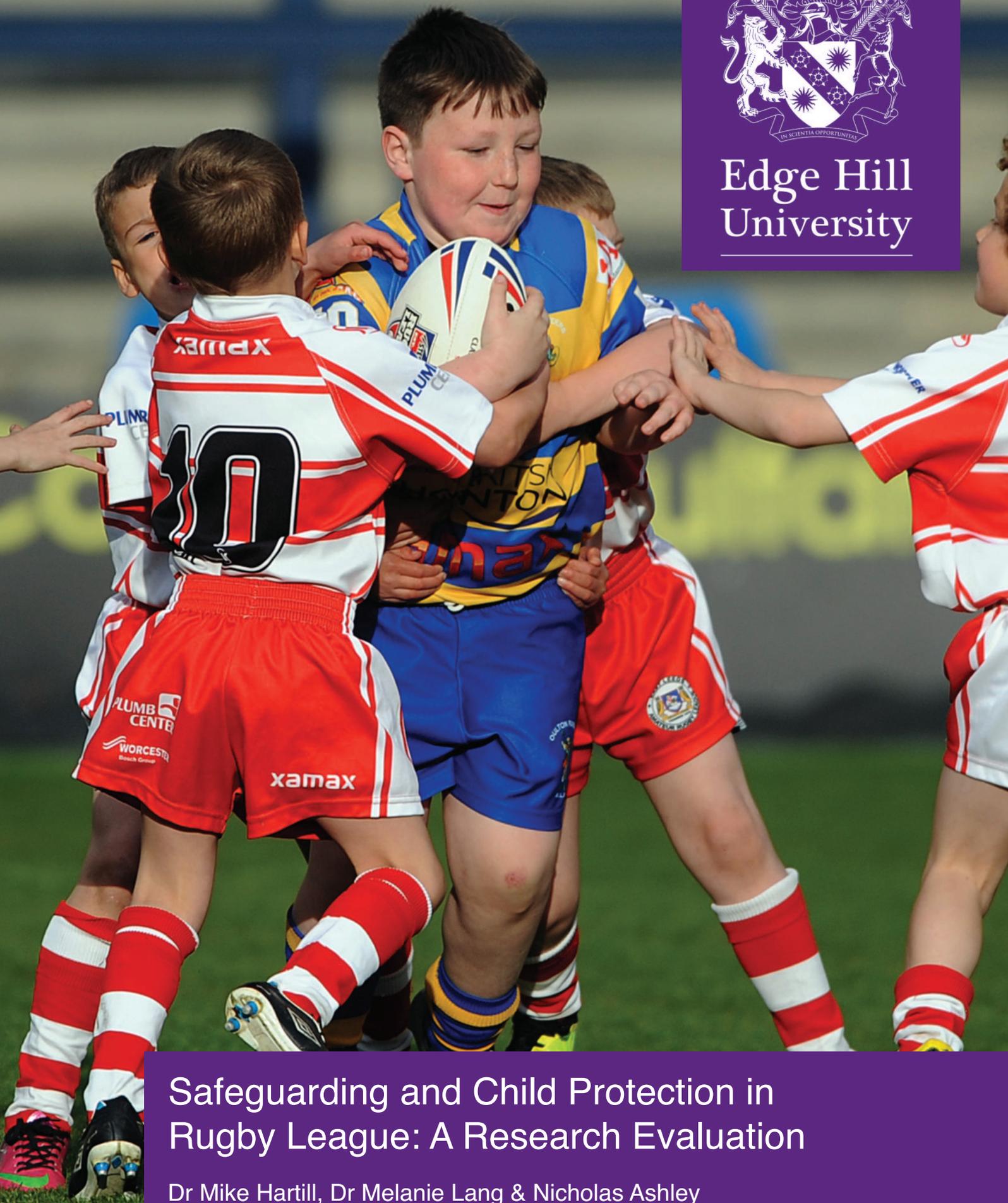




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## Safeguarding and Child Protection in Rugby League: A Research Evaluation

Dr Mike Hartill, Dr Melanie Lang & Nicholas Ashley

A Research Project funded by: Edge Hill University and The Child Protection in Sport Unit

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## **SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION IN RUGBY FOOTBALL LEAGUE**

### **Final Report**

Dr Mike Hartill, Dr Melanie Lang & Nicholas Ashley

Department of Sport & Physical Activity

Edge Hill University

A Research Project funded by:

Edge Hill University

&

The Child Protection in Sport Unit

March 2014



## **Acknowledgments**

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Finally, but most importantly, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the club and community coaches and welfare officers of the rugby league community. They were extremely generous with their time and I am very grateful for their willingness to speak with us.

Mike Hartill

March 2014



## CONTENTS

SECTION	PAGE
PREFACE	1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
BACKGROUND CONTEXT	5
THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK	7
MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SCP IN SPORT	10
THE RESEARCH	12
METHODOLOGY	15
FINDINGS	19
THEMATIC ANALYSIS: KEY EMERGING THEMES	25
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	45
REFERENCES	49
LIST OF APPENDICES	52
APPENDICES	53



'Rugby League'  
by Frances Hartill, aged 8.

## **PREFACE**

Safeguarding and Child Protection (SCP) have now been part of British sport for well over a decade. The RFL was one of the first sports to establish guidelines and procedures in this area when it launched its policy at Wilderspool Stadium, Warrington, in 2003.

Edge Hill University (EHU) has established a long-term association with the RFL in relation to child protection and safeguarding research. This is the third report published by Hartill and colleagues on SCP in rugby league since 2002.

As December 2013 marked the 10-year anniversary of the RFL's first child protection policy, it seemed an appropriate time to take stock of progress.

Dr Mike Hartill devised, initiated and obtained funding for the project. The project was led by Mike Hartill; Dr Melanie Lang (EHU) acted as co-researcher. Research assistance was principally provided by Nick Ashley, and also Sharon Bayton, Dr Jimmy O'Gorman, Stuart Savage and Mark Turner. Transcription services were supplied by Tom Waterworth and Jenny Russell (Department of Sport and Physical Activity). Professor John Diamond (EHU) performed an oversight role and provided valuable academic support. Joanne Morris (EHU Research and Enterprise Support Office) provided administrative oversight in relation to finance and other matters.

The RFL have been most helpful and supportive in facilitating access to their community clubs and officers. Colette Eden, with the support of Emma Rosewarne, has frequently promoted the study within the club network and encouraged the rugby league (RL) community to engage with the research.

The study was funded by Edge Hill University with additional funding provided by the NSPCC (via the Child Protection in Sport Unit). The contents of this report are based on

the work conducted by the research team as outlined above and do not necessarily represent the views of either the RFL, Edge Hill University or the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU).

The publication of this report demonstrates the RFLs continued inclination to engage with research evaluation and its commitment to continuous development in SCP. Facilitating external scrutiny is rare in this field and the RFLs willingness to provide access to its network of clubs, welfare officers and coaches should be acknowledged in this regard. Indeed, the RFLs recent commitment to advancing understanding in this field, within and beyond the borders of its own sport, as well as beyond the UK, is itself testimony to the seriousness with which it approaches the issue of child welfare.

This report provides a detailed account of the project and the data generated by the research. It offers a detailed discussion of this data and presents recommendations for the RFLs consideration.

The intention is to provide an evidence-based analysis that can assist the RFL, and the rugby league community, in the further development of its approach to Safeguarding and child welfare.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Against the background of the RFL’s stated commitment to safeguarding children (and vulnerable adults), the resources it has channelled into this area, and the programmes and policies it has implemented, this project aimed to answer the following question:

**How engaged/activated are key stakeholder groups within the rugby league community towards the safeguarding and child protection agenda?**

The study identified three key stakeholder groups: Club Welfare Officer (CWO); Club Coach; and Community Coach. Qualitative, in-depth interviews were conducted with each group. The transcribed data was then analysed utilising Brackenridge et al.’s (2005) ‘Activation States’ methodology.

The results show that, in general terms, the rugby league community can currently be categorised as ‘active’ in relation to safeguarding and child protection (on a scale from ‘opposed’ to ‘proactive’ – see below).

### Activation States Key

(adapted from Brackenridge et al., 2005)

Opposed	Inactive	Reactive	Active	Proactive
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### STAKEHOLDERS BY ACTIVATION STATE

	Comm. Coach	Club Coach	CWO
Voices	Inactive	Inactive	Active
Knowledge & Exp.	Active	Active	Active
Feelings	Inactive	Proactive	Proactive
Action	Active	Active	Active

It is important to note that the purpose of the Activation States approach is not to provide an absolute result, but rather to indicate a group’s position at a point in time; progression as well

as regression is clearly possible. It is anticipated that the data generated by this study can be used to develop an evidence-based aid to continuous development and learning (i.e. a heuristic device).

The data has also been subjected to thematic analysis in order that specific issues or themes can be identified. On the basis of this analysis a number of recommendations are presented.

### Recommendations

This report makes 19 recommendations which relate to 10 separate areas:

- 1) **Communication with children and young people**
  - a) Develop specific training and resources on communicating with children on safeguarding and welfare-related issues and build this in to all standard rugby league training packages/qualifications
  - b) Establish RFL youth ambassadors to represent children and young people’s voices and ensure they are sufficiently represented and supported within the RFL decision-making structures and processes
  - c) Communicate clearly that the RFL values the participation of children and young people in the running of rugby league, and encourage clubs and affiliated organisations to demonstrate this in their local context
- 2) **Children’s rights**
  - d) Ensure that key principles of children’s rights are clearly, consistently and appropriately communicated to all rugby league stakeholder groups, both explicitly and implicitly, through the range of

materials produced by the RFL, especially within coach education

- e) Ensure that all CWOs and RFL representatives have sufficient access to resources which communicate the implications of children's rights for their role and other roles within RL

### **3) The Community Coach role**

- f) Ensure that all Community Coaches have completed the required training and are sufficiently aware of the safeguarding policy and related resources and are able to act as proactive advocates for safeguarding within the community game

### **4) The Club Welfare Officer role**

- g) Consider further methods to enhance the role of RFL CWO and further embed this identity within the game
- h) Consider a wider range of means by which to support the RFL CWO community

### **5) RFL Safeguarding policy and related resources**

- i) Further incentivize clubs to build RFL resources into their standard processes and encourage parents and children to see such resources as an important feature of a high-quality and safe club environment

### **6) Separation (and isolation) of safeguarding and child protection**

- j) Ensure that training and education clearly identifies the separation of safeguarding and child protection from mainstream roles (coaching, administrating) as poor practice and provide further direction to

coaches/volunteers at all levels to see safeguarding as a fundamental foundation of their practice rather than as an 'add-on'

### **7) Anxiety and perceived vulnerability**

- k) Ensure that coach education/training explicitly addresses coaches' anxieties and perceived vulnerability through evidence-based discussion of, for example, allegations of sexual abuse in sport/RL, their prevalence and the rate of abuse
- l) Ensure that education/training is underpinned by research evidence on abuse in sport (and beyond) and provide clear instruction on the different forms of abuse

### **8) Handling disclosures of abuse**

- m) Promote the message that disclosures of abuse, whilst difficult, should not be viewed as negative events but instead framed as indicators that the rugby league community sees children's rights and their welfare as a priority
- n) Clubs which are fulfilling a broad community role should be recognised formally by the RFL and the promotion of children's rights should be central to this recognition

### **9) Dissemination of findings and development of an evidence-based, bespoke education resource**

- o) Establish a programme of events (e.g. focus-groups, seminars) over a defined period (e.g. 24 months) to ensure that key messages from the research are communicated to all stakeholders, including children and young people

- p) Utilise these events to engage stakeholder groups in further reflection on the data in order to further refine training and other support resources
- q) Reinforce education/training by using the research data to inform a bespoke package for rugby league
- r) Evaluate the impact of the revised package

#### **10) Continuous Learning**

- s) Establish and embed a longitudinal programme of evaluation research within the community game which can inform and underpin the RFLs strategy, activities and arrangements in relation to children and young people.

## **BACKGROUND CONTEXT**

### **Historical development of child protection and safeguarding in UK sport**

When British Olympic swimming coach Paul Hickson was convicted in 1995 of the rape and sexual assault of young athletes under his care, the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA), like most other English sports organisations, had no strategy for safeguarding and protecting athletes from abuse. The Hickson case drew national attention to sexual abuse in sport, although sports organisations initially denied such abuse was widespread and branded Hickson ‘a bad apple’ (Lang & Hartill, 2014). Further revelations of child sexual abuse in British sport surfaced in the late 1990s, resulting in intense media scrutiny and an emerging ‘moral panic’ around child sexual abuse in sport.

The Hickson case was a wake-up call for sport. The case cost the ASA around £1 million in lost sponsorship (Bringer 2002) and prompted national governing bodies of sport (NGBs) and umbrella sports agencies such as the National Coaching Foundation (now SportsCoach UK) and Sport England to act. In these early years, there was considerable resistance from inside sport (Boocock 2012). However, since Hickson’s conviction in 1995, British sport has been positioned as a world leader in athlete welfare.

Following the Hickson case and much advocacy work, a Child Protection in Sport Task Force was convened in 1999 which led to the establishment of the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) in 2001. The CPSU is a partnership between the NSPCC, Sport England (the government agency with responsibility for sport), Sport Northern Ireland and Sport Wales. The CPSU is charged with ‘working with UK Sports Councils, National Governing Bodies (NGBs), County Sports Partnerships (CSPs) and other organisations to help them minimise the risk of

child abuse during sporting activities’ (CPSU, 2013). In their 2006 strategy document the CPSU state:

An initial study into the funded national governing in bodies of sport showed that less than half of those sports had a child protection policy (Towards a Standard for Sport in England, July 2001). Now all funded sports in England and a significant number of other sporting bodies have developed and introduced child protection policies and procedures.

### **The Development of Safeguarding and Child Protection in Rugby League**

The RFL, like other NGBs and County Sport Partnerships (CSPs), is required to adhere to the child protection and safeguarding policies set down by Sport England via the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU). Standard One of the National Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport (CPSU, 2007) requires that all NGBs have a child protection policy which is: endorsed by the executive committee; is mandatory for staff and volunteers; and is publicised and distributed to all relevant audiences. It must also be reviewed every three years or when there is a major change of policy.

The RFL published its first ‘Child Protection Policy and Guidelines’ in 2003 and an updated version in 2008. The RFL (2014) states:

The welfare of children within Rugby League is paramount and the RFL are committed to ensuring the correct policies are adhered to within the game. The RFL Safeguarding and Protecting Children Policy contains the principles which must be adhered to by all clubs in the game to ensure that young people in the game can be healthy and happy, and allow them to enjoy and develop in the game of

Rugby League (RFL website 'Child Welfare').

The RFL Safeguarding Policy (RFL, 2008, p. 7) states:

- Every child who plays or otherwise participates in Rugby League should be able to take part in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from abuse. This is the responsibility of every adult involved in rugby league.
- The RFL recognises its responsibility to safeguard the welfare of all children by protecting them from physical, emotional or sexual harm and from neglect or bullying.
- The RFL is committed to working to provide a safe environment for all children to participate in the sport to the best of their abilities for as long as they choose to do so.
- The RFL recognises that all children have a right to be protected from abuse irrespective of their age, gender, culture, disability, race, faith, religious belief and/or sexual orientation.
- The child's welfare is paramount and will be put before other considerations such as winning matches or the success and achievement of adults or clubs or representative teams.
- The RFL recognises that abuse and poor practice does take place in sport and that raising awareness and understanding of the main forms of abuse and poor practice and encouraging reporting if abuse or poor practice is suspected, will further safeguard children participating in Rugby League.

More recently, the RFL state that their vision is to:

- Ensure that all relevant individuals within the game, including, but not limited to, Coaches, Players, Match Officials and Club Welfare Officers, have confidence in their ability to protect and safeguard the welfare of every child within Rugby League;
- Ensure all adults within the game are able to recognise poor practice or intent and know how to report their concerns;
- Create a generation of Players who are confident to report poor practice or intent;
- Empower Rugby League Clubs to be competent and confident that they are contributing positively to children's lives;
- Achieve a greater level of awareness of Safeguarding and Protecting Children issues throughout the game.

