

# AGE GRADE TO ADULT: TRANSITION GUIDE



England  
Rugby

**PLAY  
TOGETHER  
STAY  
TOGETHER**



IT'S RECOGNISED THAT THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT DROP OUT POINT IN PARTICIPATION AMONGST 16-24 YEAR OLDS.

This guide will support you in encouraging individuals to stay at your club by providing:

- Insights into the reasons for dropout
- Suggestions to help you create a supportive and positive environment
- Ideas on building relationships and aspirational pathways for players



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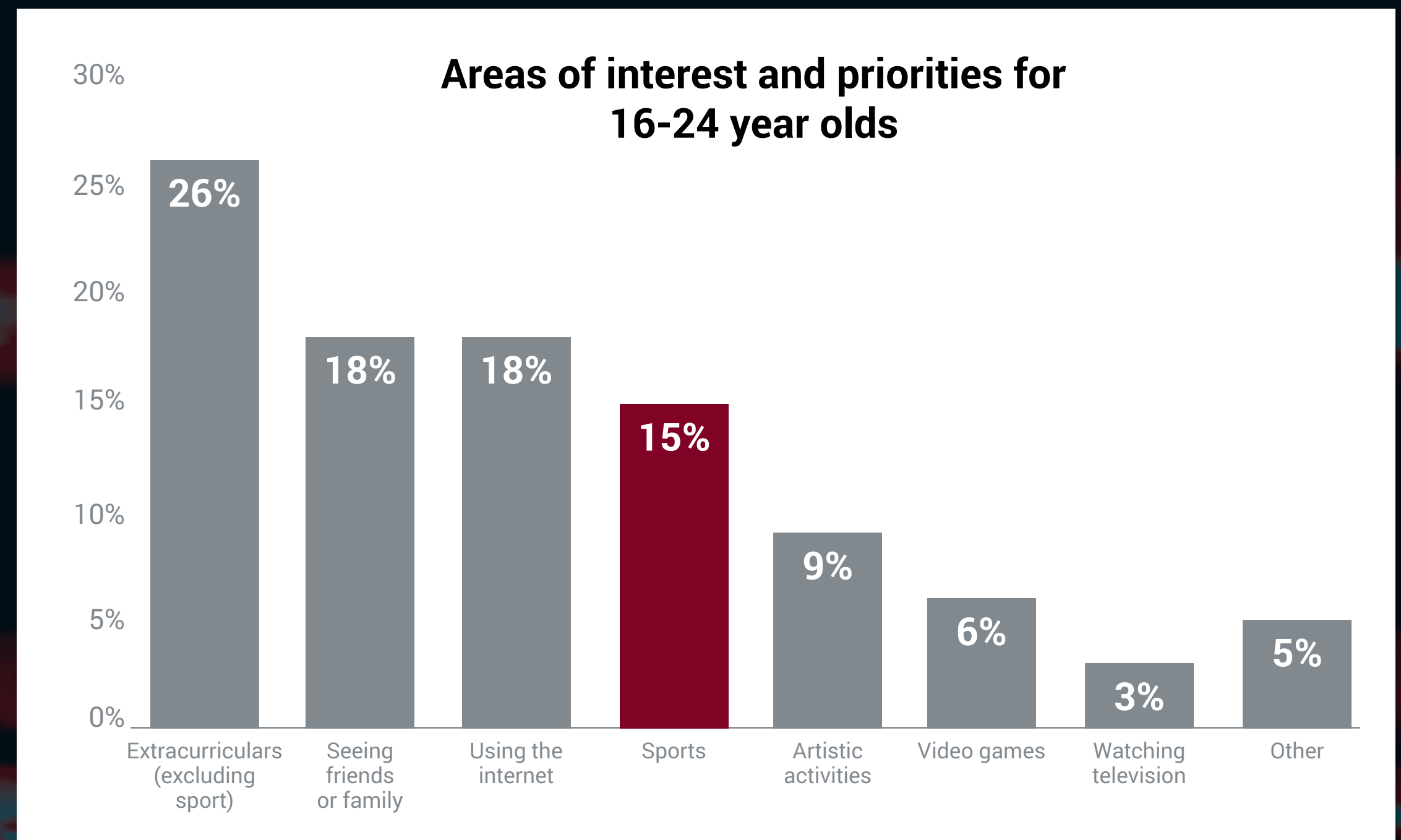


# 16 TO 24-YEAR-OLDS: WHY MIGHT THEY STOP PLAYING?

The challenges of retaining young players from age grade through to adult rugby have been highlighted in several studies carried out by the RFU, Sport England and World Rugby. Here's what they found...

