



DEVON RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

Club Competitions Meeting

Minutes

Date: 21st July 2026

Venue: Newton Abbot RFC

Present: Chris Forster (Director Male Game DRFU), Liv Jenkins (RFU), Simon Farmer (Exeter Athletic), Andrew Spry (Exeter Saracens), Clinton Mill (New Cross), Ben Gatehouse (South Molton), James Rickter (Torrington), Mike Freeman (Plymouth Combination), Craig Bulley (Barnstaple), John Sloley (Barnstaple), Sean Cook (Plymstock Albion Oaks), Dave Upton (Plymstock Albion Oaks), Jerry Rice, (Honiton), Tom Churchward (Honiton), Steve Alexander (Brixham), Tim Taylor (Topsham), Mike Hawkes (Vets League), Alan Noblett (Paignton), Steve Clemens (Paignton), Graham Beer (Cullompton), Andy Forster (Competitions Team DRFU), Lee Mason (Torquay), Nick Blackhurst (Torquay), Mac Bayliss (Devonport Services), Fraz Pearson (Devonport Services), Matt Barrett (Sidmouth), Glenn Channing (Sidmouth), Shaun Bedford-Smith (Old Techs), Dave Evans (Old Techs), Paddy Dummett (Tiverton), Tom Powell (Okehampton), Jay Bullock (Totnes), Graeme Gillard (Director Governance DRFU), James Miller (North Tawton) Tim Warren (Secretary DRFU).

Actions

Explain the proposed Raeburn Shield format to clubs	Competitions Team
Confirm Level 8 second-team competition entries	Competitions Team
Ensure clubs nominate league contacts by 1 August	All Clubs
Publish final Devon Cup competition structure following consultation	Competitions Team
Await and communicate RFU guidance on first-team players	Devon RFU

representing second teams.

Meeting Notes

Devon Adult Male Playing Data

The meeting received a presentation on adult male participation across England Rugby and Devon from the RFUs Liv Jenkins (OliviaJenkins@RFU.com).

National Registration

Player registrations continue to increase nationally.

- Total registered adult players now stand at **111,406**, an increase of **2%** year-on-year.
- Male registrations increased by **1%** to **89,932**.
- Female registrations increased by **10%** to **21,574**, demonstrating continued strong growth within the women's game.

Devon Adult Male Registration

Adult male registrations within Devon have increased significantly.

- Registered players increased from **3,227** at the end of 2024/25 to **3,510**, representing growth of **8.8%**.
- The increase includes:
 - 863 new players
 - 2,381 retained players
 - 75 returning players

Match Completion Rates

Overall match completion improved to **93%**, an increase of **4%** compared to the previous season.

Although several leagues achieved excellent completion rates, home walkovers continue to present the greatest challenge within some county competitions.

Merit League

The Competitions Team have agreed that the Devon Merit League will be renamed the **Paul Harris League** in recognition of Paul's longstanding commitment to Merit Rugby.

Crediton RFC has kindly agreed to provide a new trophy for the competition winners.

David Butt Memorial Final

It was confirmed that the David Butt Memorial Final will be hosted by Barnstaple RFC as part of the club's 150th anniversary celebrations.

The venue was considered particularly appropriate given David Butt's longstanding association with Barnstaple RFC.

Counties Leagues

Members were reminded that all clubs must nominate a League Contact by **1 August**.

Failure to provide a nominated person to the relevant League Secretary will result in a financial penalty. All league correspondence will be issued to the nominated contact.

League Secretaries remain:

- Steve Atkins (Counties 2)
- Phil Speary (Counties 3)

RFU Playing Regulations

An update was received regarding discussions between the South West Regional Organising Committee and the RFU concerning regulations governing first-team players representing second teams in Counties competitions.

The proposed changes aim to:

- maintain the integrity of league competitions;
- provide an appropriate route for players returning from injury; and
- allow players returning from loss of form to re-enter competitive rugby through second-team rugby where appropriate.

Further guidance is awaited from the RFU.

Transition Funding

There is funding within the Male game to support transition from Colts to Senior rugby. If clubs are interesting in running an event to support this transition point please let Chris know.

Devon Cup Competitions

Proposed Devon Cup Structure (2026/27)

The meeting discussed a revised competition format.

The proposal would see:

- Senior Cup (Level 5)
- Senior Shield (Level 6)
- Intermediate Cup (Level 7)

- Intermediate Shield (Level 8) using the **Raeburn Shield** format (see below)
- Junior Cup (Level 9) as a county-wide knockout competition.

Second teams at Level 8 will be asked whether they wish to enter the Intermediate Shield or participate in a separate second-team knockout competition.

Raeburn Shield Format

The Raeburn Shield is based on a simple "challenge" format. The current holder of the Shield defends it in every fixture they play. If they win or draw, they retain the Shield. If they lose, the team that defeats them becomes the new holder and defends it in their next fixture. This creates a continuous competition throughout the season, with the Shield changing hands whenever the holder is beaten. The format is inspired by the historic Raeburn Shield concept used in international rugby, where the title passes from team to team in the same way as a boxing championship belt.

Continuing the Conversation

We want to keep this conversation between clubs and Devon RFU going over the next few months and will be arranging follow-up meetings.

We will continue to explore the topic of second teams in the leagues to ensure fair games and balance with needs of our higher league clubs to be successful. Another topic of discussion will be Play-offs in Counties 2 in future seasons.

Note Post Meeting

Second Teams playing at level 8 will not enter the Intermediate Shield but create a league within the league as with other competitions.

Tim Warren, July 2026