(RFL, Oct. 2013: [http://www.therfl.co.uk/the-rfl/child\\_welfare/education](http://www.therfl.co.uk/the-rfl/child_welfare/education))

This vision would seem to underpin the RFLs engagement with research and it is anticipated that this study will support the RFL in the realisation of this vision.

## **THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

### **The Regulatory Framework for Safeguarding and Child Protection in England**

In England, a child is defined as a person under age 18. The child welfare system in England is a product of its history, with developments predominantly emerging in reaction to high-profile reviews of children's deaths and cases of sexual abuse (see Munro, 2011) and there is no single piece of legislation that covers child welfare in England.

The framework for the current system was established with the Children Act 1989 and its related guidance, particularly Working Together to Safeguard Children. These set out how children should be protected from 'significant harm', defined as ill-treatment, including sexual abuse and non-physical forms of ill-treatment, or the impairment of physical or mental health, or of physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development (Department for Children, School and Families, 2010). Importantly, the Act applies only to local authorities and the courts; all other organisations, including sport, are exempt from its requirements.

The requirements of the Children Act 1989 encapsulate the term 'child protection' (Parton 2001), which is used to collectively represent 'the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm' (Department for Children, School and Families, 2010: p. 35). The focus of child protection is specifically on protecting children from 'significant harm', in other words providing predominantly reactive services to protect children from 'abuse' under the four sub-categories of sexual, physical and emotional abuse plus neglect (Department of Health and Social Security 1988).

In 2000 there was a shift towards more preventative services for all children, signalled in the document Every Child Matters and its related legislation the Children Act 2004, by the term 'safeguarding', meaning:

...the process of protecting children from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development, and ensuring they are growing up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care that enables children to have optimum life chances and enter adulthood successfully.

(Department for Children, School and Families, 2010: p. 27)

Rather than focusing only on protecting children from abuse, this new safeguarding agenda is more holistic and broad-ranging in its remit. It covers all issues that have the potential to disrupt a child's health and development, regardless of their cause, leading to criticisms that the role of the state is becoming broader, more interventionist and regulatory, resulting in the emergence of a 'preventive-surveillance state' (Parton, 2008: p. 166).

The Children Act 2004 also made clear that all sectors of society, including sport, are responsible for safeguarding children. For example, sports organisations are urged to follow 'appropriate codes of practice for staff, particularly sports coaches' (Department for Children, School and Families, 2010: 49), including creating child protection officers and establishing procedures for reporting child welfare concerns. Indeed, the most recent guidance reiterates that voluntary and private sector organisations, including those in sport, should have a range of safeguarding measures in place and that staff must be aware of how to report concerns (Department for Education, 2013).

Nevertheless, while recent government policies have tended to be framed around ‘safeguarding children’ (Parton, 2006), recent high-profile cases of child abuse in England – the physical abuse case involving Baby P,<sup>1</sup> the sex abuse scandal involving the Catholic Church,<sup>2</sup> historic sexual abuse allegations against celebrity Sir Jimmy Savile<sup>3</sup> and allegations of sexual abuse in some of the country’s most successful music schools<sup>4</sup> – have again put the term ‘child protection’ at the core of governmental concerns. Currently, then, the terms ‘safeguarding’ and ‘child protection’ are often used alongside one another, and while there is an acknowledged interest in proactively promoting children’s welfare and positive development (safeguarding), the central tenet of legislation remains on protecting children from harm caused by abuse, predominantly sexual abuse (child protection) (Parton 2012).

A further important development in child welfare came in an amendment to the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which introduced the offence of ‘abuse of trust’. While the age of consent for sexual relations in England is 16, this Act made it a criminal offence ‘for a person aged 18 or over to engage in sexual activity with, or directed towards, a person under that age if he is in a position of trust in relation to that person’ (Home Office, 1999). The law defines specific roles and settings where even apparently consensual sexual activity between a young person aged 16 or 17 and those in positions of trust, responsibility or authority constitutes a criminal offence.

Crucially for sport, while settings such as educational institutions, residential care homes, hospitals and youth offender institutions are all named, the definition of ‘position of trust’ excludes roles and settings in sport, although coaches would be covered by this legislation if they were employed by and working within a school (CPSU 2011). However as there is currently no offence of abuse of trust legislation specifically relating to sport, the only way sports governing bodies can deal with this issue is as a poor practice disciplinary matter (Lang & Hartill, 2014).

A recent report from the National Crime Agency and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (2013) refers directly to agencies providing sports coaching and has recommended that:

the position of trust should be expanded to encompass volunteers and staff in all organisations where parents or guardians entrust other adults to provide activities, care or instruction to children in formal or informal settings.

National Crime Agency (2013: 22)

### **The regulatory framework for child protection and safeguarding in sport (England & Wales)**

The Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) was established in 2001. Its mission is:

To build the capacity of sports to safeguard children and young people in and through sport and to enable

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<sup>1</sup> 17-month-old baby Peter Connelly died in London after suffering more than 50 injuries over an eight-month period, during which he was repeatedly seen by welfare professionals. The child’s mother, her boyfriend, and a third man were convicted in 2009 of causing or allowing the death of a child. The case, which came to be known as the Baby P case, gained notoriety and led to a review of child protection services.

<sup>2</sup> In the late 2000s, allegations surfaced of widespread sexual abuse by members of the Roman Catholic Church in the UK, Ireland and elsewhere in Europe and north America.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Jimmy Savile was a well-known TV presenter, charity fundraiser and celebrity, and is now considered ‘one of the UK’s

most prolific known sexual offenders’ (Gray & Watt 2013: 24). In 2012, one year after his death, police began investigating historic abuse by the star following allegations of sexual abuse and rape by Savile in the 1970s. He is suspected of numerous offences against some 450 children and adults, predominantly sexual in nature, between 1955 and 2009.

<sup>4</sup> In 2013, the former director of the Cheetham School of Music in Manchester, north west England, was convicted of indecently assaulting a pupil more than 30 years earlier. Other staff at the school have also been arrested and the police are investigating what lawyers called ‘habitual indecent assault’ at the school (BBC 2013).

sports organisations to lead the way in keeping children safe from harm.  
(CPSU, 2013, p. 1)

In 2003 the CPSU introduced a set of standards for child protection for NGBs to work towards as a condition of funding, called the Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport (CPSU 2003, 2006a), and shortly after published a national strategy for safeguarding and child protection in sport (CPSU 2006b). The Standards reflect statutory requirements in the Children Acts 1989 and 2004 as described in Working Together to Safeguard Children (Department for Children, School and Families, 2010). They focus on protecting children from and managing cases of abuse, but also cover broader safeguarding concerns, for example encouraging strategies to promote equity (CPSU 2006a).

The Standards also introduced criminal background checks for individuals working with children in sport, bringing sport in line with the Police Act 1997 which required criminal history checks on anyone working with vulnerable groups, including children. Checks are processed through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and search the applicant's spent and unspent convictions as well as serious cautions, reprimands and final warnings.

The DBS has only been introduced in 2013, therefore, little is known about its impact. However, background checking in one form or another has been in place since 2002 (through the former Criminal Records Bureau). There is, however, anecdotal evidence that some sports clubs are not vetting staff as required (see for example, Margeson, 2012) and concern that background vetting deters volunteers and puts financial and resource pressure on sports clubs (Kay et al., 2008).

For NGBs who have achieved the Standards, the CPSU introduced the Sports Safeguarding Framework (CPSU, 2012) in 2012 to further

develop and embed safeguarding and child protection within sports' organisational culture. The Framework, which like the Standards is linked to receiving funding, requires NGBs to audit their current position against four stages – forming, developing, embedding or continually improving – and create an action plan of how to improve.

The key objectives of the Framework are to enable sport to:

- Ensure high quality experiences of sport for children and young people;
- Maintain and build on the positive outcomes arising from the application of the Safeguarding Standards;
- Embed good safeguarding practice at all levels within sport;
- Integrate the involvement of children and young people in the development and implementation of safeguarding processes.

(CPSU, 2012, p. 1)

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF SCP IN ENGLISH SPORT

Since its inception, monitoring and evaluation has been built into the national system within sport in England and Wales. Standard Nine of the national standards ‘Implementation and Monitoring’ requires that NGBs take action ‘to ensure that the organisation’s intentions in relation to safeguarding children are taking place, and to monitor and evaluate action and effectiveness’ (CPSU, 2007, p.13). The CPSU go on to say that:

Policies, procedures and plans have to be implemented across and in all parts of the organisation. Checks are needed to ensure this is happening consistently. The views of those involved inside and outside the organisation can help to improve the effectiveness of any actions taken.

(CPSU, 2007, p. 13)

Specific criteria are also given.

### A Call to Action

In February 2010 a ‘Call to Action’ for safeguarding children in and through sport was launched. This ‘articulated an updated and revitalised vision for all of those who are concerned with the safety and wellbeing of children taking part in sport. It also clarified the roles and responsibilities of all agencies’ (CPSU, 2012, p. 2). The accompanying policy development to the Call to Action is the ‘Framework for maintaining and embedding safeguarding for children in and through sport’, also known as ‘the framework’.

Self-assessment is central to the new framework, and supporting evidence is required to demonstrate the extent to which safeguarding is embedded within a sport.

Monitoring and evaluation is, therefore, crucial to the self-assessment process. The CPSU (2012, p. 2) state that:

Each organisation would be responsible for assessing themselves using the Framework Self-Assessment Tool (SAT). The key is that the assessment considers how well good practice has become embedded throughout an organisation and specifically has filtered through to a local delivery level. For example, organisations that can demonstrate clear evidence of how NGB safeguarding policies and procedures have become thoroughly embedded at a local level, resulting in specific examples of good practice and a child-centred culture, are demonstrating a high level of maturity.

According to the CPSU (2012) ‘support for organisations in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures will be drawn from the Call to Action Research and Evidence task group<sup>5</sup>, and from the NSPCC Evaluation Department.

In 2012 the CPSU published *Sport’s Safeguarding Children and Young People Action Plan 2012 – 2013*, which sets out the ‘roles and action for all organisations safeguarding children and young people in and through sport’. This action plan included a ‘Call to Action Legacy Model’.

A three-dimensional diagram (Appendix C) illustrates how the overall model for the plan should work. The model enables any actions/plans to be tested against strategic objectives and translated into operational delivery. There are four key underpinning dimensions to every area of work:

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<sup>5</sup> The lead author has sat on the Research and Evidence advisory group since 2003 and the co-author since 2010.

- Communication and influencing
- Progressive learning (monitoring and evaluation)
- Children and young people's voices
- Integration/working together

In October 2013 the NSPCC published the Sports Safeguarding Children Initiative: Mid-project progress report (NSPCC, 2013). The report refers to key achievements that have been made by sport since 2010 in four key areas:

- Framework
- Research and Evidence
- Case Strategy
- Skills and Knowledge

It also states that the Strategic Group for the Safeguarding Children in Sport Initiative is working towards developing further four key areas, one of which is Research and Evidence. The report states:

Bringing together researchers from a wide range of disciplines who can contribute to an evidence base for the group's work and who can work alongside sports bodies to facilitate action learning.

Edge Hill University has worked alongside the RFL since 2001 in relation to research on child protection and safeguarding and has worked with the CPSU for over ten years.

## **THE RESEARCH**

### **Background to the research between Edge Hill University and the Rugby Football League**

In early 2001 the British Amateur Rugby League Association (BARLA) had drafted its first Child Protection Policy and Guidelines and planned a pilot scheme to introduce the policy to a service area sample of its affiliated clubs. The then chief executive of BARLA, Ian Cooper, who was coordinating the policy, invited the lead author to join the Child Protection in Rugby League Working Group. Subsequently, Edge Hill University was requested to undertake an evaluation of the pilot scheme.

Approximately 40 amateur club representatives were introduced to the draft policy and procedures during a 3-hour seminar at Wigan RLFC's JJB Stadium in October 2001. The seminar was coordinated and delivered by Ian Cooper and supported by Brian Foley of Wigan RLFC. The chief executive of the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), Steve Boocock, also attended and assisted with the delivery.

Based on research interviews with a sample of the seminar participants, the author submitted an evaluation report (Hartill & Prescott, 2002) (including recommendations - see Appendix A) that helped to inform the first 'Rugby Football League Child Protection Policy and Guidelines'. These were published in November 2003 and launched at the Wilderspool Stadium, Warrington, in December 2003 (see RFL, 2003, p. 3). This policy was revised and updated in July 2008 and retitled 'The RFL Safeguarding Policy' (RFL, 2008).

The findings of the 2002 evaluation suggested, amongst other things, that there were three main strands of concern: (1) a lack of awareness and understanding of the reality of

child abuse; (2) a lack of a child-centred perspective within the clubs; and (3) problems with procedure and process in the implementation of the policy.

In an attempt to continue to track the roll-out of the original policy and the development of child protection within rugby league, the author submitted a further report in 2006 based on a questionnaire survey with club welfare officers (Hartill & Prescott, 2006). In total, 205 clubs were contacted with a final response rate of 37% (n=75). This study investigated how individual clubs responded to the RFL's new policy; in other words, it enquired about what happened when the policy reached the organisations and individuals who were charged with delivering it. The findings of this study were also published within an international research journal (Hartill & Prescott, 2007).

By 2007 the RFL had been awarded the Preliminary level of the national standards; the Intermediate level was achieved by 2008 and the Advanced level was awarded in 2009. In 2012 the new 'framework' (CPSU, 2012) was piloted and is now being rolled out to all NGBs who have achieved the Advanced level.

As December 2013 marked the 10-year anniversary of the RFL's first child protection policy, it seemed an appropriate time to take stock of the progress that has been made since 2001. The current project was designed to document and investigate the RFL's continuing programme of SCP in a more comprehensive fashion than has been previously achieved.

### **The Project**

In August 2011 the Edge Hill University (EHU) Research Investment Fund agreed to contribute £6771.36 to fund a proposed research project into child protection in sport. Subsequently the Child protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) agreed to contribute a further

£2000 to the project. As noted above, this project extended and expanded upon the previous (unfunded) collaborative work between Edge Hill and the RFL. An outline of the project is provided below:

#### **Aims:**

- To generate data and knowledge about child protection and safeguarding children within the sport of Rugby League;
- To provide the RFL with in-depth knowledge about key stakeholder groups' perspectives in relation to child protection and safeguarding children;
- To disseminate findings locally, nationally and internationally to relevant communities of practitioners, professionals and academics.

#### **Objectives:**

- Within the Rugby League community, evaluate key stakeholder groups' level of 'activation' in relation to child protection and safeguarding utilising Brackenridge et al.'s (2005) 'Activation States' research model;
- Prepare a research report for the RFL, Edge Hill University (funding body) and the Child Protection in Sport Unit (additional funding body);
- Deliver findings within a range of formats at the local, national and international level.

#### **Outputs:**

- Final Report: EHU published report submitted to the Rugby Football League and Child Protection in Sport Unit;
- Presentations at conferences and meetings;
- Publication of findings in international peer-reviewed journal(s).

#### **Research Question:**

Against the background of the RFL's stated commitment to safeguarding children (and vulnerable adults), the resources it has channelled into this area, and the programmes and policies it has implemented, this project has been guided by the following question:

**How engaged/activated are key stakeholder groups within the rugby league community towards the safeguarding and child protection agenda?**

#### **Approach**

Brackenridge's Activation States<sup>6</sup> approach uses the categories: Inactive, Reactive, Active, Proactive, Opposed which are determined through four dimensions: Voices/Discourses; Knowledge and Experience; Feelings; and Action.

This tool has been developed and used by Brackenridge et al. (2005) in research for the English Football Association (see Appendix B) but has not yet been used by other researchers or organisations.

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<sup>6</sup> Brackenridge, C. et al. (2005) Measuring the impact of child protection through Activation States. *Sport, Education and Society*, 10 (2), pp. 239-256.

