

Balancing the Board

A toolkit to help increase
women's representation on
rugby Boards



“ The women’s game is critical to the growth of rugby. I’m fully committed to leading the change to ensure women are involved in decision-making at the highest level.”

Bill Beaumont, World Rugby Chairman

A sport for all, true to its values. This is World Rugby's vision.

Since the day that William Webb Ellis caught the ball and ran with it, rugby has continued to grow and evolve, to stay relevant to its players and fans. It is now truly global, attracting players, officials, volunteers, audiences and investors at every level of the game.

Women's participation is our fastest growing area. There is enormous potential to expand the reach of the game through women, and to genuinely welcome and integrate those who have for many years been on the periphery. The benefits are numerous, but to realise them we need to set ourselves up for success. That means starting at the top with our foremost leadership roles: our Boards.

Rugby is not alone in this endeavour. However, our stated aspiration is to be a world-leading sport so it is fitting that we should set the standard and be exemplary. We are a values-based code, and those values guide our practice on and off the field. 'A sport for all' simply has to mean women as well as men.

It's not just a case of better representation for women, it's a case of better representation for rugby.

This toolkit is designed to help you improve the level of women's representation on your Board. It provides some background information about what is needed and why, and then outlines some practical steps for getting there.



Why start with Boards?

Throughout this document we use the term 'Board' to refer to the highest governing body for the sport. For some this might be called the Executive Committee or the Council.

The Board has responsibility for the overall direction and performance of the game. Collectively, Board members make sure their organisation is being run properly and is meeting its overall purpose, as defined in its constitution. Boards take account of constituents' and stakeholders' interests, and make sure the core values are embedded and upheld.

“ Having served on male-dominated boards for more than 20 years, I have come to respect the value that women bring when they sit at the table and contribute towards building an inclusive model of decision-making that represents diverse views and perspectives. I invite the World Rugby family to involve women at all leadership levels.”

**Wendy Luhabe, Independent Member,
World Rugby Executive Committee**

To do this well, Boards need to draw on diverse perspectives and generate a variety of alternative viewpoints. The unifying element is a shared commitment to achieving the very best outcomes for the game. If everyone has a similar background then decisions cannot reflect the interests of the wider constituency. It becomes very hard to think differently.

It therefore makes sense to invest time and attention in getting the Board composition right, and ensuring it is truly reflective of rugby's interests. That means increasing the representation of women.


Female Board members bring a wealth of skill and experience that can be applied to all areas of governance. They are not there to only represent 'women's issues'. Men can equally champion women's involvement in the game and there are many great examples in our sport of male Board members doing just that.

Some sporting codes have established quotas for gender representation on corporate Boards. This is common with national funding bodies and fulfilment of such quotas is increasingly a condition for receiving funding. World Rugby is not seeking to impose a required target. While there are mixed views on quotas the case stands on its own merit, and there is strong and compelling evidence about the benefits of gender equity on Boards.

There is, however, an important point about numbers. A common mistake made with well-intended attempts to improve women's representation is to only appoint one woman to the Board. Research shows that for optimal impact there needs to be a critical mass of around 30 per cent representation. It can be hard to have your voice heard when you are a sole representative and that experience can be very isolating. At around one-third representation, women move from being regarded as 'unusual' or a special interest group, to becoming an accepted and legitimate part of the Board.

Becoming a sport that is genuinely inclusive must start with balancing the Board. Aside from the benefits arising from wider representation, it is symbolically powerful and signals positive intent. But the effort certainly doesn't end there. It is important to review structures, processes and policies to ensure they are not creating barriers to inclusivity. It is also important to think about the prevailing culture and attitudes, and how they might be impacting the experiences of women.

Beginning with the Board is the right place to start and then further action can follow. One step at a time!



“ Women make up a significant percentage of rugby participants around the globe, and certainly in North America, so it is only appropriate that the governance of the sport reflect that. Gender diversity in leadership is important to business success, and the sports world should be no different.”