This is a major transitional phase in this age group's life. Their routines, location, spare time and aspirations are all changing due to:

- FINISHING SCHOOL
- TAKING GAP YEARS OR GOING TRAVELLING
- GETTING FIRST GIRLFRIENDS OR BOYFRIENDS
- STARTING FIRST JOBS
- STARTING OR FINISHING UNIVERSITY



Source: Business Insider survey

Doing well at school or university was the top priority for almost all young people involved in our research, and sport had to 'fit in' around their studies.

They are more conscious of the importance of remaining active (both for physical and mental health) than previous generations. However, this still competes with studies and other life changes, and they are more likely to exercise elsewhere with less perceived commitment.

# RESEARCH FOUND MORE REASONS FOR PLAYERS DROPPING OUT - AND OFTEN MORE THAN ONE APPLIES



Increased pressure to perform at a higher standard

Concerns about injury

Change in social dynamic within the squad due to new teammates

Don't feel good enough or ready

'Trimming down' to one sport

Choose more flexible exercise options e.g. running, cycling, swimming

Don't transition to a club from school or uni



HOW CAN WE **CREATE**  
**A SUPPORTIVE CULTURE**  
TO RETAIN YOUNG  
PLAYERS AND FIT  
IN WITH THEIR  
CHANGING LIVES?

# CHAMPIONING THE BENEFITS OF RUGBY: ENJOYMENT AND ESCAPISM

We know young people get huge emotional benefits from playing rugby. Numerous research participants spoke about a feeling of escape, belonging and distraction from other worries in their lives.

While many clubs already work hard to transition young players, we need to explore more ways to bridge this gap. By understanding the pressures faced by this age group, we can combat the reasons for dropping out of the sport, whilst also amplifying the positive benefits of playing. So, we've collated some examples of approaches you can take to encourage the transition from age grade to adult rugby.

16-24 YEARS OLD

## YOUTH RUGBY

Participation  
Inclusion  
Support  
Empathy  
Fun  
Skill

## SENIOR RUGBY

Performing  
Winning  
Training  
Socialising



# WELCOMING NEW PLAYERS TO THE SQUAD WITH CONFIDENCE

Create a welcoming environment to make clear that your club doesn't encourage or tolerate stereotypical and negatively perceived 'rugby lad' culture.



Incorporate players from the adult squad into the coaching team for the youth players. That way, you are fostering a transition attitude early and the new players will already be familiar with their teammates.



Assign all new players a buddy/mentor from their new adult team, helping them to feel less intimidated, more confident and part of the squad from the beginning.



Create awareness of new players attending their first training session, with designated senior players meeting them on arrival and looking after them all evening.





# SHOWING YOUR SUPPORT AND MAKING THE TRANSITION AS EASY AS POSSIBLE

To highlight the supportive culture of your club, show that you're committed to making the journey to become a new member as positive as possible. Ways to do this include:

Make it easier for players to attend by organising transport, or encouraging lift sharing to training and to games.

RFU research identified that injury in adult rugby was a concern to young players. Holding induction sessions can help reduce this apprehension and increase confidence in players.

Message new players after their first session - thank them for coming, say well done, ensure they know when the next training session and social occasion are.

'Offering a 'try before you buy' option, providing discounted or waived memberships for students, under 25s or people concerned about the financial commitment.

# ENGAGING WITH LOCAL SCHOOLS, COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

We found that a sense of belonging is fundamental to the wellbeing and identity of teenagers and young adults. This is particularly true at transition points in their life, when change and unfamiliar surroundings can create a sense of loneliness and social isolation – such as finishing school and starting university.