As noted above, the new CPSU Framework also introduces a ‘Self-Assessment Tool’ (SAT) that NGBs will be required to use in order to evidence their continuing development and commitment to maintaining and embedding safeguarding principles and practices. The SAT is designed to provide evidence-based indicators to enable NGBs to monitor and evaluate their own development as well as to provide a quantitative data gathering tool for the CPSU to monitor each governing body (across four identifiable progressive stages: Foundation/Formation; Developing; Integrating/Embedding; Continually Improving).

However, within the SAT considerable emphasis is placed on governing bodies to collect qualitative data from within their own organisation in order to demonstrate that their policy initiatives are being embedded and having an impact ‘on the ground’.

The Activation States approach may be an effective tool for governing bodies and/or researchers to address this requirement as it is specifically designed to gather ‘rich’ data at the individual level in order to generate robust data upon which an organisational evaluation can be based.

This approach resonates with the CPSU’s reference to ‘deep dive’ analysis within their Call to Action. Certainly, the data collected for this study provides a substantial source for further analysis beyond the Activation States profile produced for each of the three stakeholder groups.

The thematic analysis presented below represents this analysis to date. The depth of analysis and knowledge provided by this data and the extent to which the RFL is able to evidence in-depth (and objective) evaluation of its approach to child welfare positions the RFL amongst the field-leaders within the landscape of UK sport. Facilitating external

scrutiny is rare in this field and the RFL’s position should be acknowledged in this regard.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sampling

The minimum sample required by this methodology is 15 per stakeholder group (Brackenridge, 2010, personal communication). In order to produce robust data and to ensure that all regions of the rugby league community were included in the project, a target sample of 30 per stakeholder group was set.

A comprehensive list of English RL clubs with a junior/youth section (youth clubs) was received from the RFL in November 2011. This list was separated into the 5 English regions that constitute English rugby league (see table 1).

The number of youth clubs in each region was then calculated as a percentage of the total (e.g. the 80 youth clubs in Yorkshire constitute 36% of the RFL-affiliated youth clubs in England). This percentage was then used to determine a target figure for each stakeholder group per region, based on 30 interviews per stakeholder group (see table 1). For example, on this basis, 11 participants from Yorkshire would need to be interviewed within each stakeholder group for a representative sample to be achieved.

Table 1: Sample required (by region) for each stakeholder group (SG) based on target of 30 participants per group

REGION	CLUBS (N)	N as % of total	SG Int. Sample
MIDLANDS	10	4	1.2 (1)
N.EAST & HUMBER	28	13	3.9 (4)
N.WEST & CUMBRIA	85	38	11.4 (11)
SOUTH	20	9	2.7 (3)
YORKS	80	36	10.8 (11)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>30</b>

However, due to the time involved in contacting participants, arranging consent and

conducting interviews and the small budget available to secure research assistance, the target of 30 interviewees per stakeholder group was not possible. Nevertheless, the minimum of 15 was exceeded for all three stakeholder groups. Data collection was completed by the autumn of 2013. 71 interviews were conducted totalling just under 500,000 words of data.

Table 2 illustrates the actual sample achieved and how each region is represented in the sample in relation to its proportion of RFL affiliated clubs. In other words, Midlands clubs' represent 4% of the national total and are, therefore, marginally over-represented within the study as interviews with Midland representatives constituted 5.6% of the total sample.

Table 2: English Amateur Rugby Football League Clubs (Youth) by Region with Target Sample and Actual Sample

REGION	Total Youth RL Club (N)	% of national total (N=224)	Int's Completed*	Inter-views req'd for representative distribution	% of sample
MIDS	10	4%	4	3	5.6%
N.EAST & HUMBER	29	13%	9	9	12.7%
N.WEST & CUMBRIA	85	38%	31	27	43.7%
SOUTH	20	9%	5	6	7%
YORKS	80	36%	22	26	31%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>224</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Completed = conducted, transcribed and analysed

Table 3: Actual number of representatives interviewed within each stakeholder group per region

REGION	Club Welfare Officer	Club Coach	Comm. Coach	Total
MIDLANDS	0	2	2	4
N.EAST & HUMBER	3	4	2	9
N.WEST & CUMBRIA	15	11	5	31
SOUTH	0	2	3	5
YORKS	7	9	6	22
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>71</b>

## Methods

### Sampling, Access and Anonymity

To achieve a random sample, a pattern was identified by which clubs were selected for inclusion (e.g. every fourth club from an alphabetical list per region). This provided an initial target group for interview. Letters and/or emails were distributed widely to the clubs with the endorsement of the RFL.

However, contact did prove difficult, especially with limited research assistance, and progress was slow. This was most often due to the busy schedules of the target population and occasional reluctance to participate. In instances where contact proved overly difficult, the research team identified alternative contacts.

In the occasional instance, contact with a club representative was facilitated by the RFL lead officer for safeguarding, however, the identities of the vast majority of participants and the clubs they represented were, and are, not known to the RFL. All data was anonymised during transcription and analysis.

Due to difficulties in securing participation from the originally identified target sample, as the study progressed the research team adopted a purposive sampling procedure. Participants' contact details were mostly obtained through club websites or word-of-mouth (therefore the process was kept independent from the RFL) and individuals were then contacted either by email or telephone inviting them to take part in the study. In addition, the RFL provided a list of all community coaches.

### Informed Consent

If individuals were interested in taking part, they were forwarded an information sheet and informed consent form (Appendix D), which outlined, in more detail, the purpose of the research and also confirmed their voluntary

participation. Not all participants returned the consent form, however, all participants were adults and consent was confirmed verbally before the interview began. All interviewees were given the opportunity to ask questions about the research project prior to commencement of the interview and again at the end of the interview. Transcripts were available on request and participants were informed of this. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the project at any time.

### Interviewing and Transcription

Once the researchers received the signed consent form, the semi-structured interviews were arranged around the participants' schedule. Semi-structured interviews were used due to the flexibility afforded to the researcher with the ability to alter the interview schedule in order to suit the flow of the conversation (Bell, 2010). This is a qualitative approach and interviews varied in length and ranged from approximately 30 minutes to over 2 hours. The principle behind this method was to ensure that the conversation was able to cover sufficient ground so that all substantive areas relating to safeguarding in rugby league could be covered and participants were given sufficient time and space to express their views on a range of issues (see Appendix E for the themes and questions covered in these interviews).

Therefore, this method ensures that participants' views are explored in sufficient depth without being confined to a rigid question structure (as in questionnaire surveys). This methodology avoids the simplistic 'tick-box' approach (e.g. questionnaire) which was deemed insufficient for capturing the complex responses which are inevitably related to the introduction of policy initiatives aimed at cultural change. A rationalised approach to evaluating the process of organisational and cultural change, such as gathering evidence against predetermined

indicators, means that many issues relevant to that particular community are ignored from the outset and cannot be captured.

A more rigorous approach is clearly required for the Activation States analysis even though the data is finally reduced into a grid form. The aim is to generate knowledge based on robust research methodology which can be presented in an accessible fashion: a heuristic device rather than a simple measuring device (Brackenridge et al., 2005). Thus, whilst this approach is time-consuming, it allows both researcher and participant adequate time to explore and address the range of issues related to safeguarding and child protection within that particular context.

Interview guides were developed for each stakeholder group through making contextual adjustments to the original CWO interview guide (Appendix E). All interviews were conducted over the telephone and were audio recorded using a digital recorder (three interviews were lost through recording failure). The recordings were then transferred to the lead researcher who stored all recordings on a password protected computer, operated and secured by the Edge Hill University IT system. These recordings were then transferred to the transcription team.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by two members of the administrative team in the Department of Sport and Physical Activity at Edge Hill University. These support staff were also bound by the rules of confidentiality as set out in the consent forms.

All transcripts and informed consent forms were stored separately in order to maintain participants' anonymity. Names were removed during the transcription process and any remaining identifying information (e.g. reference to individuals or clubs) was removed during the analysis.

## Coding and Analysis

The team used initial interview transcripts to incrementally develop a coding instrument. Initially, this was based on Brackenridge's study with the Football Association (Brackenridge, 2002 - see Appendix B) but was reformulated using data from six early interviews in order to create a bespoke coding instrument. This has gradually been refined to produce a master template (see Appendix F).

Upon completion of the interview and transcription process, the interviews were subsequently analysed twice, using Activation State coding and thematic analysis. First, coding the interview data using activation states required the researchers to code sections of data which they believed were indicative of a voice (what the person says about SCP), knowledge and experience (what the person knows about SCP), feeling (what the person feels about SCP) or action (what the person does about SCP).

Each dimension (voice, knowledge, feeling, action) was then coded according to an Activation State: opposed, inactive, reactive, active, or proactive; adapting Brackenridge (2002) this is essentially a continuum from negative to positive practice (see Appendix B).

Once each interview was fully coded, the number of codes per dimension and state generated an overall profile across the four dimensions. For example, 'active voice', 'reactive knowledge', 'inactive feeling' and 'opposed action'. The line numbers in the transcript pertaining to each section of coded text were recorded to enable discussion and verification within the research team. This process ensured consistency of approach to coding. Team meetings were held regularly throughout the project, particularly during the analysis phase, to ensure consistency.

The grid below (Table 4) illustrates the raw coding of a transcript, with transcript line

numbers recorded by dimension and state. The team found that placing ‘Opposed’ on the left, rather than the right of the Activation State

grid (as per Brackenridge, 2002) to be more intuitive.

Table 4: Example of coding process

	<b>OPPOSED</b>	<b>INACTIVE</b>	<b>REACTIVE</b>	<b>ACTIVE</b>	<b>PROACTIVE</b>
VOICES		401-407,	77-80, 82-85, 91, 221-226, 230-232, 235-239, 242-243, 317-318, 394-398, 411-412, 418-426,	86-89, 264-266, 294-299, 330-345, 428-432, 437-439, 456-461,	
KNOWLEDGE & EXPERIENCE		283, 348,	103-111, 184-198, 245-249, 283-292, 326-328,	54-67, 114-120, 135-150, 157-170, 202-216, 252-259, 268-280, 303-313, 354-384,	
FEELINGS		231-233, 401-407, 411-412, 418-426,	127-129, 175, 178-179, 222-227, 235-239, 440-451, 476,		484-495
ACTION		283,		69-75, 202-216, 303-313, 330-345, 386-391,	

Table 5 illustrates the overall profile of this transcript. A colour coding system was also

introduced indicating the progression from ‘negative’ (red) to ‘positive’ (green).

Table 5: Example of individual profile based on modal measurement

	<b>OPPOSED</b>	<b>INACTIVE</b>	<b>REACTIVE</b>	<b>ACTIVE</b>	<b>PROACTIVE</b>	<b>PROFILE</b>
VOICES		1	<b>11</b>	7		<b>REACTIVE</b>
K & EXP		2	5	<b>9</b>		<b>ACTIVE</b>
FEELINGS		4	7		1	<b>REACTIVE</b>
ACTION		1		<b>5</b>		<b>ACTIVE</b>

The individual profiles were then used to build a picture of the overall group. Taking the modal or most common response, the individual profile in table 5 would represent a ‘reactive’ state for the ‘voices’ dimension. When all individual transcripts had been coded in this way, an overall ‘activation state’ profile for each stakeholder group was produced, also by calculating the modal frequency or most common response-type (see Findings).

The AS analysis provides a snap-shot picture of a specific group in an accessible format. However, the complexity and richness of the data is hidden ‘behind’ the AS grid. Whilst examples are provided to illustrate the AS

coding, the research team also conducted an in-depth (or thematic) analysis of the stakeholders' views towards child protection and safeguarding in order to investigate and illustrate the data further.

Thematic analysis is a process of data reduction that is designed to create emergent themes within and across the interview transcripts through a close reading of the data (Roulston, 2010). The team will continue to examine the qualitative data, however, a provisional thematic analysis is also presented below.

## FINDINGS

### RFL SAFEGUARDING - ACTIVATION STATES ANALYSIS

The tables below illustrate the Activation State profile for each stakeholder group.

#### CLUB WELFARE OFFICER (N=25)

	OPPOSED	INACTIVE	REACTIVE	ACTIVE	PROACTIVE	PROFILE
VOICES				ACTIVE		ACTIVE
K & EXP				ACTIVE		ACTIVE
FEELINGS					PROACTIVE	PROACTIVE
ACTION				ACTIVE		ACTIVE

#### CLUB COACH (N=28)

	OPPOSED	INACTIVE	REACTIVE	ACTIVE	PROACTIVE	PROFILE
VOICES			REACTIVE			REACTIVE
K & EXP				ACTIVE		ACTIVE
FEELINGS					PROACTIVE	PROACTIVE
ACTION				ACTIVE		ACTIVE

#### COMMUNITY COACH (N=18)

	OPPOSED	INACTIVE	REACTIVE	ACTIVE	PROACTIVE	PROFILE
VOICES			REACTIVE			REACTIVE
K & EXP				ACTIVE		ACTIVE
FEELINGS		INACTIVE				INACTIVE
ACTION				ACTIVE		ACTIVE

#### STAKEHOLDERS BY ACTIVATION STATE

	Comm. Coach	Club Coach	CWO
Voices	REACTIVE	REACTIVE	ACTIVE
Knowledge & Exp.	ACTIVE	ACTIVE	ACTIVE
Feelings	INACTIVE	PROACTIVE	PROACTIVE
Action	ACTIVE	ACTIVE	ACTIVE

To illustrate the coding scheme through which the grids were produced, the following presents illustrative examples of the data under each Activation State and across each dimension. A master grid has also been produced (Appendix F).

## OPPOSED

### Voices:

- I think safeguarding's more safeguarding the adult more than anything; the Child Welfare Officer is not there to coach the kids - and a coach is not there to be a Child Welfare Officer.
- You start going silly, you start going over the top if they push child protection any more.
- At the end of the day, they're here to play rugby, but a lot of people tend to delve deeper and question things that perhaps don't need questioning.
- I tend not to keep going back to it ... I don't want to unnerve anybody, just keep referring to it, making them feel like there is an issue ... if you keep going back to something you make people continually think about it.

### Knowledge:

- It doesn't seem to happen in Rugby League. I have seen it like within schools and things like that but not sort of when it comes to Rugby League - we haven't been affected in that way.
- I'm not aware of the safeguarding policy.

### Feelings:

- I probably haven't got time or I just, just can't be bothered to be honest [reading newsletters].
- I can't see the point in drawing players' attention to it if there's no need to. If there was a problem, they would tell us about it. But if there's not, why mention it? Sometimes you do more harm than good.
- ... it's like taking them [children] to games, you're not allowed to drive by yourself ... you know, I've done that for twenty five years, I've always taken kids... but now, because of

safeguarding, you've got to have another parent in your car.

### Actions:

- There have been times where the players have lost focus and decided that they don't want to deal with the drills that I'm setting. The way I resolve that is just getting them to run - it does get them to focus again.
- I introduce myself as the Coach. I try to keep it [CWO role] a little bit quiet ...
- We don't discuss Child Protection with our members no.
- We don't talk to the children specifically about Safeguarding and Child Protection.
- ... if them parents want them kids to know about it ... we're only there as coaches ... it's what the parents want to drill into their kids - we're not responsible for their kids.

## INACTIVE

### Voices:

- Obviously the child protection's always changing ... it's mainly coaching for me.
- To have a meaningful conversation with 300 people is going to be quite time consuming, isn't it?
- Child Protection is against perverts ... and against nasty people. We all know about celebrities and stuff like that ... they need protecting against that.

### Knowledge:

- I'm not familiar with it but we do have, I think we should have one. You need it for getting your Clubmark anyway.
- I'm sure it [club] does have one [safeguarding policy] but not that I'm aware of.
- I have heard of it [RFL Safeguarding Policy] but I haven't really read through it.

### Feelings:

- Have you needed to raise any issues with your CWO?  
Not really, no. To be honest, from seven, they've been real good kids. I mean when [number] get signed professional last year, so, you know, they have been dedicated.
- Is the safeguarding policy something that you refer to often?  
It's not, no ... I suppose once you've started and you're doing the right practices, you just think that you're carrying on doing the right practices.