Bob Latham (USA)
Chair of World Rugby Regulations Committee

The benefits of women on Boards

There is a wealth of quality research to confirm the benefits of women's representation on Boards:

- *Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity are 15 per cent more likely to have financial returns above their respective national industry medians. (McKinsey & Company, 2015)*
- *The 100 highest ranked companies on the Thomson Reuters Diversity and Inclusion Index have, over the duration of the benchmark, had better return on equity, stronger operating profit margins and better dividend yields, as well as lower beta, than their Global Developed Index benchmark. (Thomson Reuters, 2016)*
- *As well as a positive correlation with financial performance, Boards with women members are more likely to focus on non-financial performance indicators such as customer satisfaction and corporate social responsibility, and are better able to*

monitor board accountability and authority, leading to improved corporate governance. (International Labour Organization, 2015)

Given our history, it isn't surprising that many of today's rugby Boards are comprised only or predominantly of men. But this doesn't equip us well any longer for today's world, let alone tomorrow's. Not only do we owe it to our members to be more reflective of our wider rugby family, we are also missing out on a huge pool of talent, ideas and energy.

At World Rugby we are leading the way. We're holding our hands up to say that our current Council profile simply isn't diverse enough for the future and we're working out the best way to quickly and effectively redress that imbalance.

“ I'm committed to working with the unions in Asia to help facilitate the changes needed. Our board has made the call to establish a gender inclusion committee, which will help unions identify gaps and solutions.”

Ada Milby, Asia Rugby Board Member

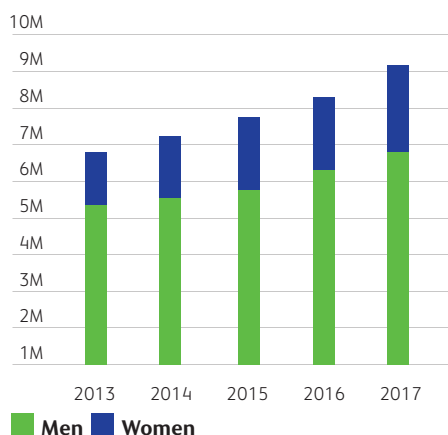
Women's involvement today

Women have always been involved in rugby. In many ways they have been the invisible engine behind the success of the game. In the past their support was often behind the scenes, but this is changing rapidly. Female players represent the fastest growing sector of our sport and we are now seeing women participating in the full breadth of supporting roles.

World Rugby has responded by developing a plan for accelerating the inclusion of women across all aspects of the game. This toolkit is part of a plan that seeks to normalise the women's game by growing participation, creating quality high-performance competition, fostering inspirational leadership, furthering engagement and attracting investment. The following statistics serve to reinforce the need for these actions.

Players

Since 2013, the total number of female rugby players has increased by 60 per cent with the number of registered female players rising by 150 per cent. This compares to 28 per cent and just under 25 per cent respectively for male players. Today, more than a quarter of the nine million people who play rugby in World Rugby member unions are female. This is fantastic news for the future success of our game.



Supporters

Additionally, we are seeing record-breaking spectator statistics for the women's game. Take Women's Rugby World Cup 2017 in Ireland:

- More than 45,000 people attended the games
- 3.2 million viewers in France tuned in to watch the England v France semi-final and 2.65 million UK viewers tuned in to watch the final, which was almost half of the audience for the men's final at RWC 2015
- There were 45 million views across the official social media platforms
- Seventy-three per cent of social media engagement was aged under 24 and these fans were 53 per cent female and 47 per cent male, showing the game is enjoyed by men as well as women

- 600,000 unique users from 223 different territories visited the official website over the duration of the tournament, a fourfold increase on WRWC 2014

Our Boards

Our leadership, however, is not keeping pace with this change. World Rugby surveyed the Board and Executive Committee composition of six regional associations and 14 unions (these unions represented 65 per cent of registered female players). Of these 20 organisations:

- Two had no women on the Board or Executive Committee
- Eight had one woman
- Seven had less than 10 per cent women
- Twelve had between 11 and 25 per cent women
- Only one had 33 per cent women (the recognised percentage for effective impact)

“ In South America we have work to do in terms of supporting women into leadership roles. We are keen to put in place pathways to get better representation and to support the changes needed.”

