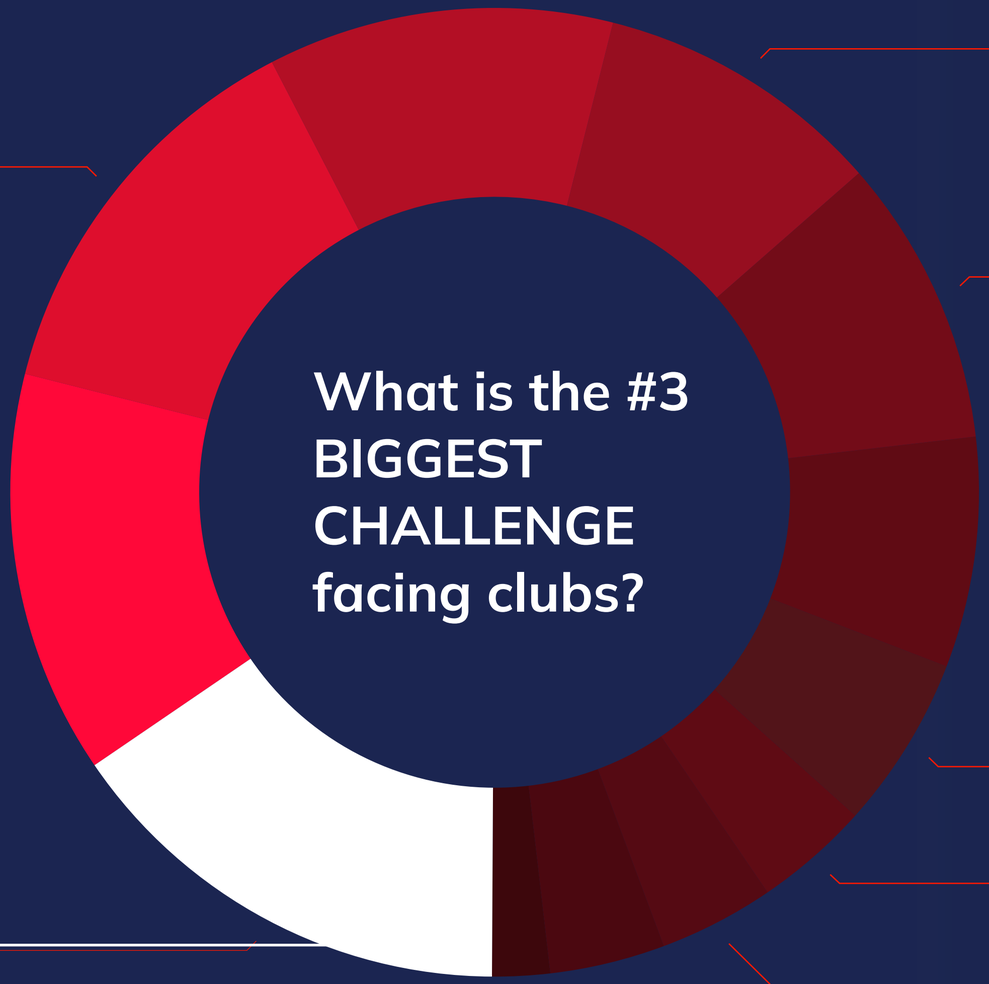
Floodlights (2 clubs)

First Aid (1 club)

Travel costs (1 club)

18 out 60 Clubs identified retention & recruitment of Male Adult Players as their second greatest concern.

Lancashire RFU



Financial / Funding / Sponsorship Concerns (6 clubs)

M&J retention / recruitment (7 clubs)

Volunteer retention / recruitment (7 clubs)

8 out 60 Clubs identified retention & recruitment of Male Adult Players as their third greatest concern.

Facilities Improvements (5 clubs)

Colts / Juniors Transition (5 Clubs)

Women & Girls Recruitment (4 clubs)

Travel costs / distance (3 clubs)

Survival (2 clubs)

RFU Admin GMS EMC (2 clubs)

Pitch Concerns (2 clubs)

Physio First Aid (1 club)

Lancashire RFU

What do Clubs see as their main obstacle to achieving goals ?