### Actions:

- The leaflets are there for the kids. I don't actually talk to any of the kids personally. The coaches let them know who the Welfare Officer is.
- Do you talk to your teams about Safeguarding and Child Protection?  
No, not really. We have the chat at the beginning of the season to the parents ...
- ...not me personally no ... discussions like that [on child protection] it's just using the Child Welfare Officers to lead on things like that.

## REACTIVE

### Voices:

- You're covering your back ... in case anybody does accuse you of anything ... you've got somebody to cover your back.
- It [CP and Safeguarding] makes you sceptical of whether you should be coaching ... so I think it could put coaches off.
- You'll generally start to lose people ... all they wanna do is help out with Rugby League and it just puts off people.

### Knowledge:

- ... I haven't actually had to use any of the sort of mechanisms in place ... I'm

not as aware of them as I probably should be in all honesty.

- And how about the Local Safeguarding Children Board?  
I've heard of those, but it's not specifically my job
- His dad can't take him home so the coach does ... or is that forbidden in this health and safety mad world?

### Feelings:

- It's just a never-ending process and realistically we're not only the Community Coach within the Club, you're a Welfare Officer ... It does seem to be a lot of added pressure.
- It just makes you aware of all the procedures that you have to do so you don't get caught on stuff. To be honest, a lot of it is a bit over the top.
- What would be a trigger point? It may be my son - and I've got me arm round him - and somebody looks, and they might say, 'eh, he's got his arm 'round a kid.'

### Actions:

- Do you speak to your players about child protection and safeguarding procedures?  
Not very often but I do ...
- ... you've gotta do it ... we get through it and tick the boxes, which is the main thing to make sure that we're a Club Mark Gold Club, you know, for the sake of the kids.

## ACTIVE

### Voices:

- After being on a lot of courses you realise it's not just physical it could be mental, and it could be just their wellbeing ... things like not having the proper kit ... you don't just look for people who are being harmed ... have they got the right equipment and have they got the right things at home food wise ... things like that really.

- I think the kid's need a face that they know, away from the Coach. I try and go to different training sessions each week so that the kids are familiar with me especially the younger ones.
- Since they've [the RFL] taken over Child Welfare or Safeguarding, it's come on leaps and bounds ... they're at the end of the phone if you've got a query. They put on the conference each year, which I think is really good.

#### **Knowledge:**

- If we have a safeguarding problem, our first point of contact is the RFL ... so we liaise through Colette Eden at the RFL. If someone comes to me and discloses a child protection and abuse problem then what I do is ...
- We have a complaints procedure for child safety. They [club members] can write the details down, pass them to me then I will go to the committee.

#### **Feelings:**

- You don't want to make children do something they don't want to do. There's a reason why they don't want to do it.
- How do you feel about child protection and safeguarding? Very, very, very happy about it. The last few years it's come on strides and everybody we talked to welcomes it and it's making the game more professional and more attractive to parents.
- There's got to be a structure where the child can report that to adults and you've got to have a mechanism for dealing with that in a clear and transparent way.
- The Child Protection Policy is for everybody, from the President of the club, all the way down.

#### **Actions:**

- We've had one issue with foul and abusive language ... provoking the opposition ... we had to stop her and

pull her back into line, explain that this isn't part of Club policy and if she didn't stop then we'd have to ask her to leave the Club.

- One of our youngsters came to the canteen and was with a man I didn't know. I asked him who he was, it turned out it was his granddad on his mum's side. I will question people who are watching matches or hanging about.

### **PROACTIVE**

#### **Voices:**

- It's not a hundred per cent, I think I'd be complacent if I thought it was.
- I always try to emphasize that kids aren't about winning. Whenever [parents] say 'oh we're going to go and beat so and sos' - it doesn't matter; it doesn't matter if you lose against them as long as you come off the pitch smiling, that's the whole point of kids rugby!
- Some kids are forced to play either to toughen them up rather than because they want to, so that can lead to situations where they're being pushed and that's not positive for the child.
- I see safeguarding as a preventative measure, raising awareness of the fact that children are vulnerable and have the right to be safe.
- I think there's too much of an emphasis on performance. I like to make sure kids want to be doing the sport. It doesn't matter if we win or lose, get everyone enjoying it.
- There's always more that can be done and there's always kids that have slipped through the net that you didn't see. I think you want to be striving for excellence.

#### **Knowledge:**

- The Victoria Climbié report, the Layman report, brought in a lot of

mandatory requirements around information sharing.

- My first point of call would be Colette at the Rugby League. If it was particularly serious, the first port of call would probably be the police and our LADO.

**Feelings:**

- As many people as possible should be doing the safeguarding course.
- There's got to be some procedure there to offer help and support when necessary. That it's clear and open for everybody to see, not only for the young people but also for the adults that deal with it. That part's essential.

**Actions:**

- I like to not give them any rules and then let them find out how they can do things and find the different ways and journeys of doing things.
- We have an Anti-bullying Policy, we also have a Behaviour Policy because we had issues with challenging behaviour amongst the older boys, with coaches and parents not knowing how to handle it. So we decided that we would do that as a Club.
- He could [tell] me how he felt ... kids can come and talk to you, it's because you're using the Safeguarding stuff well.
- I picked up the forms from the Local Authority, whoever had responsibility for vulnerable adults ... They thought it was absolutely wonderful that somebody had thought of putting vulnerable adults in the Safeguarding bit.

## SUMMARY DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### The Activation States Analysis

Across the three groups, 'Active' is the most frequent category by some margin. The AS grids show that the Club Welfare Officers are the most 'activated' of the three groups with a solid active profile across Voices, Knowledge and Action, and proactive Feelings. However, all three stakeholder groups are predominantly active with the CWO and Club Coach groups demonstrating elements of a proactive state under the dimension of 'feelings'.

Perhaps most significantly, all three groups are profiled as active within both the Knowledge-Experience and Action dimensions. Whilst we do not have earlier Activation studies with which to compare these findings, this indicates the organisational investment in safeguarding and child protection made by the RFL and individual clubs over the past decade aimed at encouraging clubs to make specific and actual changes to their environment as well as the resources (such as training and abridged policy materials) provided for its membership.

Nevertheless, reactive (Voices) and inactive (Feelings) profiles within the two coach groups indicates some discrepancy between what stakeholders say and feel about SCP in relation to what they know and what they do. This would perhaps seem preferable to the reverse, but does suggest that the SCP message is not universally endorsed, even where required processes and mechanisms are in place and being followed.

In other words, whilst coaches may be fulfilling their SCP responsibilities, their views on SCP suggest their actions are not necessarily consistent with how they feel about it. This is particularly the case for the Community Coach group. This raises questions about the extent to which coaches 'believe' in the safeguarding agenda which in turn raises questions about how effectively that

agenda is implemented at the ground level. Exploring the reality of how coaches implement policy is beyond the capacity of this study but it should clearly be explored further.

### **Validity and Rigour**

The Activation States approach allows for a quantitative picture to emerge through the coding of qualitative comments and representation of these codes via overarching grid profiles. However, the sample of seventy-one interview participants does not constitute a statistically representative sample of the rugby league community, nor do the small number of participants in each stakeholder group constitute a representative sample of that group.

However, the objective of qualitative research is not representativeness (at least in a statistical sense) but validity. Thus, qualitative approaches allow for and encourage the expression of deeply held (and often closely-guarded) beliefs which are not easy to quantify but which are illustrative of a more valid (authentic) picture.

Thus, the project team also conducted a closer (repeated) reading of the data so that such aspects could be identified and considered further. So whilst no claims are made for statistical representativeness, we do claim that the findings represent a robust, in-depth approach which reveals important issues in relation to SCP within rugby league which other (quantitative) approaches would not. These preliminary findings are presented below.

## **THEMATIC ANALYSIS: KEY EMERGING THEMES**

The central aim of this project was:

To provide the RFL with in-depth *knowledge about key stakeholder groups'* perspectives in relation to safeguarding children and child protection.

This research has applied the Activation States system, which is designed to generate a picture of the extent to which a group or community is activated towards the principles of a policy aimed at cultural/organisational change.

However, the issue or question that underpins the Activation States system relates to how the rugby league community perceive or 'construct' SCP.

That is, in the responses given to our questions, what underlying views, or discourses, can be identified? The different dimensions of the AS system (voices, knowledge, feelings, action) attempt to capture some of the complexity of responses to the introduction of cultural change policy. For example, individuals might profess to be in complete agreement with the tenets of a policy but their actions may indicate a different perspective, or they may experience an inability to carry out in practice what they feel at the level of attitude and personal belief.

However, in order that this complexity is not diluted through the reduction of the data into Activation Grids (albeit with illustrative statements), it is crucial to excavate further and interrogate more closely the data provided by the RFL community. Therefore, in order to provide a 'richer', more robust and authentic picture of the position of safeguarding within

rugby league culture, the team looked again at the data set in order to refine and deepen the analysis.

Analysing the data in this way requires time to complete and time for reflection and, to some extent, our analyses continue to evolve. The following pages present the key findings to emerge out of this process.

## **SPC AS A POSITIVE AND WELCOME DEVELOPMENT**

There was broad acknowledgment that there have been noticeable developments in safeguarding and protecting children within rugby league over recent years and general appreciation for the RFL's commitment and leadership on safeguarding matters. Indeed, very few negative comments were received about the RFL, which is a significant feature of these findings.

Generally, there was broad agreement that SCP policies, training and initiatives had had a positive impact on the game and on children's welfare within both the CWO and Club Coach groups (as indicated by the 'proactive' profile within the 'feelings' dimension).<sup>7</sup> This clearly suggests not only a broad acceptance of the principles of safeguarding within rugby league, especially at the local level, but an embracing of these principles and an acknowledgment of the value they have for the game as well as children in rugby league:

Do you feel enough is being done to *ensure children's welfare in Rugby league?*

CWO: At one time there was very little, however things seemed to have moved on dramatically in the last few years ... I have seen the RFL get more

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<sup>7</sup> Whilst the 'interviewer effect' will certainly be a factor (whereby interviewees may give answers they feel are expected) each interviewee was

carefully assured that the information they gave was entirely anonymous and confidential. The length of the interview is also a controlling factor in this regard.

involved with the child safeguarding and protection side of things.

How do you feel about child protection and safeguarding?

Community Coach: Very, very, very happy about it. Very, very happy. The last few years it's come on strides and everybody we talked to welcomes it and it's making the game more professional and more attractive to parents.

What impact do you think the *Safeguarding policy's had on the Club?*

Club Coach: Well it's been massive ... it's come on leaps and bounds and the standards are, are head and shoulders above what it was like ten years ago, it's crazy really.

How have Child Protection and Safeguarding impacted on Rugby League at the grassroots level?

CWO: They have impacted because it increases knowledge and understanding and it's cascading knowledge and understanding ... all these policies, statements, that are now up in Club House – challenging behaviour – I do think it has a made a difference.

CWO: I think the Rugby League are making a massive effort, keeping you informed, asking the right questions. I think some clubs fall down, but that is the strength of the people who you've got available to do the job

Community Coach: He didn't seem his normal self, so I said, 'what's up mate?' And he said 'oh nothing'. I said, well, I'm not forcing you but if ever you need to talk ... it was obvious something was going on ... I just sort of said, 'you don't look your

normal happy self, what's going on?' And he said, 'oh, just a bit upset with my mum and dad'. So I just let him talk, really, and listened to him. I didn't like, offer any advice, I were just, I don't know, he just seemed to want to get it off his chest and once he'd done that he was, he seemed alright again.

Do you think the training helped you to become a better Coach?

Club Coach: Well I think yes, I'd say yes, it made me a lot more aware of things ... I would report those signs now even if they may be nothing, I'd let somebody else investigate it who's trained better in that area.

Club Coach: To be quite honest until I got involved in the [role], I didn't realise it was actually an issue, I didn't think that there was a need to do it.

Community Coach: I came away [from training] with different ideas and different ways of wanting to safeguard children.

Indeed, some participants' expressed personal philosophies about 'good' coaching that clearly chime closely with children's rights principles and an awareness of the broad agenda that underpins 'safeguarding':

Club Coach: My philosophy is that the most important thing, the number one, is that they enjoy it and that's been my ethos throughout my time. Kids enjoy more if they are winning, but a win in itself isn't the be-all-and-end-all. So, yeah, enjoyment, and development of skills is my main goal.

Club Coach: You've just got to listen to the kids ... and obviously just look after them in the in the best possible

manner and keep parents involved as well.

CWO: Our responsibility as a club is to make sure that the children are kept in a safe environment, not only from, let's say a stranger, but the actual playing facilities as well. For me that's part of Safeguarding, making sure that we do the risk assessments, all the equipment is up to date and in good working order. For us that's part of Safeguarding as well, it's the general wellbeing of the children, whilst they're in our care.

Community Coach: Child abuse, I mean straight away it springs into mind, the negative criminal connotations that come with it. But it's a lot more than just a criminal aspect. Um, obviously, there can be mental abuse or different forms of abuse.

Club Coach: the parents want them on the pitch and they don't wanna be on. I'll say to the parents after the game, 'this child doesn't wanna be on the pitch and he's gonna get injured because he's being forced to play either to toughen them up or because you want them to play, rather than because they want to,' so that can lead to situations where they're being pushed and that's not positive for the child.

Community Coach: I never ever let kids pick their own teams. I do that because inevitably you get one little boy stood at the end who's probably not the best athlete and it's demoralising. I see that as a form of child abuse that somebody in authority is letting that happen over and over again.

There is then considerable evidence that many within the rugby league community speak from an informed perspective and perceive or

construct 'safeguarding' as a benefit to the game as opposed to a burden or as 'hoops' to be jumped through. The accumulation and development of knowledge in relation to child welfare issues by those in key roles within rugby league is also highlighted by this Community Coach:

I must admit when I first started this role I thought that child abuse was a lot of physical stuff, but after being in a lot of courses you realise it's not just physical. It could be mental, it could be just their well-being. ... things like not having the proper kit for the sessions so, if it's like absolutely freezing outside ... you don't just look for people who are being harmed physically but ... have they got the right equipment and have they got the right things food wise ...

These perspectives clearly indicate a strong base from which the rugby league community can continue to develop from.

## **SAFEGUARDING ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Organisational Support and the Lead Officer Role**

In the following extracts, CWOs emphasise the importance of broader organisational support from the RFL. In particular, the extracts highlight the importance that club representatives place on communication with their governing body, especially where a safeguarding issue has been raised:

CWO: Oh very good yeah, since they've [the RFL] taken over, Child Welfare or Safeguarding [has] come on leaps and bounds. You know before ... we never did hear from conclusions if anything was reported, whereas now if we ring up they can give us a conclusion or say it's still in

investigation. I felt that some things were never even dealt with, not big issues but, I felt they were never dealt with, whereas now I do feel as though they're dealt with. And they're at the end of the phone if you've got a query. They put on the conference we have each year, which I think is really good.

Club Coach: If it was anything I considered at all serious, I think my first point of call would generally be Colette at the Rugby League [the Lead Officer] because she's very good at directing and advice and if it's not something they need to deal with, she would know which agency to get in touch with.

These extracts also indicate the importance of the Lead Officer role within the RFL. This was a recurring theme:

Club Coach: ... if I had any serious cases I would always ring Colette up and take the advice that she offers and make sure that it's done in the correct way.

Club Coach: We currently have a Safeguarding issue that was brought to our attention by Colette who informed me that we have somebody currently with a Temporary Suspension Order. I've not had a lot to do, I was just made aware of the fact.

CWO: what we find is that our club sees its children 'out of hours'. They meet in the evenings and at weekends when everywhere is shut. So we've got a mobile number for Colette and we've got a voicemail number for Colette where we can ring and leave messages. If Colette's around, she picks the phone up and we can tell her about it and she tells us, "right, leave it with me and I'll sort it." If we can't

get through to her, we can leave a message and as soon as she gets the message she rings back and we talk about it.

Have you ever had to deal with the Local Authority Safeguarding Unit at all?

CWO: No. None at all. To be honest, if I did I would probably be ringing Colette first for advice ... rather than just panicking, just go straight to them, I'd probably ring her for a bit of advice. I have her mobile so I would ring her direct.

Do you have contact with Rugby Football League's Safeguarding team as well?

