



Press release

ROYAL LONDON & LIONS ANNOUNCE £3 MILLION GRANT FOR UNIONS AHEAD OF 2027 WOMEN'S LIONS TOUR

- **The British & Irish Lions Women's Team Founding Partner, Royal London, launches 'Levelling the Playing Field' grant to invest in elite women's player and coach pathways in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and England.**
- **Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) to use funds to develop a 'Coach Accelerator Scholarship Program' and host additional women's U18 and U20 camps and training matches.**
- **IRFU will also work with universities to identify future talent and unearth potential high-performance players.**
- **This funding will help develop more players and coaches for the inaugural Howden Lions Women's Tour to New Zealand in 2027.**

The British & Irish Lions Women's Team Founding Partner, Royal London, has announced a £3 million (€3.5million) 'Levelling the Playing Field' Pathways Funding grant with the Unions of Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England detailing how they will allocate funding received.

The UK's largest mutual life, pensions and investment provider is allocating these grants to support the elite women's player and coach pathways in all four Unions. Each has developed its own tailored funding plan to match their needs.

The Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) has elected to use the funds to host additional women's U18 and U20 camps and training matches to accelerate player development. It will also develop a 'Coach Accelerator Scholarship Program'. The programme will accelerate coach capability and long-term career progression with a specific emphasis on removing gender-related career barriers. Coaches will be supported by high-performance mentors throughout the scholarship program. The IRFU will also work with universities to identify future talent and unearth potential high-performance players.

The aim of the funding is to help develop more players and coaches ahead of the inaugural Howden Lions Women's Tour to New Zealand in 2027 and cements Royal London's partnership with the Lions Women's Team.

It follows the news that the first-ever Lions Women's Tour will take place in New Zealand in September 2027. The series will include three Tests against the Black Ferns, the current world champions, alongside pre-Test fixtures.

Working collaboratively with the Unions and sharing research, ideas and experiences will help develop playing standards and give the Lions Women's squad the best chance of winning in New Zealand.

To represent its investment into aspiring rugby players and coaches across Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, Royal London has commissioned a bespoke shirt to showcase what this investment will mean for women in rugby. Matthias Hamzaoui, an established artist and calligrapher, has designed the shirt that uses his iconic grayscale portraiture surrounded with typography quoting players, coaches and staff from across the four national women's programmes on what this £3 million (€3.5million) bursary means for them.

Susie Logan, Group Chief Marketing Officer at Royal London, commented, *“Our aim as the Founding Partner of the Women's Lions Team is to play an integral part in levelling the playing field for women's rugby. The ‘Levelling the Playing Field’ grants we are announcing today further demonstrate our commitment to breaking down barriers and ensuring we're able to support the development of women's rugby at all levels.*

“It's been incredibly important to us that all Unions are actively involved and empowered to develop their own plans, ensuring optimal use of the funding across each nation. We're looking forward to continuing our work in partnership with the Unions to ensure it makes a difference for the current and future generations.”

Ben Calveley, CEO, British & Irish Lions said, *“Supporting the growth of the women's game is a key strategic priority for The British & Irish Lions as it is for each of our constituent Unions. Royal London's ‘Levelling the Playing Field’ grant represents a significant investment into the women's game in the four Unions and will make a positive impact on women's rugby. Royal London are an outstanding partner to The British & Irish Lions and a consistent advocate both for the Lions Women's Tour and for the women's game. We look forward to working closely with them over the coming years as we build towards this historic Tour in 2027.”*

The Rugby Football Union (RFU), the national governing body for rugby union in England, will use the grant to further develop its 'Player Development Groups', boosting the overall player experience journey and increasing the targeted skill development of players coming through the pathway.

Scottish Rugby (SR) will recruit two Performance Pipeline coaches and will deliver additional U18 and U20 camps and training matches to accelerate development within the teams. SR will also host residential camps for a national academy which brings together the best pipeline players in Scotland.

The Welsh Rugby Union (WRU) will strengthen its women's pathway coaching staff with five new members; a Performance Pathway Coach, Physical Development Lead, Performance Pathway Scientist, a Set-piece Coach and a specialist Skills Coach. It will also invest in talent identification programmes and transfer programmes across the country, and initiatives to engage Welsh qualified talent based outside of Wales.

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Notes to editors

This announcement follows a Feasibility Study funded by Lions Founding Partner Royal London, which concluded that the optimum time for the Tour is 2027. The Feasibility Study also investigated all key aspects of creating a Lions Women's Tour with a consultation process exploring brand, commercial, financial, spectator, logistical, and scheduling considerations specific to the women's game.

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About Royal London

Royal London is the largest mutual life, pensions and investment company in the UK, and in the top 25 mutuals globally, with assets under management of £162 billion, 8.5 million policies in force and over 4,200 employees. Figures quoted are as at 31 December 2023.

About The British & Irish Lions

The British & Irish Lions is an iconic sporting brand in the world of rugby. Every four years, the Lions – the best of the best selected from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales – travel to the southern hemisphere to take on Australia, New Zealand, or South Africa on landmark tours.

The British & Irish Lions has announced the initial details of a historic inaugural Lions Women's Tour with the best women's players from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales traveling to New Zealand to play the current world champions in 2027. The British & Irish Lions will continue to collaborate with all key stakeholders, including its constituent Unions, World Rugby, and the various leagues to finalise full Tour details.

The Lions is the pinnacle of players' careers, a once in a lifetime experience for fans and leaves an enduring legacy wherever the team visit.

The Lions foundations are strong, built upon 130 years of history and tradition with tours taking place regularly since 1888.

About Royal London Ireland

Royal London Ireland has a history of protecting its policyholders and their families for almost 200 years in Ireland, and it is committed to continue to do so for a long time to come. Our businesses heritage in Ireland is nearly 200 years. The Caledonian Insurance Company's first office opened on Dame Street, Dublin 2 in 1824. Royal London Ireland is owned by The Royal London Mutual Insurance Society Limited – the largest mutual life insurance, pensions, and investment company in the UK, and in the top 25 mutuals globally, with assets under management of €187 billion, 8.5 million policies in force and 4,200 employees. Figures quoted are as of 31 December 2023. Royal London Ireland's office is based at 47-49 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.