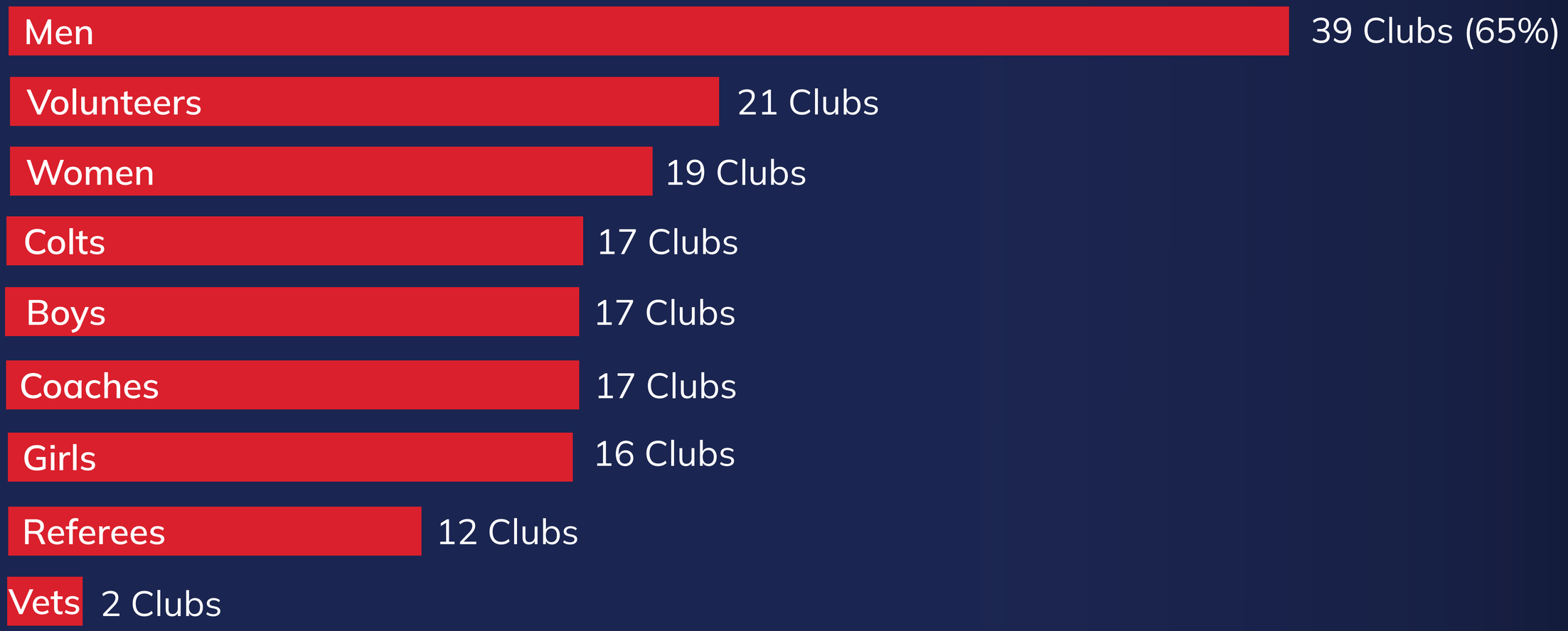


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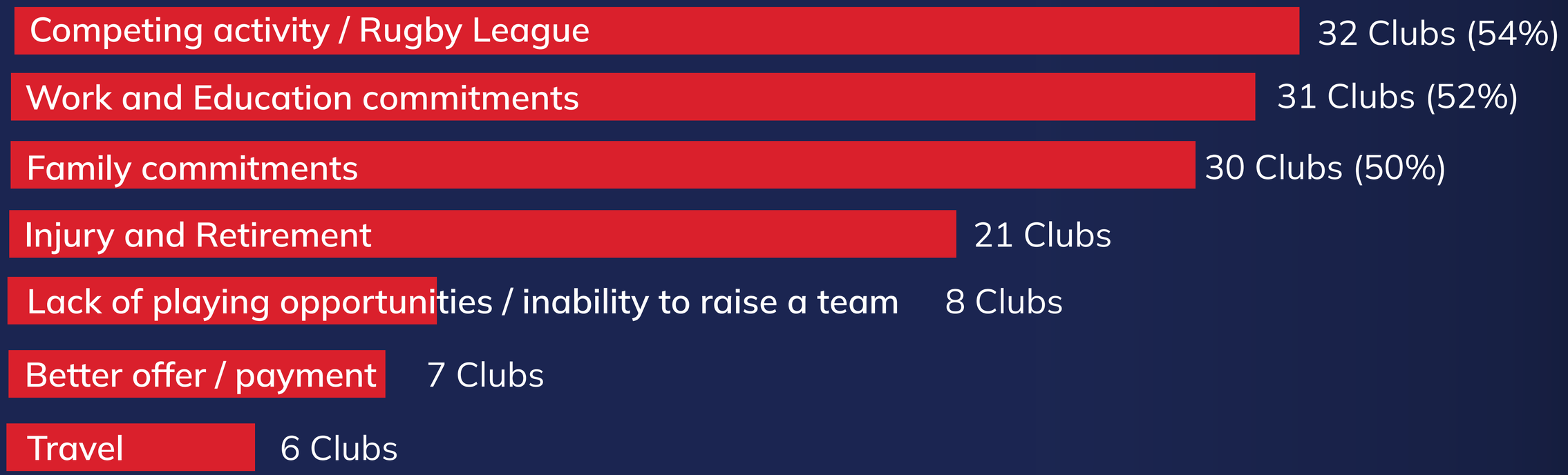
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Where are clubs experiencing the greatest retention or recruitment difficulties?