CWO: Yes, I do. Either Colette or [assistant] but Colette's been a great help.

The dedicated, full-time Lead Officer role is not universal within UK national governing bodies of sport but this research illustrates the value that club representatives place on having ready access to a known and trusted professional. It also illustrates that the Lead Officer is known beyond the CWO group and this is no doubt related to the various lines of communication that the RFL have established, such as a regular newsletter, website pages, training, and the annual safeguarding conference.

### The CWO Role

The emergence of the CWO role within Rugby League (and British sport more broadly) is a significant development. This role now represents a considerable volunteer workforce within British sport that is deserving of closer attention and greater recognition. It is perhaps unsurprising to find that many who occupy the CWO role consider the work they do to be important (although it is clear that this is not universal – see below). However, the data

reveals some important issues relating to the CWO role and the function it plays within the RFL community.

The following extract suggests that the role of the CWO has become established within (at least some) RFL contexts to the point where these individuals provide an important source of information and reassurance for club members at a time when many popular and comfortable assumptions (or misconceptions) about perpetrators have been shattered:

CWO: This Jimmy Savile thing has worried a lot of people and people come and ask you things because of Jimmy Savile ... it's something that worries them and especially now ... I get volunteers coming to me saying, can I do this or will that be classed as child abuse? People are not sure now around where the boundaries are ... this thing with Jimmy Savile has unsettled a lot of people because of the way that he was originally held in high-esteem.

The steady stream of sexual abuse cases reported in the national media, which has been evident for at least a decade, has reached something of a crescendo in the last two years. It is difficult to determine the extent to which the so-called moral panic around child sexual predators in sport in the early 2000s (which characterised the environment in which a National Task Force on Child Protection in Sport gave birth to the Child Protection in Sport Unit) impacted upon the Rugby League community. However, all sectors of British society have been touched by the Savile and other high-profile cases.

These cases (coupled with ongoing inquiries into abuse in organised religion) have reiterated the capacity for trusted individuals to conceal their abusive activities and almost certainly cast a long shadow over many activities involving children, sport included.

Whilst this is something that needs further investigation, it seems evident that clubs with a knowledgeable and engaged CWO are more likely to have the capacity to resist ill-informed and irrational responses that will undoubtedly be ignited by the media coverage of cases such as Jimmy Savile and Stuart Hall.

In this respect, training and support resources seem essential in order that those that deliver children's rugby league are operating from an informed position guided by a robust evidence base rather than popular commentary and hyperbole.

The importance of the CWO role in challenging poor practice in a balanced and informed way would also seem to be crucial:

CWO: Well I think sometimes Coach's tend to be very much in love with, passionate about the sport. And they tend to have a win mentality. And so when I'm talking to them - I talk to both the Coach's and the children - we discuss the fact that some children are there just to play Rugby, not to win all the time and not to be beaten within an inch of their lives, in terms of you know the training that they're doing, their fitness and that sort of thing. And although we feel as a Club it's important, I also feel quite strongly that some children aren't as able to participate as others are, and every child should be given an equal opportunity to participate to their potential.

Some CWOs also exemplify enhanced knowledge in relation to safeguarding and child protection and an understanding of 'safeguarding' as much broader than 'child protection', and it is particularly noteworthy to see children's rights being explicitly referred to by those at club level:

What do you understand by the terms 'safeguarding' and 'child protection'?

CWO: In terms of Safeguarding I see it as a prevention, a preventative measure so it's raising awareness of the fact that children are vulnerable and that children need to be safe and have the right to be safe and that we as adults have the right to protect them ... in terms of Child Protection, its raising awareness of the channels available in order to put that protection in place, and as I say, giving them ownership, and the parents ownership - being able to ask questions and not be afraid to tell if something is happening or going wrong or if they're worried about something.

CWO: We have procedures, you know, if a child would come to either me or to the Coach, the Coach's know never, never to make promises, you know "I won't tell anybody else," - and then that comes forward to me, and then between me and the Coach and the child, we decide where we want to go with that particular issue ... I mean a lot of it has come from the Safeguarding books that we've been given, but all the Coaches are given a pack of what to do if this happens in your team and where to go and what to say, like a little flow chart we've done for them.

It is also important to note the clear thinking that this knowledge and experience enabled CWOs to bring to situations that are potentially fraught with tension:

CWO: A manager of a team said one of the coach's was getting a bit close to one of the boys. I got the facts from her, she kept a diary for me. I forwarded it on then, once I received it - because you're not necessarily there to take action with the person who's

having the finger pointed at them, basically you're there to make sure it's justified what is being said about the person and also get the facts and have them written down, and then pass them over to the RFL for them to consider what the case is and what action to take if any. In this case it was nothing and there was no action to take, but if there had been the RFL would have advised.

Similarly, in the following extract, a CWO discusses a violent incident and, in its aftermath, how cooperation between clubs appeared to work to prevent an unsuitable individual from continuing to coach children in rugby league:

CWO: the only other instance we've had is where one of our coach's has punched another coach ... I phoned the Police ... obviously I didn't want anything to do with him being at the Club, I contacted the RFL and they said once the Police had finished their investigation they would then look ... he did take his kid to another team and because of the rumours the coach from the other team phoned me to ask was the rumours true ... he said 'Right fine, it's just if he tries to come coaching we can say no straightaway'.

Such examples provide evidence to suggest that child welfare is being prioritised over the traditional allegiance to 'looking after one's own', at least where behaviour contravenes safeguarding and child protection principles and policies. Clearly, the role and knowledge of CWOs and the network that this role has created within rugby league are crucial to these processes. Nevertheless, the fact that this joint action was apparently prompted by 'rumour' rather than facilitated by organised sharing of information is something that the RFL should consider further.

Others emphasised the importance of having someone in a supporting role to the children who wasn't directly involved in their skill and performance development:

CWO: I think it's very important [the role of a CWO], I think the kid's need a face that they know away from the Coach.

### **DELIVERING SAFEGUARDING IN RUGBY LEAGUE: TENSIONS AND CHALLENGES**

The data also demonstrated the challenges presented by safeguarding policies:

What do you think about the recording and photography policies?

CWO: I think it needs to be taken seriously across the whole of the game. And sometimes that isn't the case, as I say.

Previous reports to the RFL (Hartill & Prescott, 2007) highlighted how club representatives may be inclined to relegate child protection to an 'Any Other Business' item on meeting agendas, thereby signalling the extent to which safeguarding and child protection are valued and influencing the seriousness that club members attach to such issues. From the data in this more recent study, safeguarding now appears to be presented and promoted in much more appropriate fashion within rugby league and this achievement should be acknowledged and welcomed. Nevertheless, participants highlighted the challenges that they faced.

For example, participants noted the challenges of getting everyone 'on board' with SCP:

Community Coach: I mean we've a presentation of it [safeguarding] on signing-on nights ... fifty per cent of parents are watching it and the other fifty per cent are not, they're not really

bothered ... some parents just want their Joe to be the best player in the world so they'll do anything they can to make it happen.

Club Coach: Trying to publicise certain policies to people is particularly difficult. Not everyone will be looking on the RFL website. I think there's always more to be done.

Club Coach: I, it can be quite annoying, really. It can be quite annoying in the fact that, you know, you try to as a, as a Club, you know, we will not tolerate any kind of issues ... the parent that was constantly being abusive and using foul language - we dealt with it swiftly and promptly ... and it does annoy you when you're proactive in sorting these issues out, yet you do go to some teams and it's just constant and it just doesn't seem to be addressed. You know, it would be better for, you know, if everybody abided by, by the rules and, and, and legislation set down by the RFL. Um, it just seems to me as if it's some Clubs will and some Clubs won't.

The importance of having support from within the higher levels of the club's hierarchy was also mentioned. As this CWO indicates, clear messages about safeguarding have to come from the top if the CWO role and safeguarding more broadly is not to be undermined by reluctant (and potentially influential) voices.

CWO: It's been hard with a lot of the coaches. Trying to explain to someone who has done it for years that, actually the way you're speaking to the kids isn't quite right, you don't shout at them constantly and pull them to one side, "but it works for me, it works for my son". "Well maybe in times gone by things have been done a little bit differently but right now this is the

way we want you to speak to the children, erm, you are actually bullying and that's the way it can be perceived". And there has been a few, sort of been fired up, "I'm not standing here listening to this", they have come round eventually because they have had to do it, from the top down, the chairman's been on board and he's come in and said "no what she's saying is right, this is the way we should be acting".

This, and the following, extract illustrate specific tensions between the language of safeguarding and children's rights and the practicalities of embedding safeguarding within traditional male-dominated team sports, especially those of an aggressive, masculinist nature. The challenge this presents for CWOs within clubs should not be underestimated:

CWO: A lot of it unfortunately tends to be related to like how children are being spoken to, and it can be the coaches, it can be other parents on the sideline ... it's the parents that let it down a lot of the time ... But it's just trying to, I mean when you're talking about young teenage kids and you've got parents on the other sideline: "smash him!" You're like, hang on a minute. Touch-wood there has been no assaults, it's all just been sort of game day conduct really. If an away team club isn't of the same opinion as yours that's when you struggle because people can think you are being a little bit over the top and a little bit, pedantic when you're asking them not to shout and ball at kids.

There were many examples within the data of the commitment that individuals within rugby league make, especially amongst CWOs, to ensure that the welfare of children is given significant attention and that safeguarding is delivered within their club:

CWO: I act as the coach co-ordinator. I organise all the coaches when they need to go on courses, fill in all the paper work for them, get all the checks and get them sent off and keep the records of that for the CPD (continual professional development). I keep all those up to date. I keep our website up to date as well. If you go on the first page on the contents ... and for each person my intent was - and I have virtually done it - is to show that every named person has a role at the club and they're all CRB checked. You will see I have put a comment for every person that is CRB checked. The number underneath ... that's the date it's due for renewal, so I use it as a database so I know when it's due for renewal. And I'm involved with the under 8s team, as the administrator for that team.

CWO: I try and go to different training sessions each week so that the kids are familiar with me especially the younger ones.

Community Coach: kids find themselves in some vulnerable situations that they might want to talk and ask you about so you start to look at and familiarise yourself with the personalities of the kid's so you can identify any changes that might be evident in the week-to-week sessions.

Community Coach: I did a course regarding the CEOP's team from the Police, on exploiting children. That was really, really interesting just to see it all from a different perspective. You know, because of social networking ... it opened my eyes.

Club Coach: If I feel a child's being forced to play - and I have seen this -

then I'd say to the parents I don't think the child should be in this environment ... you can see it clearly, they're not enjoying it. First I'll try and talk to the child, 'are you alright? Is this something you want to do?' I may get the parent and say 'this isn't working, he doesn't want to play'.

Finally, CWOs expressed the difficulties of managing their role alongside other commitments:

**CWO:** there are so many age groups and they are all training two nights a week at different times - and work commitments and having a small child it's hard for me to get to training. Weekends are a bit easier because obviously I am not having to work and sort anything out, me and the little feller can just jump in the car and go and watch, but I don't tend to be at any training sessions.

Sport tends to be run by volunteers, especially at the grass-roots level (Ringuet-Riot et al., 2014). Consequently, clubs may struggle to find enough volunteers to fulfil the required roles. As a result, in many instances CWOs are volunteers and may also have additional responsibilities in their club, making it difficult to commit their time and energies full time to their safeguarding role. The impact of having dual roles such as this is worthy of further study, but one suggestion is that clubs have multiple CWOs to spread the workload and/or those occupying the role of CWO be allowed to commit to it without having to take on additional responsibilities in recognition of the position's value.

## **ANXIETY & BURDEN OF SAFEGUARDING**

It has been recognised for some time that sport stakeholders view the introduction of

safeguarding and child protection strategies in sport with a degree of fear and uncertainty (Lang, 2010, 2014). More than a decade after the RFL introduced its safeguarding and child protection strategy, this feature appears to remain with some coaches drawing attention to their feelings of vulnerability, particularly in relation to being accused of abuse:

**Community Coach:** It [CP and Safeguarding] actually makes you a little bit more sceptical of whether you should be coaching sometimes, because there's a lot of procedures ... you know, you can find yourself quite vulnerable as a coach and nobody actually sees that side of it, really.

**Club Coach:** You know, like, in contact with kids and that. You know, what would be a trigger point? You know if you're at one end of the field - and it may be my son - and I've got me arm 'round him - and somebody looks, and they don't even know, they might say, 'eh, he's got his arm 'round a kid.'

**Community Coach:** Having worked with predominately 18 plus previously, to drop down to the 16 and under and 18 and under, you understand that there's some quite erm vulnerable positions that you can put yourself in that you need to avoid ...

In response to this perceived vulnerability, some coaches discussed how they followed safeguarding procedures to protect themselves as much as the children they work with:

**Community Coach:** Well you just sort of, you're covering your back as well, aren't you? You know, in-case, if anybody does accuse you of anything, you know you've got, you've got somebody to cover your back, haven't you.

Community Coach: Like, back when I was a kid, you know, things were totally different. I guess the world we live in these days, we have to make sure we're totally covered and - through good practice.

Research in other sports and in child-related settings outside of sport suggests coaches' concerns about their perceived vulnerability are often a result of misinformation and 'fear of fear itself' (Lang, 2014). Indeed, anxiety over allegations of abuse is likely to be disproportionate to the actual rate of accusations, unfounded or otherwise (Brackenridge et al., 2005; Lang, 2014). So while coaches' concerns about perceived vulnerability warrant further exploration, they should not deter sports organisations from implementing safeguarding and child protection strategies, although there may be considerable value in discussing this issue in coach education courses, particularly if framed in light of the number of allegations later found to be false or unfounded to assuage coaches' concerns.

Meanwhile, some CWOs reported that their role was received negatively, in some cases prompting them to avoid disclosing to others in rugby league:

How important do you think the role [CWO] is to the Club?

CWO: I don't think the Club's necessarily view it as important as it should be treated. And that's not just within our club, that's when I've been talking to other coaches. Um, because sometimes I don't tell other coaches when I'm out there coaching that I'm also a Club Welfare Officer; you hear them talking about their Club Welfare Officers and what a pain in the arse this is.

For others, there appears to be considerable fear about receiving disclosures:

CWO: To be honest I got somebody else to sit in with me because I was very uncomfortable ... it put me on the spot and ... I was like 'Oh my god what do I do?'

CWO: For your CWO's, I think anything that can be done has been. And for you personally, what are the biggest challenges of this role? Dreading the day that a kid comes to me and tells me something ...

Presumably the 'something' in the extract above refers to abuse, very probably sexual abuse. The construction of a child's disclosure of abuse as something to 'dread' is worthy of discussion. Children do not tell about abuse (especially sexual abuse) often until much later in their lives and sometimes never. If an abused child reaches the stage where he or she feels able to tell an adult about what they are experiencing, this represents a major breakthrough for the child and can potentially be the first step in the process of a child emerging from an abusive relationship towards a safer, better life.

If such a disclosure was made to a CWO or other club member then this may well indicate that the child felt able to turn to that person when they most needed support.

Therefore, perhaps counter-intuitively, disclosures of abuse to those within the club are (potentially) strong indicators of a club environment that takes child maltreatment seriously and has put appropriate processes in place.

For the individual, a disclosure of abuse, should then be characterised as a positive event and (potentially) a signal that their stance towards children is one which prioritises the child's rights and well-being.

This is obviously not without caveat as there have been many instances where those hearing disclosures have callously exploited the vulnerability of victims by abusing them again, however, it may be a point that is worthy of emphasis within training courses and literature.

### **MINIMISING OR DILUTING NEED FOR SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION POLICY**

The data also revealed that further work is required in relation to how RFL members approach safeguarding and how they promote it within their club:

Do you speak to your players about child protection and safeguarding procedures?

Club Coach: Not very often but I do. I just feel that maybe once at the beginning of the season ... but I tend not to keep going back to it. Because I don't want to unnerve anybody, just keep referring to it, making them feel like there is an issue. If you keep going back to something you make people continually think about it. And I think maybe once at the beginning of the season, then crack on with the season. People know it's there and you don't have to keep worrying people over it.