Engaging with your local schools and universities to create local partnerships can be a great way to start building awareness of the supportive and inclusive environment your club offers. Ways to facilitate this include:

- Holding training sessions within schools
- Sending 'find a new club' comms to university leavers
- Promoting social events on university campuses and their social media channels
- Setting up local games for U20/21s with the university
- Letting local university teams use your club facilities or vice versa
- Running a social media campaign at the start of university terms to support recruitment - use paid media to help reach the audience



# EMPHASISING THE SOCIAL ASPECT OF ADULT RUGBY

Research shows that a big part of the appeal of rugby is belonging to a team, and the friendships and sense of camaraderie that come with this. So, your club needs to show that the same fun and belonging can be enjoyed as part of an adult rugby squad. You can do this by:

- Not centring pre-season solely around rugby and winning, but around fun team building activities to integrate new players.
- Holding a 'not goodbye but see you soon' match for your age grade players about to leave for university, or a 'reading week' game or a reunion match in the Christmas holidays.
- Understanding that the previously mentioned pressures on this age group (such as university, new relationships etc) will remain a factor, and mitigating them by holding fun, low-pressure 'return to club' festivals and events.



# OFFERING **NEW FORMATS** TO ENHANCE INCLUSIVITY

1 in 5 young people expressed an interest in playing non-contact rugby. This included:

**52% OF  
CURRENT  
PLAYERS**

Offering both full contact and non-contact formats, and allowing players to switch between the two, can boost inclusivity within your club. It also helps to address the concern of injury that several young players highlighted.

**35% OF  
LAPSED  
PLAYERS**

The availability of both competitive and more casual non-contact programmes will ensure you have something for all. A number of clubs run successful touch programmes, which are offered at the same time as full-contact sessions.

[FIND OUT MORE HERE](#)

**19% OF  
NON-  
PLAYERS**

# MOTIVATING CURRENT MEMBERS WITH RECRUITMENT INCENTIVES

Your existing members will be the best advocates for your club, so engaging them in recruiting new players can be a great tool in attracting members.

You could offer referral incentives to members to encourage them to support the initiative and recruit members. Examples include:

- Food and beverage tokens
- Match fees are waived for a day
- Free kit
- Priority access to international tickets



# EXTENDING AGE GRADE RUGBY

To avoid drop out as soon as they're old enough to join adult rugby, you can encourage young members to continue playing with their mates until they feel ready to make the transition. Here are some examples of how other clubs have achieved this:



**SURREY RUGBY**

## U20/21 GAME

Set up a local game before players leave for university



**Staffordshire  
Rugby Union**

## 'TRANSITION GAME'

Treat an existing adult game as a more casual transition game to ease them in



**BOLTON  
RUGBY**

## GRADUATION DAY

Presentations to all players who made adult debut



# HOW TO ENGAGE NEW 16 TO 24 YEAR-OLDS THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be a great tool for recruiting new players to your club. The most used social platforms by 16 to 24-year-olds – and therefore the best way to target them – are Instagram and TikTok.

**To reach and inspire the target audience on these platforms, avoiding media wastage, you should...**

Make sure you post rugby-related information and content in-keeping with the audience's interests above. This might be about the latest national and international rugby news, as well as what's going on at your club.



## INSTAGRAM

### Demographics:

Location: England  
Gender: Male & female  
Age: 16\*-24 (\*u18s cannot be targeted by interests)

### Audience Size:

2.6-3 million

### Interests:

Twickenham Stadium, England national rugby team, Rugby sevens, Rugby World Cup



## TikTok

### Demographics:

Location: England  
Gender: Male & female  
Age: 13-17\* / 18-24 (\*u18s cannot be targeted by interests)

### Audience Size:

1.3-1.6 million

### Interests:

Rugby, Rugby Shirt

Look at using tech platforms such as Strava or Zwift to set-up forums away from training, allowing players to support and motivate each other to train.

# KICK OFF WEEKENDS

The kick off weekends at the start of the season offer the chance to bring everyone back together, while also acting as an important recruitment tool to boost player numbers.

To support this year's goal to encourage more 16 to 24-year-olds to transition, we need to ensure the weekend sessions are engaging and relevant for this age bracket.