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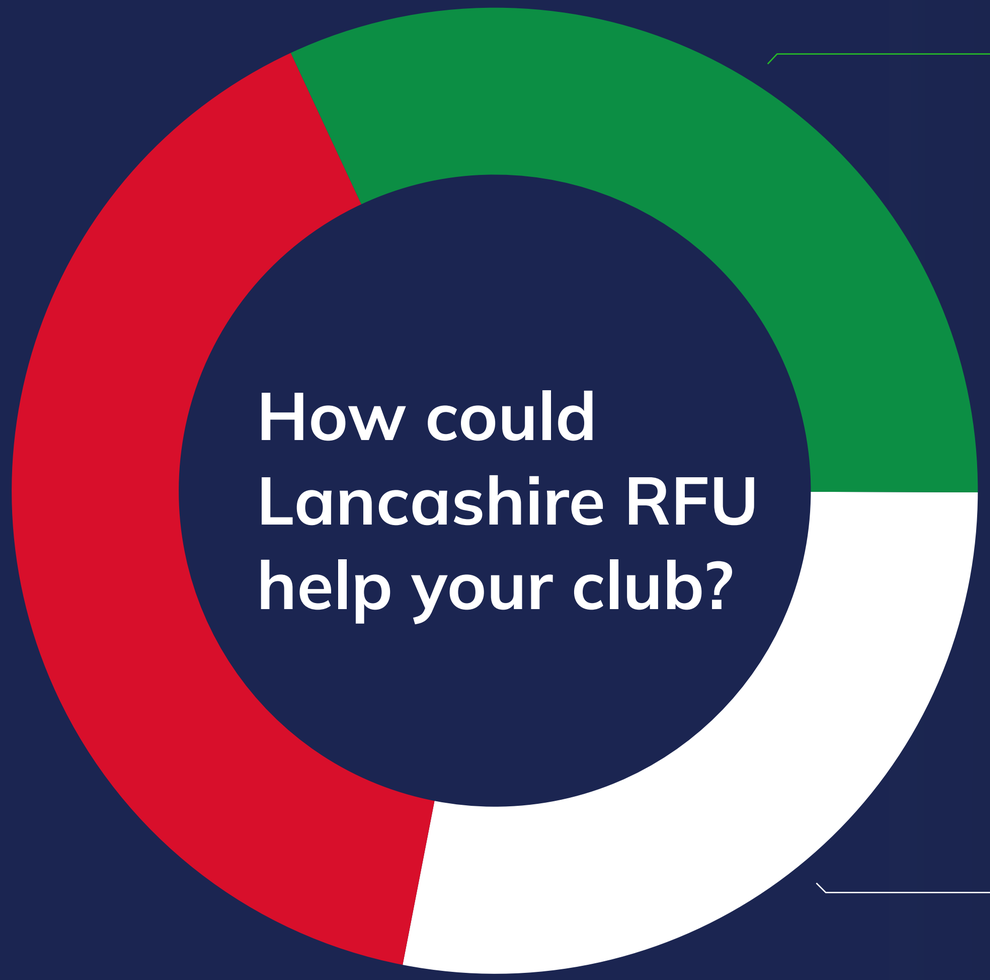
What are the main reasons players leave clubs?