The notion that raising safeguarding will worry people seems to be underpinned by a particularly narrow construction of safeguarding and child protection, perhaps illustrated within the following extract:

Club Coach: Well, Child Protection is against, I suppose, perverts. That's child protection to me ... and against nasty people. So they do need protecting against that.

Within this extract, the notion of safeguarding and child protection is confined to the serial child sex abuser/predator or paedophile ('pervert') seeking entry into sport from the outside. Safeguarding policies and procedures, then, may be constructed as means of keeping bad, 'nasty', people out of sport. This can create an outward-facing environment where the danger is always beyond the borders of the club and the current culture within the club goes unquestioned. Thus, safeguarding and child protection is reduced to an outward-facing focus on 'stranger danger'.

This position is not justified by survey evidence and many cases from within sport which demonstrate that children are abused most frequently by people they know (and often trust). In such circumstances there also seems to be a risk that the wider perspective of safeguarding is narrowed to a simplistic protectionist approach aligned only with sexual abuse at the expense of other forms of abuse and maltreatment.

In other cases, coaches seemed unwilling to raise welfare and safeguarding issues with their players for fear of 'leading' them on:

Have you communicated with the players with regards to welfare and abuse and Safeguarding and Child Protection, have you ever spoken to them as a group?

Club Coach: I would say on those specific issues no - 'cause I think you'd be leading, you'd be leading people to try and get answers that you wanted and that'd be wrong, I'd want them to come to us.

Okay but have you sort of talked to them about it and made them understand sort of what they need to do, if anything happens to them, for example?

Yeah, yeah, I would, I would hope the players feel confident to come and talk to the Coaches if they feel there's

issues they wanna discuss. I would hope that they know that they can talk to us and if there is something then you would explain the procedure to them. I'd expect the older kids to be able to read what's there, understand the rules of the Club that they're signing up to, be able to talk to us about what they need to - I would hope so yes, in that context. The younger players - eight to ten year olds - I don't know is my honest answer.

Club Coach: I can't see the point in drawing children, well, players' attention to it if there's no need to. Um, if there was a problem, they would, they would tell us about it, you know. But if, if it's not there then, you know, why mention it sort of thing? Because sometimes you do more harm than good. It's like bullying ... it's just a word that's bandied about. So the more you draw people's attention to it all, you know - it's just being subtle about it really.

Clearly there are some troubling aspects to the comments of these club coaches. As well as equating safeguarding solely with abuse, these coaches perceived that raising awareness of safeguarding and child protection may be doing 'more harm than good', presumably because they believe that educating children about abuse will encourage them to make false allegations. Such misconceptions within sports coaching have been documented since the early 1990s (e.g. BBC TV, 1993) but it is concerning that such ideas persist.

These coaches seem content that children would feel sufficiently confident and comfortable - and aware of club policies - to talk to them about welfare issues, despite the fact that they are unwilling to raise it with the children. The idea that discussing safeguarding with children is a risky activity, inclined to

incite them to false allegations, is worrying. It flies in the face of established knowledge and best practice and illustrates the continued need for, and importance of, effective training. Such statements construct safeguarding and child protection as something dangerous, to be avoided, hushed up and kept quiet. It is beyond the scope of this project to ascertain how prevalent such ideas are, but it would be foolish to think they are merely isolated cases. Indeed, such ideas were also evident within earlier research in rugby league where child protection issues were relegated to 'AOB' agenda items (Hartill & Prescott, 2007). Further research is required to explore this issue in detail.

This also raises the important issue of the extent to which children and young people's voices are valued within the spaces they occupy in rugby league, and the way adults communicate with them about SCP.

## **COMMUNICATION AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS**

Others noted different reasons for their lack of willingness to take responsibility for speaking to children about safeguarding issues:

On communicating with children, do you talk to your team or your teams about Child Protection?

Club Coach: No, no not really. See I coach under-10s. We have the chat at the beginning of the season to the parents, and hopefully then - it goes back to the parent's responsibility to take it to their kids. You don't know their situation at home or anything like that so if them parents want them kids to know about it, you know, at the end of the day we're only there as coaches. And as a Club, it's what the parents want to drill into their kids ... we're not responsible for their kids.

In this extract the coach appears to be equating safeguarding with sex education, which presumably derives from a view that child protection is about preventing child sexual abuse and keeping paedophiles out of sport/rugby league. In other cases, the time and workload involved in speaking to children about welfare issues was used to explain the lack of active engagement:

Do you explain your role to the parents and the children at the Club?

CWO: No, other than the fact that they know there's a Welfare Officer because that's detailed on the website and in the programmes ... we don't really push the issue, uh, at all. Just that the information is out there if they want it.

*Are there reasons why you don't sort of talk to the children about Child Protection and Safeguarding?*

Well, for a volunteer, it would be a lot of conversations with a lot of different kids, obviously. So I mean, we've fifteen teams, so twenty kids per team is nearly three hundred players and to have a meaningful conversation with three hundred people is going to be quite time consuming, isn't it?

In this extract, the burden of the CWO role is apparent and this should not be dismissed lightly. However, other CWOs have clearly found ways of managing the scale of the work involved in a more efficient manner (e.g. group meetings).

Is there any facility for children to be part of any decision-making process, *so whereby, they have a say in what's going on within their coaching sessions or anything like that?*

Club Coach: I don't think there was any formal way that they could do that. I don't think it was something that was in place. But I think that the coaches are quite approachable ... and

I'm sure that, you know, that they could get their point of view across. But probably some young children wouldn't go for that option because it's quite hard to sort of voice your opinion to your coach in that way, I guess.

This coach does appear to reflect on and acknowledge the inadequacy of not making suitable and appropriate provision for children to be able to raise their concerns with club representatives. If the rugby league community is going to be able to demonstrate that the rights of children are embedded within its culture and practices, as well as its policies, then the communication to children about welfare-related issues must be a standard aspect of clubs' practices.

Providing accurate and appropriate information to children about safeguarding and welfare issues (and their rights more broadly) and establishing appropriate means by which they can voice their opinions and by which those opinions are taken seriously, would indicate an environment which is underpinned by a children's rights agenda; an environment which prioritises the best interests of the child; and an environment which is proactive in relation to children's welfare.

The CWO role, in particular, must be understood as a positive and central aspect of the provision of rugby league, rather than being conceived as an emergency service - there if the worst happens but otherwise superfluous to normal business. Child welfare and safeguarding should not only be something that is pushed but something that is an entirely usual, unremarkable dimension of the fabric of a club. Therefore, children's right to be informed about crucial issues which affect them, and to participate in decisions that affect them, including child protection issues, clearly indicates a club environment that is proactive in relation to safeguarding and child welfare. However, a welfare officer that

doesn't - as the participant in the extract above notes - "really push the issue" or a coach that sees his role as "only there to coach" is a strong indicator of an environment that doesn't prioritise the welfare of the children for whom it is regularly responsible and upon whose patronage it depends. The issue of treating the CWO role as an 'emergency service' was also mentioned by others:

And what about parents, do you talk to them about Safeguarding at all?

Club Coach: Not specifically ... I don't, I don't think we've really ever had the need to. You know, most of the kids come and it's never something that really comes up. I don't think you talk about it for the sake of talking about it.

In this extract, safeguarding is again conceived of as something that would only be spoken about if an issue was raised, in other words, if an incident or disclosure of child maltreatment occurred. Thus, safeguarding is reduced to its child protection dimension; a mechanism for dealing reactively with an emergency or crisis rather than for proactive action. This view of safeguarding is also illustrated in the following extracts where policy is constructed as something to be called on only when needed:

*And Whistleblowing? Do you have ...*

CWO: We use the RFL Whistleblowing Policy, but Whistleblowing was not actually, I wouldn't say, as such, needed. But it's there ... It's there to be used if ...

So what impact do you think the Safeguarding Policy has had on your Club?

CWO: I wouldn't say an impact as such, because we haven't really, actually needed it, but I think it's good knowing that it's there should you need it.

*Do you know if your Club's got a Safeguarding policy?*

Club Coach: Yeah, we have.

And are you familiar with that?

Er, I am when I need to be, yeah.

So when was the last time that you sort of familiarised yourself with it?

Er, probably eighteen months ago.

## MISPLACED CONFIDENCE

Some participants expressed what might be considered an over-reliance or misplaced confidence in the 'goodness' of rugby league. That is, in the ability of their sport, as well as the 'good' nature of their sport and their club (and the presence of policies), to ensure that children were not harmed and that if they were that it would be effectively handled by their members:

Do you think that child maltreatment is a problem in sport and specifically in Rugby League?

Club Coach: Er no, in sports in general I don't know because obviously I'm not involved in any other sports, but I think in Rugby League I don't think it is at all, I think it's well managed and I think it's such a good, friendly sport that everything seems to be good.

Club Coach: Yeah, I could probably do with reading [safeguarding policy] up on the fine print every now and again but I think as a father you're sort of just, you're there anyway with your own kid aren't you? Basically what I do for my own kids is what I do for the others, do you know what I mean? So I think, as a father, you have sort of an idea as where you're starting from anyway.

Do you think child maltreatment is a problem in sport?

CWO: No, I think with the policies and procedures that are in place ... there's enough checks and balances to deter people from, you know, if they're looking around, and say, wanting to, to sort of, you know, cause issues or get involved in sport for the wrong reasons, I think there's enough there to stop them.

Club Coach: There's always so many volunteers that are involved that people are generally not coaching on their own. There's always other people there, there's always other sessions on. So that, you know, that means that you're not in that situation where you've got one coach that could be, you know, doing anything that is inappropriate, because there are always other people around.

And do you think that the Safeguarding policy at the Club has had an impact at all with sort of your adult members and also the other coaches?

Club Coach: Um, honestly I don't think it has but I only say that because we are a club that has very good morals. We are very up-to-date and very modern in our way of thinking and coaching. There has never been any issue with any child feeling very uncomfortable around the adult. We've never had that ... because we're just, we're just such a very well-run club and we know how things should be done so there's been no need for anyone to change the way they think because they already know that's not the way to do things.

In, terms of going to away-games, is there anything in place with regards to having children in your car and are there any policies or anything that the Club enforces with regards to that?

Club Coach: I wouldn't say that there's any policies that we enforce, but obviously as coaches we're well aware. To be quite honest ... the majority of kids - all the family are friends and that ... you know, they're all trusted.

Do you know of resources that are available from the Rugby League in relation to Safeguarding and Child Protection? Do you know of any of the names of the policies that are out there at the moment?

Club Coach: Er off the top of my head, I haven't got a clue, no. No. What impact has the Safeguarding policy had on the Club?

Er, not a great deal really because we, er, we was all, we've always been a very forward thinking and, um, protective Club if you like. So a lot of the stuff that, that, you know, that's in the policy we carried out as standard anyway. So the policy hasn't really - when we, you know introduced, er, a new policy and it hasn't really altered the way that we work because we worked in the, in the safe and correct manner in the first place.

Have you had any training in relation to Child Protection and Safeguarding? Nah. No, I haven't.

*You haven't, no.*

No. Er, no. We've, we've never done any major, I haven't done - there's been courses on, er, unfortunately I've, I've been, I've not been present on, on the days that the courses have been run.

A strong belief in the environment that one is heavily invested in is not uncommon, and is an important feature of voluntary work. However, given established knowledge about past cases of abuse in organisational settings (including sport), the sentiments raised here (especially in the final extract where there is clearly no

underpinning knowledge of RFL policies or training) is cause for concern and illustrates the importance of safeguarding and child protection training for sports organisations. It also illustrates the extent to which the RFL relies on its members to engage with the training and information resources that it provides.

### **RESISTANCE TO OR LACK OF ENGAGEMENT WITH RFL POLICIES AND MECHANISMS**

Some participants made comments that seem to suggest a resistance to the safeguarding message or a reluctance to fully endorse aspects that seemed inconvenient or 'over-the-top':

Community Coach: ... a lot of it personally I think is a bit over the top, but that's how things are at the moment. But apart from that it just makes you aware of all the procedures that you have to do so you don't get caught on stuff as such.

Club Coach: ... it's like taking them to games. You're not allowed to drive by yourself, you know, I've always taken kids and so has other coach. But now because of Safeguarding and things like that, you've got to have another parent in your car. Well sometimes it means that a lad can't even get to a game because their parents aren't dedicated to take him - and if you can't sit in another person's car then they can't get to a game.

Others appeared not to have undergone relevant training or had not engaged with RFL policies or important supporting resources provided by the RFL:

Have you received any particular training, been on any courses?

CWO: No ... not yet.

Have you undergone any training in relation to Child Protection or Safeguarding?

Community Coach: No, no I haven't no.

Do you use any Safeguarding resources at all?

Community Coach: Er, no, not personally, no. I mean I just - there's always like posters and what have you up on noticeboards around Club and what have you, so....

Have you come across the RFL's policy on Safeguarding?

I have heard of it, yeah, but I haven't really - read through it, to be honest.

And is it [safeguarding policy] something that you refer to often?

Community Coach: It's not, no ... I suppose once you've started and you're doing the right practices, I suppose you just think that you're carrying on doing the right practices.

If there was an issue, do you know the names of the people that you need to speak to?

Community Coach: Not off the top of my head but obviously there's access to, to the [RFL] website where there's people you can get in touch with.

How about the RFL Safeguarding team - do you know the people to contact?

Community Coach: Hand on heart I probably wouldn't, no. I'd probably speak to my Management at the Club or the Service Area Coordinator ... Probably speak to one of those.

The Coaches Code of Conduct - have you ever come across it?

Community Coach: I probably did it on my Level Two but no I definitely couldn't recite it for you. But I'd assume it was what I've been taught throughout being a Coach and I'd say I definitely follow the correct practices yeah.

In relation to the Respect Code of Conduct, do you discuss the Respect policy with your Clubs?

Community Coach: Not really. Because of the amount of contact time, we don't really get the opportunity to do much other than the actual physical playing the game. But the Service Area Management ... tend to cover everything. So I would guess that the Respect is something that they cover in their meetings.

CWO: If you asked me what Respect stood for - I've forgot ...

Some adults may be unwilling to challenge or confront instances of poor practice and resort to justifying behaviour that contravenes safeguarding principles by setting a low bar for children's experiences in rugby league:

Club Coach: Sometimes you see how a coach might, like, speak to his young children and think, 'he's being a bit harsh there'. Like if he was being a bit, sort of, shouty and stuff like that, and you think 'that's not necessary', like, 'chill with it'. But I think that's just his personal style and I don't think that it really puts the child - it maybe doesn't keep them as happy as they might be - but I don't think it puts them in any danger, you know?

The following coach/CWO seemed to equate the size of a club to the extent to which safeguarding and child protection is an 'issue':

Club Coach: Because we've not got many junior teams - well we've only got one at the moment ... so it's never really been a big issue, so I've just done it [CWO role].

The notion that child welfare is not a "big issue" because there are only, say 15-20 children at a club, represents considerable ignorance around SCP issues and clearly does not treat child welfare with the seriousness it deserves. Such perspectives are often based on a lack of broader knowledge of safeguarding processes, structures and sources of support:

What about local safeguarding children boards, do you have any contact?

CWO: I couldn't tell you who they even are to be honest.

Are you familiar with the Child Protection in Sport Unit?

Community Coach: Er, is that with the RFL?

*It's the NSPCC.*

No, I'm not, no.

In terms of the actual sources, do you kind of consult any particular sources? *I'm thinking of things like the Child Protection in Sport Unit?*

Club Coach: I don't, I've never really heard of them to be honest, I've heard of them but never really used them.

Some participants made statements that appear to oppose the need for safeguarding policies and procedures:

Community Coach: You'll start to lose people. They're already taking up a big time commitment in the first place, to be involved with the Club. If you're adding things on top of that, you end up losing people ... I do think something needs to be done, otherwise people are just going to be put off by

the fact that they've got to fill out all these - everything safeguarding ...

Others framed their views on SCP in relation to broader perspectives on contemporary society and young people:

Club Coach: I don't think they're [children] frightened of anybody anymore. I mean, when I were a player ... I mean some of them now, they just, you know, they've no respect, no proper respect. There's no, there's no should I say, er, they're not frightened of the police now are they? And they know that people can't grab hold of them, so they're a lot more challenging now, some of the kids. They want to push you to that reaction.

