



Rachael Burford
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Att: Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
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United Kingdom

An open letter to the Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE from Girls Rugby Club founder Rachael Burford and Girls Rugby Club Advisory Board members – on behalf of the female rugby community

Next year girls and women from across the world will have their eyes fixed on New Zealand as their heroes take the pitch for the Rugby World Cup – the ninth global event for women of its kind. The spectacle follows closely behind the Tokyo Olympics where women's rugby sevens players from 12 countries, including Great Britain, headed to Japan with gold in their sights. This marks a time in history where young girls look up to remarkable female athletes as role models, rather than having posters of just sportsmen on their walls.

It is even more historic given the England Red Roses will go into the World Cup chasing their third title, as one of a growing number of fully-professional, contracted female rugby players, including the New Zealand Black Ferns and Black Fern Sevens teams. Furthermore, the RFU has agreed to double the salary cap to £120,000 per team for players in the Premier 15s domestic competition next season.

The tide is changing, with growing opportunities for women to make a career in sport and we believe it's time our schools follow suit. But it's far more important than winning world titles and making money.

We have a responsibility to see that equality extends beyond the classroom and to the playing field as well. We no longer pigeon-hole girls into stereotypical subjects and vocations, but encourage them to dream big and pursue careers in STEM too with huge benefits to industry and the economy. Why do we continue to pigeon-hole them into stereotypical sports?

The gender segregation that exists within school sport is stifling young girls and preventing them from taking advantage of the opportunities now available within traditionally male sports like rugby and football. They deserve the choice.

Research by Women In Sport, a UK-based charity aimed at creating opportunities for women and girls in sport, reports that girls drop out of sport and physical activity at a faster rate than boys. Only 14% of 8-10-year-old girls and 8% of 11-12-year-old girls meet the recommended guidelines for physical activity and over half of secondary school girls say their experiences of school sport has put



them off sport and physical activity. We need to work harder to offer them more choice, more opportunities and a more positive environment at school.

But it's not only narrowing their opportunities within sport, it's exacerbating what is already a crisis of inactivity within schools. The research shows girls are being disproportionately affected by the impacts of covid-19 on activity levels, widening the gender gap even further. The flow on effects to their mental, as well as physical, wellbeing are deeply concerning.

We, the undersigned, call for rugby to be made available to girls as part of the school curriculum, or as an extra-curricular activity. We, the GRC, will offer coaching support to ensure those delivering the lessons are equipped and confident to offer contact, or non-contact forms of rugby to students.

Since 2014, World Rugby reports that the total number of registered female rugby players has risen by 145%, compared to 25% for male players. More than a quarter of the 9.6 million people who play rugby in the world are female. Rugby inspires young people to excel, to have courage, to lead, to work hard, to have respect for others and for themselves. Those lessons can be applied to much more than just sport, they're lessons for life and ones we should be teaching girls in particular.

A survey of female rugby players in the United Kingdom, conducted by the Girls Rugby Club in 2020, found an overwhelming 90% of respondents said that playing rugby improved their self-esteem and confidence, and while 92.8% felt conscious of their weight and physical appearance, just 13% felt self-conscious in a rugby environment.

A further 2021 survey of 400 female rugby players and parents found that 100% of respondents felt it was important to offer girls the same opportunities as boys to play sport at school, however 72% felt girls were pigeon-holed into stereotypical female sports during PE classes.

School is where the rugby journey starts and therefore a responsibility lies with schools to foster inclusivity, opportunity and equality – not division and outdated stereotypes. We're not just chasing world titles, we're developing young girls into courageous, healthy and independent women.

Let the girls lace up their boots and allow them to experience rugby at school. Let the girls play.

Signed,

Rachael Burford

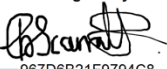
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Founder
Girls Rugby Club


Additional Signatories:
Advisory Board members, Girls Rugby Club

Emily Scarratt




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Shaunagh Brown

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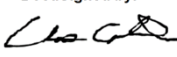
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Claire Cruikshank

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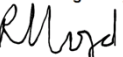
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
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Vicky Alexander



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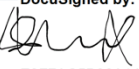
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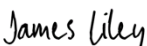
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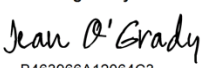
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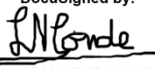
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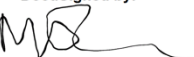
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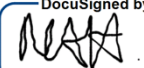
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