Lancashire RFU

CLUB SUPPORT

Lancashire
RFU



19 Clubs

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

24 clubs

FUNDING SUPPORT

17 clubs

COMPETITION SUPPORT

Lancashire RFU

FUNDING SUPPORT

40% of clubs said they'd appreciate financial help & advice

"Regular updates on funding/grant opportunities."

"Pitch maintenance advice, grant and funding advice"

"Help with funding applications"

"Help in gaining funds for floodlights as we can't afford alternate winter training venue and pitch management."

"More insight into grants."

"Highlight and provide guidance on fund-raising opportunities".

"Information on available grants".

"Sponsorship generation & assistance with grants".

Have a "running a club" part on the website for access for guidance on how to deal with things.

"Offer courses for coaches which are affordable."

"Help with floodlighting costs."

"Assistance with grants and income streams".

"Help around grant applications and other funding opportunities."

"Provide grant funding so we can improve our facilities (floodlights)."

"Give us a mini bus !!"

"Financial support in any way related to travel, pitch assistance costs."

"Help with funding". "Provide support to help improve finances."

"Creating a centralised Fundraising & Sponsorship Toolkit for clubs, including templates, grant advice, and best practices for securing local business support and facility funding."

"Help with grants"

"Providing grants to help improve the pitches."

"Support with development funding would be useful".

"We could always do with financial help, hosting Lancashire club finals and representative games".

"More support with travel arrangements for away fixtures"

Lancashire RFU

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

32% Of clubs want more community engagement

“Keep the club cluster idea alive, good meetings last year to share ideas. Keep the dialogue going. We need to work together to grow the game”.

“Social Media support. Local advertisements for rugby clubs”.

“Continue to bring local clubs together to adopt best practice and work together”.

“Regional recruitment, promote the game as a whole, raise awareness”

“More liaison with RFU and local schools or colleges”.

“Community engagement to help with coaching and first aid.”

“.

“Appointing a dedicated Community Schools Representative on the CB board to bridge the gap between local secondary schools and club youth sections, ensuring smooth player transition and retention”.

"Volunteer recruitment ideas to get more helpers involved in rugby.

“Help with retention of members, building the connections within the community at school level”.

“More involvement with regular comms, club visits and check-ins”.

“Increase knowledge in the local area that our club is still active and we can provide playing opportunities for anyone who is interested”.

“Consider the impact that payment of players at lower levels has on player retention and sustainability across community clubs”.

“Come to visit us to understand what we do and to give our members the opportunity to engage with you”.

“Send representatives to 1st team games”.

"Liaise with local school/academy/landowners to help us access additional pitch space. Look at ways across our county to make Rugby Union more attractive to junior players than Rugby League with more competitive league/cup games and more ‘pathway' options”.

“Support with player recruitment & retention”.

“Promote rugby benefits for wellbeing and social interaction. Provide guidance for good coach, parent and player behaviour”.

“Assist with recruitment and promotional ideas”

"Wave a magic wand and find new playing facilities”.

Lancashire RFU

COMPETITION SUPPORT

28% of clubs wanted more game flexibility

“Stop being a blazer brigade who wants to dock points constantly, instead of working with teams”.

“Could play a greater role in supporting and developing social and veterans rugby, providing opportunities and structures for social rugby, rather than directing all teams towards league participation. Help clubs retain players who no longer wish to commit to league rugby while still remaining involved in the game”.

“Encourage other teams to be more flexible so that we can get fixtures played”.

“We need games to go ahead. Last season we had a lot of games conceded by the opposition which impacts us financially and with player retention”.

“We feel supported, the help we get for a very small club is really good. In terms of the men’s team, would like to see a less restrictive policy to concedes”.

“We were helped last season, most teams in our league were. The understanding needs to grow to keep games on”.

“Be forgiving with changes to game times where possible”.

“Greater flexibility on fixtures where possible”.

“As clubs, we know when we can’t carry a team on and bow out gracefully, but sometimes we can persevere. I would like to see the fourth concede start a dialogue with a club, rather than immediate expulsion”.