CWO: For me, it's getting society back to a, a scenario where, where it can be trusted and it operates functionally, not dysfunctionally. At the end of the day, they're there for playing rugby and that's top and bottom, but a lot of people sort of tend to delve deeper and question things that perhaps don't need questioning.

These participants seems to be resistant to the safeguarding agenda and would prefer a return to a previous era where rugby wasn't 'interfered' with and children were sufficiently "frightened" of adults in positions of authority. However, as the RFL's safeguarding policy notes, "Every adult has a moral and statutory duty for the care, custody and control of any child under the age of 18 under their supervision" (RFL, 2008, p. 7).

Indeed, the term 'safeguarding' as it is understood in England foregrounds children's rights over the rights of adults in order to maximize children's developmental opportunities and overall health and wellbeing (Parton 2010). So while any organisational

change will inevitably come up against elements of resistance, and while there may be concerns amongst some about increased regulation and more emphasis on appropriate standards of behaviour, such changes are entirely appropriate when based on improving outcomes for children, regardless of the impact they have on the adults around them.

The concerns of these adults should, of course, be taken seriously and, where possible, managed effectively, but the rights and wellbeing of children should be prioritised and nay-sayers should bear in mind the reasons why safeguarding and child protection initiatives are necessary in sport, as the RFL's safeguarding policy points out: "The reality is that abuse, not only sexual abuse but physical and emotional abuse, as well as bullying, does take place in sport although rarely; and in some cases coaches and other trusted adults in sport have been convicted" (RFL, 2008, p. 6).

### **CONCEPTUAL SEPARATION OF SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION AND ABDICATION OF RESPONSIBILITY**

In some cases, participants attempted to distance themselves from their responsibility for safeguarding and child protection:

Club Coach: I think I'm more confident because I know I've got the support because obviously the child protection's always changing - obviously as a coach you're trying to keep up with the up to date of what rugby skills are coming, so I think me personally, if I didn't have the Child Support Officers at the club knowing that they were watching what was going on and watching my back then - I think it's mainly coaching for me.

This club coach appears to be rejecting his responsibility for SCP by emphasising that his

area, “as a coach”, is “rugby skills”, rather than the “ever changing” area of “the child protection”; in other words, an area that is impossible to keep up with and thus an unmanageable burden. In addition, he interprets SCP as something that poses a risk to him with the CWOs as individuals who can protect him from this risk because they “watch [his] back”. In other words, he designates a clear separation between coaching and safeguarding/child protection where one identity – that of coach – excludes the safeguarding and child protection role.

The responsibility for safeguarding is, then, diluted or even abdicated. This is also evident in the following extracts:

Community Coach: Err safeguarding?  
Erm it’s, it’s, it’s more of, more of what err what [name] does, our Community Manager ... He’s more involved in that and he’s our Child Welfare Officer.

Community Coach: The role that I’ve been doing hasn’t needed me to go on that kind of course if you know what I mean? That information’s passed on like a pyramid to all the Coaches and so the role I’ve taken on - it’s not really been a necessity.

Community Coach: Realistically we don’t talk to them about Safeguarding unless the school’s asked for it, because it’s cutting time into what else we’re trying to do.

Club Coach: I mean at the end of the day that’s down to your Child Protection Officer ... like I say the coaches only get passed on what needs to be passed on because you can’t take every role on board. You know, your main job as a coach is to coach them kids ...

Is it a part of your role to talk about welfare issues with young players?

Community Coach: No.

*It’s not and why not?*

Because the limited time that we have as coaches, coaching the game, it’s like, into the school, coach them and we’re out of the school almost straight away.

Is it part of your role as a Community Coach to talk to children about welfare issues?

Community Coach: It’s not my role, no.

Okay and why would you say that?

There’s people who are in that role specifically, Welfare Officers, those sort of people who it’s their role to do it.

Community Coach: I could probably have an inkling about things [child protection issues] but I can’t really delve into anything ... I just think it’s kind of more down to the School than to me, I don’t know really how much further I should take it or, or ... I think it’s more down to the School’s err situation, for them to - I don’t know the kid, I don’t know the kid’s parents, I don’t know where he lives, I don’t know anything, whereas the School will have more things ... I don’t think I should try and put the kid on the spot or anything like that.

The following extract illustrates a number of themes already highlighted in this analysis including the notion that SCP is the responsibility of others:

CWO: I go on courses to err tick the boxes ... erm they [RFL] wanted to know, they wanted a name in every Club – ‘who’s the Child Welfare Officer?’ So I put my name forward as

a temporary measure and it's been more or less permanent.

How have you communicated your role to the children?

I don't actually go talk to any of the kids personally. All the Coaches let them know, you know, who, the Welfare Officer is and everybody - you know who the Secretaries are.

Have you come across the Under 11s and Under 18s leaflets by the RFL in relation to Safeguarding, abuse, bullying and stuff?

Err well only what we've printed off ourselves ...

*It's available on the [RFL] website ... two separate leaflets, just sort of advice ... an information booklet.*

Yeah well, 'owt like that the Secretary would probably know more about because with 'Gold Mark' erm ... so anything to do with that sort of stuff the Secretary normally deals with it ...

We touched upon the RFL's Safeguarding policy - how often do you think you've referred to the policy itself?

It's quite a while since I've read it or referred back to it - if something happens that's when we go to it. You know so it's, unless it's something, something's happening, we wouldn't go to it regular.

What are the particular sections that you'd look at then if there was an issue?

Oh it was that long ago since I've looked at it, without having it in front of me, I wouldn't, I wouldn't know where, where you know what parts I'd want to be looking at.

Would you be able to maybe provide some key overall messages from it?

Err it's quite a while since I've read it yeah.

an administrative burden and instrument through which to attain Club Mark (Gold), rather than a means by which child welfare can be enhanced.

Certainly a CWO that doesn't talk to children indicates a clear need for appropriate training and/or a more careful recruitment process. The following extract also illustrates a rather instrumentalist approach to the SCP – a means to an end – rather than acceptance that it is a worthwhile or important aspect of rugby league in and of itself:

So does your Club have a Child Protection and Safeguarding policy?  
Club Coach: Er, yeah, I think we do, yeah. Yeah.

Are you familiar with it at all?

Er, no, I'm not familiar with it but we do have, I think we, yeah, we should have one. You need it anyway for getting your, your Clubmark.

But have you ever read through your own policy?

Um, once I think.

Okay and is that available on your website at all?

It might be yeah. Well, it should be, yeah.

That these comments come from a CWO perhaps raises particular concerns about the extent to which some CWOs view their role as

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research has applied the Activation States system, which is designed to generate a picture of the extent to which a group or community is ‘activated’ towards the principles of a policy aimed at cultural/organisational change – in this case safeguarding and child protection policy in rugby league.

The usefulness of this method, the research data generated, and the outputs which emerge from it, will largely be determined by the extent to which the RFL and the wider rugby league community attach value to the findings and the way in which this data informs future learning, policy and practice.

The overall state allocated is ‘Active’ and this seems to reflect the resources the RFL has committed to ‘safeguarding and child protection’ over the past decade, in particular the dedicated lead officer role and safeguarding team.

However, despite the commitment of those within and without the RFL who have responsibility for delivering and implementing the RFL’s policy, it is also evident that the resources dedicated to SCP will need to be bolstered if the sport is to continue to develop in this area.

The following recommendations are designed to provide guidance for future strategic direction and investment. Nine themes have been identified:

1. Communication with children and young people;
2. Children’s rights;
3. The Club Welfare Officer role;
4. RFL safeguarding policy and related resources;
5. Separation (and isolation) of safeguarding and child protection;
6. Anxiety and perceived vulnerability;

7. Handling disclosures of abuse;
8. Development of an evidence-based bespoke education resource; and
9. Continuous Learning.

These themes emerge from the findings and will be briefly discussed. Recommendations are made within each area.

### **COMMUNICATION WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

There are examples within rugby league of excellent practice in relation to communicating with and listening to children. However, the RFL Safeguarding Policy (2008: 13) states that clubs must ensure they have: ‘a forum for children to express their views’. The data from this study demonstrates that this is not happening consistently or in a structured fashion; if rugby league is to be a truly child-centred sport, communication to children about safeguarding and welfare-related issues should become a standard aspect of clubs’ practices and central to the CWO role.

#### **Recommendations:**

- a) Develop specific training and resources on communicating with children on safeguarding and welfare-related issues and build this in to all standard rugby league training packages/qualifications
- b) Establish RFL youth ambassadors to represent children and young people’s voices and ensure they are sufficiently represented and supported within the RFL decision-making processes
- c) Communicate clearly that the RFL values the participation of children in the running of rugby league and encourage clubs and affiliated organisations to demonstrate this in their local context

### ***CHILDREN'S RIGHTS***

There is clear evidence of an appreciation for children's rights within rugby league, however, children's rights and underpinning principles must be further embedded across the RFL and the broader rugby league community, especially within coach education and practice.

#### **Recommendations:**

- d) Ensure that key principles of children's rights are clearly, consistently and appropriately communicated to all rugby league stakeholder groups, both explicitly and implicitly, through the range of materials produced by the RFL, especially within coach education
- e) Ensure that all CWOs and RFL representatives have sufficient access to resources which communicate the implications of children's rights for their role and other roles within RL

### **THE COMMUNITY COACH ROLE**

There is evidence that the Community Coach group are less engaged with Safeguarding and Child Protection than the local club community. In particular, it appears that this group does not place a high value on this area of rugby league. However, this is an influential (and relatively small) group which clearly performs a 'role model' function for the whole RL community.

#### **Recommendation:**

- f) Ensure that all Community Coaches have completed the required training and are sufficiently aware of the safeguarding policy and related resources and are able to act as proactive advocates for safeguarding within the community game

### **THE CLUB WELFARE OFFICER ROLE**

The CWO role is clearly important to the RFL and to members of the RFL community, but there is evidence to suggest that the role is not

universally valued. The fundamental importance of this role to children's welfare, as well as the wider community, can be more effectively communicated through the whole of rugby league.

#### **Recommendations:**

- g) Consider further methods to enhance the role of RFL CWO and embed this identity within the game
- h) Consider a wider range of means by which to support the RFL CWO community

### **RFL SAFEGUARDING POLICY AND RELATED RESOURCES**

Whilst there is a great deal of evidence that key stakeholders are aware of, value, and use the RFL safeguarding policy and related resources (e.g. the RFL Whistleblowing Policy, the RESPECT code of conduct), there is also considerable evidence that some lack awareness of and engagement with these policies and resources.

#### **Recommendation:**

- i) The RFL should further encourage members to build RFL resources into their standard club processes and encourage parents and children to see such resources as an important feature of a high-quality and safe club environment

### **SEPARATION (AND ISOLATION) OF SAFEGUARDING AND CHILD PROTECTION**

There is evidence to suggest that some coaches see safeguarding and child protection as the responsibility of designated others with specialist knowledge and this raises the concern that some don't see children's welfare as a fundamental responsibility. A consequence of this is that the SCP area (and those with SCP responsibilities) may be isolated and/or unsupported.

**Recommendation:**

- j) RFL training and education should identify the separation of safeguarding and child protection from mainstream roles (coaching, administrating) as poor practice and provide further direction to coaches/volunteers at all levels to see safeguarding as a fundamental foundation of their practice rather than as an ‘add-on’.

**ANXIETY AND PERCEIVED VULNERABILITY**

There is evidence that some coaches continue to feel threatened by safeguarding and child protection and it is likely that such fears will mitigate against effective implementation (embedding) of safeguarding policies and procedures. It is also likely that such anxieties are based around an over-emphasis on sexual abuse and that, as a result, other forms of abuse and maltreatment are ignored or downplayed (particularly emotional abuse).

**Recommendations:**

- k) Coach education/training should be developed to explicitly address coaches’ anxieties and perceived vulnerability through evidence-based discussion of allegations (and prevalence) of abuse in sport
- l) Education/training should be underpinned by research evidence on abuse in sport and provide clear instruction on the different forms of abuse

**HANDLING DISCLOSURES OF ABUSE**

There is some evidence to suggest that some key stakeholders may be anxious or fearful of disclosures about harm to children (particularly in relation to sexual abuse). However, disclosures of abuse are more likely to indicate a club which values children and an environment where they feel safe enough to discuss very personal and troubling issues.

Therefore, disclosures of abuse (and the appropriate management of them) may well be an indicator (amongst others) of a club which is fulfilling a broad community agenda. This role should be recognised.

**Recommendations:**

- m) Education/training should promote the message that disclosures of abuse, whilst difficult, should not be viewed as negative events but instead framed as indicators that the rugby league community sees children’s rights and their welfare as a priority
- n) Clubs which are fulfilling a broad community role should be recognised formally by the RFL and the promotion of children’s rights should be central to this recognition

**DEVELOPMENT OF AN EVIDENCE-BASED, BESPOKE RL EDUCATION RESOURCE**

The data gathered for this research study (as well as previous studies) provides the opportunity to promote reflection and evidence-based learning within the rugby league community through the development of a bespoke education/training resource for rugby league.

**Recommendations:**

- o) The RFL should establish a programme of events (e.g. focus-groups, seminars) over a defined period (e.g. 24 months) to ensure that key messages from the research are communicated to all stakeholders, including children and young people
- p) Utilise these events to engage stakeholder groups in further reflection on the data in order to further refine training and other support resources

- q) Reinforce education/training by using the research data to inform a bespoke package for rugby league
- r) Evaluate the impact of the revised package

### **CONTINUOUS LEARNING**

The Rugby Football League now has the most established programme of evaluation research into child welfare, safeguarding and child protection of any sport context, nationally and internationally.

To ensure that a model of continuous learning and development is embedded within the rugby league community, monitoring and evaluation is essential.

#### **Recommendation:**

- s) Establish and embed a longitudinal programme of evaluation research within the community game which can continuously inform and underpin the RFLs strategy, activities and arrangements in relation to children and young people.

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## LIST OF APPENDICES

- A: Recommendations from: Hartill, M. & Prescott, P. (2002) An evaluation of BARLA's child protection policy implementation (pilot study). Edge Hill College of Higher Education.
- B: The 'Activation States' model developed and used by Brackenridge (2002) in research for the English Football Association.
- C: The CPSU (2012) Call to Action Legacy Model (taken from: CPSU (2012) *Sport's Safeguarding Children and Young People Action Plan 2012 – 2013*).
- D: Example Information and Consent Form
- E: Example Interview Guide
- F: Bespoke coding grid for Activation States in Safeguarding and Child Protection in Rugby League (adapted from Brackenridge, 2002).

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

Recommendations from: Hartill & Prescott (2002) An evaluation of BARLA's child protection policy implementation (pilot study). Edge Hill College of Higher Education.

1. There is a need for BARLA to establish a formal and coherent evaluation procedure for the implementation of the child protection policy.
2. There is a need for BARLA to develop a practice framework in order to clarify the process of policy implementation.
3. There is a need for a re-assessment of the training requirement in the context of the three strands of concern established by the research findings:
  - issues of seriousness
  - the need for a child-centred perspective
  - the identified problems with procedure and process
4. BARLA needs to establish clear mechanisms for the evaluation of the stated aims and purpose of the child protection policy. This will require the clarification of meaning and the measurement of:
  - 'awareness raising' training
  - inter-agency collaboration
  - 'safe environments'
  - partnership with parents
5. The child protection policy implementation and training programme requires a more mature funding response. Funding mechanisms need to be identified, focused and specifically ring-fenced for child protection.
6. Implementation of the national policy requires a detailed, short-, medium- and long-termed evaluation.
7. The evaluation of the implementation of the national policy should be appropriately funded.

**APPENDIX B**

The ‘Activation States’ model developed and used by Brackenridge (2002) in research for the English Football Association.