Agustín Pichot, World Rugby Vice-Chairman and Rugby Americas President

Making it happen

We recognise that every union will be starting from a different place. Some will already have a good level of female representation, while others will have none at all. Equally, regional and national cultures will exhibit different beliefs, norms and expectations in relation to women's leadership. Whatever the starting point, the move to greater female involvement is universally beneficial for the game.

There are a series of steps that should be worked through to achieve a balanced Board. These are summarised at a high level below with more detail on good practice and mistakes to avoid in the appendix to this toolkit.

Step 1: Discuss it at Board level

Start a conversation about your current representation and discuss the case for change

Step 2: Review the constitution

Identify any restrictive rules that might create obstacles to attracting and appointing women

Step 3: Review the competency requirements

Think about the breadth of skill and knowledge that you need on your Board

Step 4: Seek and invite female candidates

Cast the net wide to identify and attract quality female candidates

Step 5: Run the selection process

Make sure your process is free of bias and fair to everyone

Step 6: Welcome the new members

Create a positive early experience so the benefits of new talent can be harnessed from the outset

Step 7: Maintain a positive environment

Involve women Board members fully in all aspects of the Board's work

Step 8: Prepare for the future

Create a healthy pipeline of women candidates to draw from in the future

Further detail on each of these steps, including good practice and common mistakes to avoid, is included at the end of the toolkit.

“ We can't afford to not do this. We owe it to the next generation of players to fully reflect their interests in the game.”

**Madeleine Lahti, Swedish Rugby President
and Vice President Rugby Europe**

Next steps

We welcome comments and feedback on this toolkit, along with wider experiences of building greater women's representation on your Boards. There is a lot of beneficial learning that can be shared so please be forthcoming with your views.

We also urge you to connect locally with other sports. Many of them will be facing the same challenges and there may be merit in pooling resources and collaborating, rather than competing.

Any questions or feedback can be directed to World Rugby at: women@worldrugby.org

“ I have served on a number of Boards and I've seen first-hand the difference it makes to have women around the table. Without a doubt it improves the breadth of our thinking and the quality of our decisions. As I move on from my role as Chair of the Women's Advisory Committee, I'm delighted to commend this toolkit to you. I urge the World Rugby family to get behind this initiative and do all it takes to improve the representation of women on our Boards.”

Bill Pulver, World Rugby Council Member



Appendix

Step 1: Discuss it at Board level

Use the information in this toolkit to start the discussion with your Board. Invite and listen to all points of view as it's much better to talk openly about doubts and concerns. This might require discussion over the course of several meetings, so take the time that it needs. Review your player and supporter base, your future strategic plans and your current Board profile. Reach agreement on what success would look like for your organisation and how you intend to get there. Assign a Board member with accountability for driving and overseeing the work.

Good practice:

- *Chair assuming the sponsoring role*
- *Creating a network of male supporters to champion the cause*
- *Placing it high on the agenda to signify importance*

Mistakes to avoid:

- *Treating perceived obstacles as reasons why it can't be done, rather than issues to be addressed*

Step 2: Review the constitution

Identify any restrictive constitution rules that make it difficult to appoint skilled women to the Board. Watch out for:

- *Narrow skill requirements. Would these rule out 'non-rugby' women? Do candidates have to be ex-players or already have previously held rugby governance positions?*
- *Balance of elected versus directly appointed roles. Could some roles be appointed directly to the Board, based on the individual's skill and competency?*
- *Overly long tenures. Are members able to stay on the Board for a long time, resulting in reduced turnover or limited competition?*
- *Board size restrictions. Do the number of specified roles enable the full set of competencies required on a modern Board?*
- *Interpretation. Have some of the rules been interpreted too narrowly in the past? Is there scope even within the constitution to do things differently?*

Identify the areas in need of revision and begin the process of constitutional amendment.