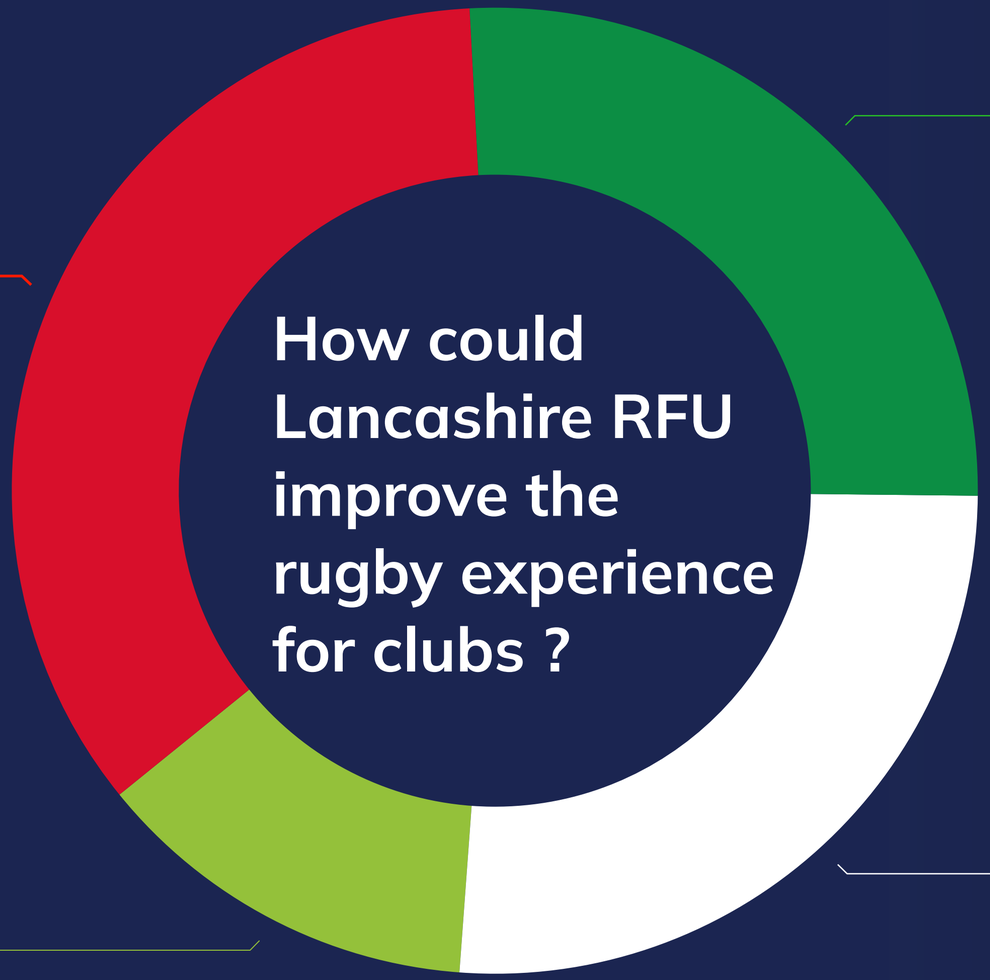
“Get rid of GMS !”

“We are trying to establish a team but we are not ready to commit to joining a league yet. We need help organising games but local teams appear to be fully committed”.

"14 team leagues for senior rugby”.

“Look at League structure and distances more closely”.

Lancashire RFU



21 clubs
COMMUNITY

16 Clubs
COMMUNICATION

OPERATIONS
8 clubs

PARTICIPATION
16 clubs

Lancashire RFU

COMMUNITY

35% of clubs want more engagement, interaction, collaboration

"More workshops to help clubs maintain contact."

"Provide opportunities for clubs to collaborate with each other."

"More liaison with clubs at volunteer, coach and player level to understand their thoughts, challenges and concerns. Maybe liaise more with rugby league organisers to see if we could work better together."

"Be more visible, have more people locally on the ground to help."

"Further collaboration between County, Sale Sharks and local clubs."

"The cluster meetings are a great way for local clubs to share ideas & experiences."

"Club visits. Check-ins. Cycle meetings throughout the region, rather then a select few.

"Improve relationships between clubs. Possibly a meet up of committee members."

"Be interested in lower club's players, give more players a chance, not just the top clubs."

"Demonstrate support and guidance for community rugby beyond competition structures."

"Cap the number of players per club to represent county. This could help with the wider development of club players and stop amassing talent at one club that then basically becomes the county team."

"Maintaining a close relationship between Lancashire RFU and its member clubs, to ensure clubs feel listened to and represented, will be important for the future health of the game. This survey is a great initiative."