‘Activation states’ with regard to child protection in football © 2002

State ->	INACTIVE	REACTIVE	ACTIVE	PROACTIVE	OPPOSED
Voices/ discourses [What people <u>say</u> about CP in football]	Don't know what you're talking about. Nothing to do with me. Never heard of it. What do you mean?	Well, OK if I have to. I'd rather not get involved. I suppose it has to be done. I'm not sure if I know enough. What if I do something wrong?	This is important. We all share this responsibility. It's something that must be done.	We won't get it right first time. There is always more to learn. We need to keep this under review. We need to learn from others.	Overt/manifest/obvious: This is complete waste of time/money. You'll never stop those paedophiles. Abuse just doesn't happen here. Covert/latent/hidden: Yes, of course it matters ...
Knowledge & experience [What people <u>know</u> through experience – their awareness, interest or understanding]	No knowledge No awareness No experience No interest No motivation	Some limited knowledge Some awareness Some experience Some interest	Aware of roles and responsibilities Knowledge appropriate for role Knowledge of where to seek advice and help	Knowledge beyond the minimum Experience of handling referrals/cases Knowledge of CP systems outside sport	Overt/manifest/obvious: Reports known CP failures Covert/latent/hidden: Appears knowledgeable but is actually ignorant of CP
Feelings [What people <u>feel</u> – their attitudes and emotions]	Indifferent Ignorant Unwilling In denial	Fearful, scared Frightened Timid Nervous Anxious Sceptical Reluctant	Accepting Tolerant Compliant Accommodating Willing	Confident, sure, certain Convinced Committed Positive Relaxed Reflective Evaluative	Overt/manifest/obvious: Resistance Hostile Covert/latent/hidden: Dishonest Contradictory
Action [What people <u>do</u> /have done – their achievements and behaviour]	None Resistant Bystander behaviour	Responds only after several 'pushes' Professes ignorance Asks to be anonymous	Applies knowledge Fulfils responsibilities Seeks learning & experiences Attends courses/workshops Reads literature Acts appropriately Engages actively	Keeps up to date Seeks feedback Talks about how to improve Adapts and responds Seeks wider info sources Participates in or volunteers for CP role	Overt/manifest/obvious: Actively opposes CP work Covert/latent/hidden: Own behaviour belies/ contradicts apparent commitment to CP

## APPENDIX C

The CPSU (2012) Call to Action Legacy Model (taken from: CPSU (2012) *Sport's Safeguarding Children and Young People Action Plan 2012 – 2013*).

### Call to Action Legacy



## **APPENDIX D**

### Example Information and Consent Form

**RESEARCH PROJECT ON SAFEGUARDING IN RUGBY LEAGUE**  
**with**  
**EDGE HILL UNIVERSITY & THE CHILD PROTECTION IN SPORT UNIT**

**Club Welfare Officer Information & Consent Form**

#### **What is this study about?**

This research aims to explore the implementation of safeguarding and child welfare policies and guidelines in Rugby Football League. During this project we aim to interview a range of different 'stakeholder' groups within rugby league about their views on these areas. Club welfare officers are obviously central to safeguarding in rugby league and as such their views on these issues will be very important to the study.

#### **What will the study involve?**

Researchers at Edge Hill University would like to speak to you about your views on issues related to safeguarding and child protection in rugby. This will involve a recorded telephone conversation between you and a researcher from Edge Hill. It is anticipated that this will last between 30 minutes and 1 hour, at a mutually convenient time. Where desirable, call-backs or follow-up conversations can be arranged. All conversations are completely confidential between Edge Hill and you. Conversations will be transcribed verbatim, with any and all identifying information removed. This transcript will be available to you on request.

#### **What happens after the meetings?**

Your transcript will form part of the data for analysis. A final report will be available to the Rugby Football League and, through them, available to you at the conclusion of the project (April, 2012).

If you would like further information please do contact Mike Hartill (Edge Hill University, Ormskirk) on 01695 584763/4212 or at [hartillm@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:hartillm@edgehill.ac.uk). Dr. Melanie Lang on 01695 584302 or at [langm@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:langm@edgehill.ac.uk) or Colette Eden at the RFL ([Colette.Eden@rfl.uk.com](mailto:Colette.Eden@rfl.uk.com)).

**Club Welfare Officer Consent Form:**

I, ..... confirm that I am the designated Club Welfare Officer for  
..... Rugby League Club.

I confirm I understand that:

- The principal researcher for this study is Dr. Mike Hartill of Edge Hill University and all information given will be in-confidence and held securely by him;
- My involvement in this study will not be disclosed to any third party (including the Rugby Football League), and all identifying information (e.g. names, places) will be removed during transcription;
- This study is guided by the British Sociological Association’s Statement of Ethical Practice in Research<sup>8</sup>; is approved by Edge Hill University; is supported by the Rugby Football League and the Child Protection in Sport Unit; and is subject to the legal statutes of the United Kingdom;
- I will be contacted by email or telephone to arrange a convenient and suitable time for me to participate in this study;
- I will be given the opportunity to ask any questions I may have when contacted by Edge Hill;
- There is no obligation to participate, no reward is given for participation and I can withdraw from the process at any time and/or request that the information I have given, or elements of it, be excluded from the study;
- The results of the study (i.e. final report and/or summary) will be available to me from either the RFL or Edge Hill University;
- Results of the study may be published in academic journals, press releases, industry publications, all of which may be accessible on-line.

I consent to participate in this study.      Signature:

My contact telephone number(s) is/are:

Circle as appropriate:

- I would prefer to be contacted at the following date(s) / day(s) / time(s):

**PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM BY EMAIL TO: [hartillm@edgehill.ac.uk](mailto:hartillm@edgehill.ac.uk) OR BY POST TO:**

Dr. Mike Hartill,  
Department of Sport & Physical Activity,  
Edge Hill University,  
Ormskirk,  
Lancashire,  
L39 4QP.

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.britisoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm>.

## **APPENDIX E**

### Example Interview Guide

#### **INTERVIEW GUIDE - CWOs**

##### **Introduction/Context**

Can you tell me a bit about your club? (e.g. history, no. of children's teams, Clubmark status, etc.)

How long have you been at the club? How long have you been CWO? What other roles do you fulfil at the club?

How did you acquire this role/position?

Did you have experience or knowledge that made you particularly suitable?

What is your occupation/profession/background?

What training have you undergone in relation to CP/Safeguarding?

How important do you think this role is to your club?

##### **General (policy focused)**

Does your club have a CP/Safeguarding Policy? Is this available on the web?

What do you think of the RFL's CP and Safeguarding policy?

Do you have contact with the RFL Safeguarding Team? (names?)

Has it changed your experience of RL in any way? (improved it? Negative?)

##### **Specific Knowledge on Abuse and Child Protection**

Why do you think the RFL has considered it necessary to introduce Child Protection policies within Rugby League?

As a CWO, what are your responsibilities in relation to Safeguarding?

Do you have a local authority safeguarding unit? Any contact?

Do you have a Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB)? Any contact?

Do you have a local area officer with responsibility for child protection? (Local Area Designated Officer or LADO) See Greater Manchester officers: <http://www.gmsafeguardingchildren.co.uk/contact/local-authority-designated-officer-lado/>

Are you aware of the different types of abuse children can suffer? (details?)

Have you come across any instances of abuse or neglect in your club?

Are you aware of any sport-related cases of child abuse? e.g. Paul Hickson.

##### **Recording Images & Photography**

How do you deal with photography and the recording of images of children?

How do you apply the RFL guidance on recording of images of children?

What challenges has this presented? What do you think of this guidance?

##### **Transporting Children**

Do you enforce the RFLs policy on transporting children?

How do you communicate your transport arrangements to children and parents?

What challenges/difficulties does transporting children present you with?

What do you think of the RFLs policy on transporting children?

What do your coaching staff/volunteers think about it?

Do late collections present you with any problems?

##### **Dressing Room Policy**

What is your dressing room policy? How long has this been in place?

How do you let members (and children) know about it?

How have members responded to this policy?

Has it presented any difficulties? How have you dealt with these?

### **Communicating with Children**

Do you use the RFL leaflet for U11s and U18s?

Are the children aware of your role (CWO) and how have you communicated with them about welfare and abuse issues?

Do you provide any formal mechanism/process by which children can voice their opinions?

How does your club encourage children to do this?

Can you give any examples of how things have changed or been adapted following discussions with children?

### **Responding to Abuse (see p.4-5 of leaflet):**

If you 'Witness, suspect or are told about abuse in a rugby league setting' what procedure would you follow? Details of procedure?

Any actual examples that you can outline?

What is the most serious case you have dealt with?

What are the most frequent types of concerns/referrals raised?

Are all these documented? How?

Does your club have a Disciplinary Panel? Who sits on it? How many times has it convened?

### **Whistleblowing**

Do you encourage members to raise any concerns with you? How? Examples?

Have you had any members report concerns to you?

Have you used the RFL Whistleblowing leaflet at your club?

### **RFL Safeguarding Policy, Parents and Carers Guide & RESPECT code of conduct &**

How familiar are you with the RFL Safeguarding policy?

How often do you refer to the policy? Particular sections?

What are the key overall messages from the policy for you?

Do you emphasise these messages to your club? How?

Have you had parents ask about child welfare and safeguarding procedures?

Do you encourage parents to engage with the Safeguarding policy? How?

Are your parents aware of the RFL Guide for Parents & Carers?

What impact has the Safeguarding policy had on your club? How have your members responded to CP?

- Coaching practice
- Training sessions
- Match Day – Touchline behaviour
- Club committee work – administration (e.g. Disclosure forms, CRB checks)
- Senior personnel
- Parents
- Children

Do you (and your club) abide by the RESPECT code of conduct?

How is this code implemented (put into practice) within your club?

Are you confident that your members are aware of the code and do they put it into practice?

Any examples of good practice?  
Positive impact?

Any examples of poor practice?  
Negative impact?

How do you promote the code to your adult members?

How do you promote/communicate it to your child members?

Do you come across 'jeering, taunts, or intimidation' within matches?

How do you respond to this? Examples? (verifiable?)

Do you come across children who are unwilling participants? How have you responded to this?

### **Minority Ethnic Groups**

Are there children from minority ethnic (ME) backgrounds at your club?

Are you aware of any special issues in relation to ethnicity and child protection?

Any examples of where you have had to consider ethnicity in a safeguarding issue?

What sources of support are available from the RFL on this issue? ('Tackle It')

### **Disability**

Are you aware of any particular safeguarding issues around children with disabilities?

Do you have any experience of working with children with disabilities?

Are you able to accommodate children with disabilities? Examples?

### **Conclusion**

Do you think child maltreatment is a problem in sport? In rugby league?

Do you feel as though enough is being done to ensure children's welfare in RL and to prevent maltreatment?

What are the biggest challenges you have faced whilst doing this role?

Are you satisfied that safeguarding is embedded within all areas of your club?

Are there any plans in place to further developing safeguarding at your club?

Anything else you'd like to add?

**Appendix F:** Bespoke coding grid for Activation States in Safeguarding and Child Protection in Rugby League (adapted from Brackenridge, 2002).

	<b>OPPOSED</b> Negative Conflicting Divergent Contrasting	<b>INACTIVE</b> Demonstrating no knowledge or commitment to CP	<b>REACTIVE</b> Demonstrating reluctant commitment and engagement	<b>ACTIVE</b> Demonstrating satisfactory awareness and involvement	<b>PROACTIVE</b> Demonstrating full commitment and advocacy
<b>VOICES</b>	<p>It's over the top; I don't need to attend these Safeguarding Children courses.</p> <p>I'm here to coach, not be a Welfare Officer</p> <p>They're here to play rugby, but a lot of people tend to question things that don't need questioning.</p>	<p>There's Welfare Officers, those sort of people, it's their role - it's not for me to do.</p> <p>Child protection's always changing ... you're trying to keep up to date on rugby skills, so it's mainly coaching for me.</p> <p>To have a meaningful conversation with 300 people is going to be quite time consuming, isn't it?</p>	<p>You're covering your back, in case anybody does accuse you of anything ...</p> <p>It [SCP] makes you sceptical of whether you should be coaching ... so I think it could put coaches off.</p> <p>In the society we live in - it's not really safe anymore, is it?</p>	<p>I'm a lot more aware of my role ... I feel a lot more comfortable raising concerns. So it is definitely a help.</p> <p>The kid's need a face that they know, away from the Coach.</p> <p>It's very important ... you've got to listen to the kids and look after them in the best possible manner and keep parents involved.</p>	<p>There's always more that can be done.</p> <p>The important thing is to make sure that the responsible people within each team have Safeguarding on their mind.</p> <p>Safeguarding is a preventative measure, raising awareness of the fact that children are vulnerable and have the right to be safe.</p>
<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>	<p>It doesn't seem to happen in Rugby League.</p> <p>I'm not aware of the safeguarding policy.</p>	<p>I have heard of it [RFL Safeguarding Policy] but I haven't really read it.</p> <p>I'm not familiar with it but we do have one ... you need it for getting Clubmark.</p> <p>If you asked me what Respect stood for - I've forgot.</p>	<p>I'm not as aware of them as I probably should be in all honesty.</p> <p>It's not specifically my job - if there were an issue, I would pass that on to our CWO.</p> <p>Child Protection is just making sure that they're safe and that they've got all kinds of care.</p>	<p>You don't just look for people who are being harmed physically but ... have they got the right equipment and the right diet.</p> <p>If someone discloses a child protection problem then I make sure the child is safe at that moment, then I'm expected to inform the Safeguarding people.</p>	<p>The Climbié report, the Layman report, brought in a lot of mandatory requirements around information sharing.</p> <p>My first point would be Colette at the Rugby League If it was particularly serious, the first port of call would probably be the police and also our LADO.</p>
<b>FEELINGS</b>	<p>I didn't have time to read it, I couldn't be bothered to be honest.</p> <p>Something needs to be done otherwise people are going to be put off by all this 'safeguarding'.</p> <p>I can't see the point in drawing players' attention to it. Sometimes you do more harm than good.</p>	<p>Have you needed to raise any issues with your CWO? Not really, to be honest, from seven, they've been real good kids.</p> <p>Is the safeguarding policy something that you refer to often? It's not, no ... once you've started and you're doing the right practices, you just think that you're carrying on doing the right practices.</p>	<p>It just makes you aware of all the procedures that you have to do so you don't get caught on stuff.</p> <p>I think it probably is needed, but it's just a never-ending process ... It's just a lot of added pressure.</p> <p>it may be my son - I've got me arm round him - somebody might say, 'eh, he's got his arm 'round a kid.'</p>	<p>Don't make children do something they don't want to do. There's a reason why they don't want to do it.</p> <p>There's got to be a structure where the child can report to adults; you've got to have a mechanism for dealing with that in a clear and transparent way.</p> <p>The Policy is for everybody, from the President all the way down.</p>	<p>There's got to be clear procedures for the young people</p> <p>I think for parents it's reassuring to know that people do receive Safeguarding training.</p> <p>As long as you come off the pitch smiling, that's the whole point of kids' rugby! It's not about medals. As many people as possible should be doing the safeguarding course.</p>
<b>ACTION</b>	<p>We don't discuss Child Protection with our members no.</p> <p>We don't talk to the children specifically about Safeguarding and Child Protection.</p> <p>I introduce myself as the Coach. I try to keep the CWO role quiet.</p>	<p>The leaflets are there for the kids. I don't actually talk to any of the kids personally.</p> <p>I don't discuss Child Protection, we get the Child Welfare Officers to lead on things like that.</p>	<p>We tick the boxes to make sure that we're a Club Mark Gold Club, you know, for the sake of the kids.</p> <p>Do you speak to your players about child protection and safeguarding procedures? Not very often but I do ...</p>	<p>We brief them on our policies on a one-to-one basis; we give them a Welcome Pack and we have monthly forums.</p> <p>I've done my own presentations at the coaches meetings. Take questions and answers, give them scenarios to run through.</p>	<p>I go to different training sessions each week so the kids know me especially the younger ones.</p> <p>Kids can talk to you, it's because you're using the Safeguarding stuff well.</p> <p>I like to not give them any rules, I let them find out how they can do things.</p>





Child Protection in Sport Unit  
**play sport stay safe**  
**enjoy and achieve**



**RFL**

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