

Hampshire Young Rugby Ambassadors

Executive Summary

Volunteers are the heartbeat of community rugby, but the traditional volunteer demographic is under mounting time pressure. To modernise the governance, delivery, and growth of the game across Hampshire, we must intentionally activate our youth.

The Hampshire Young Rugby Ambassador (YRA) Programme is not just an extra-curricular project; it is a strategic necessity. By giving young people an authentic voice and structured pathways, we solve two critical challenges simultaneously:

1. **Retention:** Keeping teenagers engaged in the sport during the high-drop-out years (ages 14–18) by offering non-playing leadership roles.
2. **Capacity:** Nurturing the next generation of coaches, referees, digital marketers, and committee members to ease the burden on current adult volunteers.

This paper outlines a pragmatic, phased roadmap for clubs to identify, recruit, embed, and retain young leaders effectively. Many clubs will already naturally do some or all of these activities. The purpose of this paper is to provide a structured roadmap for new clubs to start, or a chance to formalise the activities suggested.

Introduction

The future strength of rugby in Hampshire depends not only on the players who take the field today, but also on the young leaders who will shape our clubs tomorrow. As clubs continue to navigate changing volunteer landscapes, evolving expectations of young people, and increasing demands on community sport, there is a growing need to create meaningful opportunities for the next generation to contribute, lead and influence.

This guidance has been developed to provide Hampshire RFU clubs with a consistent and structured framework for recruiting, developing and supporting Young Rugby Ambassadors (YRAs) aged 14 to 21. It aims to help clubs identify enthusiastic young people, empower them with leadership opportunities and integrate their voices into club decision-making, community engagement, and future planning.

Young Rugby Ambassadors bring fresh perspectives, digital skills, creativity and a deeper understanding of the needs and motivations of younger generations. By giving young people a genuine role within club life, clubs can modernise their culture, strengthen connections across age groups, and create environments that are more inclusive, engaging and relevant to current and future members.

Importantly, the YRA programme is not solely about developing future volunteers, it is also a powerful tool for member retention. Young people who feel valued, heard and involved are far more likely to maintain a long-term connection with their club, whether as players, coaches, referees, administrators, or volunteers. By creating clear pathways

for leadership and personal development, clubs can foster a stronger sense of belonging, improve the youth-to-adult transition, and reduce the loss of members during key stages of their rugby journey.

This roadmap sets out practical guidance, best practice and recommended structures to help clubs embed youth voice and leadership at every level. Through a coordinated approach across Hampshire, clubs can build a sustainable volunteer pipeline, develop confident young leaders and ensure that rugby continues to thrive within vibrant, community-focussed clubs for years to come.

The investment made in young people today will determine the resilience, relevance and success of Hampshire rugby tomorrow. By embracing the Young Rugby Ambassador programme, clubs are taking an important step towards securing their future while creating positive, rewarding experiences for the next generation of rugby leaders.

The YRA Architecture: Four Core Pillars of Contribution

Young leaders do not all want to do the same thing. To succeed, clubs should offer flexible, modular roles that align with a young person's unique strengths and career aspirations. We define these through four distinct streams:

- **On the Pitch (Technical):** Assisting with Minis/Youth coaching, running non-contact/T1 Rugby initiatives, or taking early refereeing steps.
- **Off the Pitch (Operations):** Match-day logistics, event management, and supporting school-to-club transition festivals.
- **Digital & Culture (Voice):** Managing club TikTok/Instagram accounts, creating multimedia content for the RFU's LOVE Rugby (girls' rugby) or Play Together Stay Together campaigns, and acting as the youth voice on the club committee.
- **In the Community (Outreach):** Acting as a liaison with local schools and colleges to champion the sport and the core TREDs values (Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline, Sportsmanship).

The Deployment Roadmap for Clubs

To avoid overloading club volunteers, this roadmap is designed as a structured, sequential guide. Clubs should not move to the next phase until the prerequisites of the current phase are in place and secure.

Month 1: Establish the Club Infrastructure

Preparation – August

Appoint a dedicated Adult YRA Mentor (ideally sitting on or reporting directly to the Main/Youth Committee). Ensure a clear safeguarding framework is in place and define 2-3 specific, bite-sized tasks the club urgently needs help with (e.g., "Manage the U9s festival pitch logistics" or "Create 3 match-day Instagram reels")

Month 2: Targeted Recruitment & Intake

Identification – September

Look beyond just your standard team captains. Present the opportunity to U15-U18 squads, or those young players in the senior squads, local schools and colleges. Frame the pitch around employability, CV building, earning exclusive stash and gaining actual leadership experience. Aim for a balanced intake, ideally targeting a 1:1 male-to-female ratio.

Month 3: Onboarding & Intentional Matching & Identify Hampshire Reps

Deployment – October

Conduct a brief, collaborative onboarding session. Work with the YRAs to map their interests to the four core streams. Do not just hand them tasks – match them explicitly to an adult lead (e.g. matching a media-focussed YRA with the Club Communications Officer). Register them with the RFU / vInspired frameworks to track hours.

Identify 2 Hampshire representatives from your Young Rugby Ambassador intake that could represent your club views into Hampshire Youth Rugby.

Months 4-7: Active Delivery & Monthly Check-Ins

Operational Phase – November-May

Empower the YRAs to run their designated projects. The Adult Mentor must hold a brief, informal monthly check-in to clear roadblocks, gather feedback from the youth, and ensure they feel supported. Ensure their voices are actively carried into youth section meetings.

Month 8+: Recognition & Graduation

Retention – Ongoing

Publicly celebrate your young leaders. Utilise the county framework (such as the Rugby Volunteer Awards) to highlight their impact. Provide formal reference letters signed by the Club Chair and ensure clear transition options are presented for the following season (e.g., moving from a YRA to an assistant coach or an age-grade representative on the committee).

Success Factors

For this initiative to take root and deliver lasting value across Hampshire clubs, three foundational principles must be maintained:

For the Young Leader	For the Rugby Club	For Hampshire RFU
CV Enrichment: Tangible leadership, event management, and communication skills.	Reduced Adult Burnout: Delegation of operational and digital tasks.	Resilient Infrastructure: A steady, diverse, organically grown pipeline of future club officers.
Career Pathways: Access to coaching/refereeing courses and formal RFU recognition.	Modernised Culture: Fresh, peer-led recruitment strategies that land well with teenagers.	Strategic Growth: Active local support for national priority targets, including girls' rugby engagement.
Belonging: Deepened connection to their community club beyond just match days.	Informed Governance: Direct insight into what the youth membership actually wants.	TREDS Alignment: Stronger advocacy of rugby's core values across the county.

Hampshire Young Rugby Ambassadors

Two representatives from each club will be nominated to become Hampshire Young Rugby Ambassadors. They will be responsible for attending three meetings through the season with Hampshire, able to voice the views of young players and volunteers within their club. They will also have the opportunity in future years to run their own project within Hampshire RFU. The benefits of this role not only include exclusive stash but also the ability to drive the direction of Youth Rugby in Hampshire.