"Move county fixtures around the county, publish a senior men's team selection criteria that better reflects the talent in the county."

"Wider distribution of Lancashire games and Finals Days to more clubs."

"A joined approach through RFU, County and Club to target schools/colleges to expose them to Rugby Union".

"The meetings that brought the clubs together was a great idea but there's only been one - it needs to be repeated. Would like to know that the funded club projects achieved their objectives."

"A visit from delegates from time to time to see how the club is ran. Share good news stories about clubs doing well and good practice across the county.".

"Have some meetings that are a bit nearer than LSH."

Lancashire RFU

COMMUNICATION

26% of clubs identified communication & promotion support

"Raise the profile of the game."

"Less promotion of county teams, more promotion of community rugby."

"Increase the visibility of Rugby."

"Direct communication and collaboration between CB leadership and grassroots club committees. Run regional networking forums or roundtables where clubs can share best practices on volunteer recruitment, safeguarding and player retention to strengthen the county network."

"Clear and consistent communication across clubs and leagues."

"Promote club rugby across the county."

"Be more visible and noticeable across the county; better forging of links with educational establishments; greater consultation with clubs."

"Be present and visible. Be open to suggestions."

"Communicate with clubs on a more regular basis."

"Access to more schools for coaching sessions particularly in the Rugby League dominated areas and advertising of the game as a whole."

"Joined up comms with NOWIRUL competition."

"Highlight the variety of clubs that are different to people's expectations within your social media."

"The new website is a big step forward. Makes the cup comps more visible and therefore more meaningful."

"Spotlights on social media to promote clubs."

"Promote the game. Support us with recruitment."

"Clearer, structured guidance for grassroots clubs, ensuring we feel CB are trying to help and improve relationships with all parties. More transparent governance."

Lancashire RFU

PARTICIPATION

26% of clubs identified player retention & recruitment support

“Place greater emphasis on supporting social and veterans rugby, helping clubs retain players who may no longer want the commitment of league rugby but still want to remain involved in the game and their club community.

Keeping players in the game in whatever format they choose should be a priority for everyone involved in grassroots rugby. ”

“Think outside the box more, create more exciting opportunities in clubs and schools to develop rugby as a core PE option”.

“In today’s culture, it’s getting harder to get adults and juniors to play RFU in a strong RLF region.”

“Stop the online bureaucracy currently demanded within GMS. Develop a bottom up strategy to encourage the future of the game not a top down autocracy.”

“Funding for Vets Friday night matches would help.”

“We need more Referees. Perhaps there could be a 1 day course for players of lower XVs to get a game on when there are no referees available.”

“Improve availability of referees for Women's and Minis and Juniors Rugby.”

“Do more to help clubs retain and recruit senior players.”

Lancashire RFU

OPERATIONS

13% of clubs identified administrational & commercial support

"Lancashire RFU already does a lot of good work in supporting clubs and volunteers. Going forward, one of the areas where they could add value is by supporting the volunteers who are increasingly running small and medium sized businesses alongside rugby clubs, whilst managing ever increasing governance and administrative requirements."

"Increase funding for Isle of Man trips, which are a net loss for many clubs in the North West."

"Provide guidance on governance and funding opportunities. Continue to act as a strong voice for grassroots rugby with the RFU."

"More discussions about how clubs run their businesses and how to 'sweat the assets'."

"More 121 support."

"Guidance how to set up and structure a rugby section within newly regenerated club."

"Speak to clubs about their needs and provide practical help."

"Ensure all clubs are able to navigate the challenging landscape of commercial output."

Lancashire RFU

SUMMARY

Lancashire RFU

60 Clubs responded to the invitation to participate in a club community survey, which represents a 10% increase in participation (last season 54 clubs took part).

In comparison to pre-season 2025, more clubs have reported they are more positive about the rugby landscape and more confident about achieving their goals, however, they do not expect memberships to rise and very few are forecasting significant growth.

Lancashire RFU

Player Retention Support

Player retention (and to a lesser degree recruitment) is the clearest challenge for clubs. Almost every club has expressed concerns regarding Men's Rugby. It remains to be seen if this unease is justified. GMS player registration data combined with the fixture completion data at the end of the season will provide an indication of the frequency of Men's active participation and if that commitment is sufficient to sustain our clubs, teams and league competitions.