Good practice:

- *Creating a mixture of elected and directly appointed roles*
- *Limiting the duration of Board tenure to encourage turnover*
- *Developing a policy on diversity and inclusion, and ensuring it is applied to all decision-making*

Mistakes to avoid:

- *Being deterred because of the time it might take to review and change the constitution. It will be worth the effort in the long run*

Step 3: Review competency requirements

Review the skills, knowledge and attributes required for Board membership. Do they properly reflect the requirements of the role and the organisation's future strategy? Look beyond your own organisation to learn from other unions, sports or governing bodies that have made good progress in the area. Invite input from your local Board Directors' Association.

Good practice:

- *Documenting the revised requirements and making it an annual standing agenda item to review them*
- *Seeking external input and advice*

Mistakes to avoid:

- *Describing the characteristics of the typical role-holder, rather than the specific competencies*

Step 4: Seek and invite female candidates

Think creatively about where appropriate female candidates might be found. Advertise the roles widely and enlist the help of business leaders to help identify potential talent. Evidence shows that women are sometimes less inclined to put themselves forward, particularly when they need to go through an election process, so don't be afraid to approach potential candidates directly. The search stage is often a point of failure, so be proactive to create a competitive field of candidates.

Good practice:

- *Being transparent and publicising widely the requirements and the process, including in 'non-rugby' places*
- *Setting up a nominations committee to create a list of candidates. Consider asking them to create a gender-balanced shortlist*
- *Assigning a current Board member to be available to answer potential candidates' questions during the process*

Mistakes to avoid:

- *Assuming a narrow set of past roles or experiences are pre-requisites for Board membership*
- *Assuming everyone should have been a player or a high-profile official*
- *Ignoring what's being said informally about the process. Misinformed chatter can undermine the best plans*

Step 5: Run the selection process

Design an approach for assessing, shortlisting and interviewing candidates. Get a second female opinion to ensure it doesn't include any bias or blind spots; perhaps ask a senior HR professional from an unrelated field to help you design the process. Make sure you ask the same questions of each candidate, so the process is fair.

Good practice:

- *Including at least one woman on the selection panel*
- *Choosing a pleasant and neutral interviewing environment that is comfortable and welcoming*

Mistakes to avoid:

- *Appointing unqualified women in the quest. A good search process should generate a rich pool of female talent*
- *Settling for only one woman on the Board*

Step 6: Welcome the new members

First impressions count, so consciously create a positive experience for newcomers. Regardless of gender, every new member will have gaps in their knowledge. Prepare a pack of relevant background material to help familiarise them with the organisation. Set up additional one-to-one meetings with the Chair to build a strong working relationship. Actively invite early input from the new members during the first few meetings, so that their voice is heard from the outset. Newcomers notice things that others take for granted over time, so make the most of those early perspectives.

Good practice:

- *Assigning an experienced Board member to partner with the new member while they build their understanding about the Board and its ways of working*
- *Assigning a mentor to the new member, ideally from a different sport or business Board*
- *Ensuring all Board members have a personal development plan and the resources required to achieve it*

Mistakes to avoid:

- *Assuming the job is done once a woman is sitting around the table and ignoring their input thereafter*
- *Treating women as if they are somehow different or unusual*

Step 7: Maintain a positive environment

Involve women Board members fully in all aspects of the Board's work. Keep monitoring progress on personal development plans and create further opportunities for the whole Board to learn and advance their skills.

Good practice:

- *Chair meeting periodically with new women Board members to review their experiences*

Mistakes to avoid:

- *Assigning only 'women's work' to the women Board members*
- *Assigning all the junior or administrative work to the women Board members*

Step 8: Prepare for the future

Achieving a balanced Board is huge step forward, but it doesn't stop there. It's important to create a pipeline of future talent so that you are not always beginning from scratch. That means regularly reviewing the requisite Board competencies, learning and applying the lessons from previous experience, and identifying a pipeline of future talent, whether specific individuals or potential sources of that talent.

Good practice:

- *Scheduling a pipeline discussion annually on the agenda, well in advance of any nomination or appointment activity*

Mistakes to avoid:

- *Be careful about subjective information gathered on potential individuals and respect data privacy requirements*



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