## You can achieve this by:

- Ensuring all new players are introduced to people before they arrive so they can meet them and feel included.
- Involving new players in matches – whether as a player, water carrier or other suitable role.
- Providing them with food and beverage tokens to encourage them to attend and get involved.
- Ensuring they are aware of your changing facilities for post match and any social events planned.





# DEVELOP YOUR CLUB CULTURE

Holding a workshop with key members of your club is a great way to review your current club culture and develop it for the future.

To create an efficient and productive workshop, ensure different areas of your club are represented by involving some of the below key people:

- Club leader
- First XV player
- Second XV coach
- Age grade coach
- Parent of age grade player
- Age grade player

We recommend 6-8 attendees and that you allow 2 hours for the workshop, following the suggested format.

## STEP 1

### Review your current culture

How is your culture conveyed to all members of your club?

Does the same culture exist across all teams/ age grades?

How do different members feel about your club culture? Do they feel there is anything missing?

## STEP 2

### Determine the changes you want to make

Are there any elements of your current culture that you want to change? Or new elements you would like to add?

Do you need to change how the culture is implemented to ensure it is consistent across all elements of the club?

How will you ensure all members of the club respect the culture?

## STEP 3

### Implementing the new culture

Agree the next steps to implement and communicate the culture to all members.

We will provide an email template to assist with this communication.

# TALK TO THE PLAYERS



# CREATE A CONDUCT CHARTER

- 1** A conduct charter is a guide that outlines your club's culture and values. It can provide the foundations for your welcoming environment and ensure maximum enjoyment from being a part of your club.
- 2** Make it a club-wide ethos, that goes beyond the rugby field and the players to include everyone involved at the club – coaches, administrators, parents, spectators.
- 3** It should cover what it means to play for the team, what it means to represent the community, and should uphold the core values of your union. These values include teamwork, respect, enjoyment, discipline and sportmanship. All of this emphasises that you're opposed to the stereotypical 'rugby lad' culture.
- 4** Keep your conduct charter clear, concise and positive. We recommend bullet points and/or sub-headers to ensure clarity.

# CONDUCT CHARTER EXAMPLES

## PLAYERS

- Play for your team.
- Play to enjoy the game and build your skills.
- Cooperate with your coach, manager and team mates so that happens.
- Play by the laws of the game.
- Always accept the referee and touch judge's decision without comment. Only your captain can ask a question.
- Control your temper.
- Whatever the result, don't be disappointed if you've given it your best.
- Be a good sport: applaud good play by your team or your opponent.
- Shake hands with the other team at the end of the match, and clap them off to thank them for the game.
- Treat your team and opposition as you would like to be treated.

## PARENTS / SPECTATORS

- Young people play rugby for their enjoyment and development, not to win at all costs.
- Support young people in their rugby conduct.
- Be the example to them that you want to be.
- Support the referee and assistant referee, whatever you think of their calls.
- Support all efforts to remove verbal and physical abuse from the game.
- Support the volunteer coaches and managers in making rugby possible for all children.

## COACHES / MANAGERS

- Support your players' knowledge of the rules, enjoyment of the game, and development of their skills.
- Equal effort at training means equal game time.
- Keep all training and game time positive, supporting players who make a mistake.
- Be professional and accept responsibility for your actions.
- Prepare well for training and games.
- Demonstrate appropriate language, behaviour, dress and punctuality.
- Demonstrate respect for referees, opponents and opposing coaches.
- Discourage excessive talk on the field.

# CHECKLIST/ KEY TAKEAWAYS

The below checklist outlines some key areas for your club to consider when creating action plan from this guide.

Have you set up a culture workshop with key members of your club?	
Do you know how many players you have ready to make the move to adult rugby?	
Can you plan in some joint fun non-contact rugby sessions during the off season?	
Do you have any social events planned?	
Are you able to run a 'buddy system' to help players get to know each other?	
Are you able to engage with local schools, colleges, or universities?	
Can you offer incentives to existing members to recruit new players?	
Have you created a social media plan to help in recruitment?	
Have you ensured all new players have been introduced to other members?	
Do you have a willing volunteer or group of volunteers who can oversee players moving into adult teams?	
Have you developed your club charter to share with all club members?	
How will you recognise those players who have 'graduated' to the adult teams?	





# THANK YOU!



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Rugby

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