Colts, Women and Girls retention and recruitment all appear frequently as problem areas. Coaches, volunteers and referees are also in short supply across the board. Travel distances for lower-league sides, local competition from Rugby League, paid-playing opportunities, winter pitch usability are also highlighted as issues and obstacles to success by many clubs.

According to club officers, the reasons players leave clubs are varied. Injury, work, education, family commitments, inconsistent playing opportunities when low numbers force fixture loss and the lack of an attractive alternative all contribute to a loss of interest.

Rugby Union can be intense, combative, attritional, unforgiving and as such demands full-hearted, sustained commitment. If we are to keep more players engaged in the community game and secure their long term involvement with rugby, we need to consider offering a competitive but simple, enjoyable, social alternative that can accommodate irregular commitment whilst bringing players, clubs and communities together on a regular basis.

Lancashire RFU

Funding Support

Practical help and advice with raising funds, grant applications and sponsorship to achieve facilities improvements is a dominant theme in the survey responses, with floodlights, pitch issues, changing rooms and social spaces repeatedly cited. Almost half of clubs highlighted funding and commercial concerns amongst their greatest challenges.

Community Support

Clubs are looking for more interaction and engagement with each other. Clubs want Lancashire RFU to actively promote rugby union regionally and in doing so, increase the visibility of rugby and clubs within their communities. Clubs also want wider county representation in player and venue selection.

Competition Support

Clubs are looking for more flexibility with senior fixtures (less restrictions and sanctions) to ensure games go ahead. Insufficient match officials, GMS administration and travel are also highlighted as obstacles. We all want more games to get played so it’s in the interests of the Lancashire Rugby Community to explore possible solutions.

Lancashire RFU

ACTIONS

Lancashire RFU

Lancashire RFU are dedicated to supporting clubs and volunteers, to grow and sustain the community game, so the county remains a region where Rugby flourishes.

In response to the feedback received in this survey Lancashire RFU will aim to improve its passionate support and promotion of club community rugby by undertaking the following actions, which address the issues clubs themselves ranked highest, while remaining realistic to deliver.

Lancashire RFU

PLAY ON

Keeping players active, engaged and enjoying rugby is essential to the health and stability of a community club.
Competitive league structures are not the only measure of success.

Lancashire RFU

Create and share player retention advice for clubs

- Identify & publish club case studies, from around the community regions, highlighting good practice and practical suggestions for player retention.
- Publish guidance on social rugby options, injury-return pathways and reconnecting with lapsed players & parents.
- Commission & fund a targeted research project with players to understand reasons for leaving rugby.

Support social rugby pathways

- Promote and resource Walking, Touch/T1, Vets and Mixed-Ability Rugby as retention tools.
- Explore the possibilities of a county-wide, social, ‘non-contact’ community club competition, organised regionally as an enjoyable alternative to full-contact rugby.

Target Youth-to-Senior transition

- Publish transition guidance and good practice for clubs.
- Promote joint Colts–Men and U18 Girls-Women sessions and mentoring schemes.

Lancashire RFU

Explore potential solutions to easing fixture friction

- With a view to reducing the factors that drive players & volunteers away, set up a meeting with representatives of RFU Competitions, Lancashire RFU, NOWIURL and Madrefs to discuss the possibilities of greater collaboration, greater flexibility on fixture completion, concede policies, referee appointments, and publish the outcome.

Provide funding and facilities support

- Expand the Lancashire RFU ‘Club Resources’ webpage, to include more advice on grants applications, links to sources of funding, advice on securing sponsorship and club operational management.
- Publish case studies that highlight good practice and practical suggestions for clubs.
- Direct clubs towards RFU Facilities Executive. Prioritise floodlighting and drainage projects that keep training and matches on through winter - the single biggest barrier cited for maintaining numbers.

Lancashire RFU

Community Engagement

- Expand the local cluster meetings that clubs value. Organise by region, invite club leaders.
- Set up community communication groups.
- Add a schools liaison role (SRMs) so clubs can more easily rebuild age-grade pipelines, especially in rugby-league-dominated areas.
- Utilise the new Lancashire RFU Club Developer to ensure successful community project delivery does not depend on over burdened club volunteers.



Lancashire RFU

Lancashire RFU

This document was produced by Chris Gaffey, Director of Club and Community Rugby, Lancashire RFU. It's contents can not be copied, published or shared without permission. October 2026.