



**18 January 2024**

## **THE GENDER SPORTS GAP IS CLOSING IN IRISH SCHOOLS BUT RUGBY STILL LAGGING BEHIND**

- Only four in ten (38pc) Irish females aged 18- to 24-years-old had the opportunity to play rugby when attending school – while just over one in twenty (6pc) of those aged 45+ were offered the chance to do so when at school.
- One in five (19pc) of women in Ireland have never played rugby but would like to try it out.
- Four in ten parents in Ireland say that children today have a wider choice of sports and facilities in local community spaces and at school than when they were a child.
- Irish women aged 18-24 are more likely (38pc) than their Welsh (33pc), Scottish (22pc) or English counterparts (nil) to have had the chance to play rugby in school.
- No Irish women aged 55+ were offered the opportunity to play rugby at school.

The gender sports gap is narrowing according to new research from Royal London, though there's still significant variation, depending on the sport.

The research, which surveyed over 3,000 adults in the UK and Ireland, found that in Ireland, males aged between 45 and 55 were five times more likely to have been offered the chance to play rugby when in school than women of the same age. Male respondents aged 18-24 years were less than twice as likely to have been offered the sport in school as women of the same age, illustrating a seismic shift in the approach and access to sport in Irish schools.

The research, from Royal London, follows the announcement of the first-ever Lions Women's tour, set to take place in 2027 in New Zealand. As Founding Partner, Royal London is committed to championing and supporting women's rugby, and to making a difference by helping to level the playing field for this and future generations.

### **Access to Sport - Geographical Differences**

18- to 24-year-old women responding in Ireland were most likely to have had the opportunity to play rugby when in school (38pc), followed by Wales (33pc) while those surveyed in Scotland (22pc) and England (nil) lagged behind.

In the Irish survey, none of the women aged 55 or over said they were offered the chance to play rugby at school, though 17pc of men of the same age said they had. However, 38pc of Irish women aged 18-24 said they were offered rugby, compared to 67pc of men of the same age. (This percentage of Irish women was 10pc higher than the combined countries survey total of 28pc.)

When it comes to soccer in Ireland, 50pc of women aged over 55 were offered it in school compared to 83pc of men of the same age. However, this sport has also experienced very positive growth in the last 30 to 40 years with 81pc of women aged 18-24 saying soccer was available to them at school.

More than any of the other nations surveyed, Irish women showed a strong appetite to take up rugby. In Ireland, 19pc of women who haven't played rugby would like to try it, compared to 12pc of the wider survey group. Interestingly, rugby was a preferred choice over soccer, with 12pc of those Irish women who haven't played saying they would like to play soccer. The Royal London research also revealed that in Ireland, the appetite to try a new sport like rugby isn't just limited to women of a certain age: 29pc of those aged 18 – 24 would like to try such a new sport; while 20pc of those aged 25 – 34, 24pc of those aged 35 to 44 and 12pc of 45- to 54-year-olds felt the same.

### **Parent Feedback**

Almost three in 10 (29pc) parents surveyed say they will actively advocate for their children to play a team sport. When thinking of the options available in this regard:

- 40pc say that children have a wider choice of sports options and facilities both at school and in the local community than when they were a child.
- A similar number (39pc) say that children can play any sport they want to today.
- 37pc of parents thought children today have more access to sporting role models of all genders and sports than when they attended school.

**Shaunagh Brown, rugby player and ambassador for Royal London, said:** *“It is so encouraging to see the tide slowly turning with more and more girls being encouraged to play rugby. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the visibility of women in sport, across the board, and the Lions Women’s tour is a great example of the progress being made, but we undoubtedly still have a lot of work to do. I believe; an increased accessibility at grassroots level, including a practical overhaul of facilities at grounds, coupled with*

*visible role models for women and girls to look up to, will really help with this. Royal London's meaningful commitment to coach and player pathways alongside grassroots funding is a significant boost to increasing access and interest in the sport, helping ensure a more diverse and much larger player and coach pool ahead of 2027."*

**Susie Logan, Group Chief Marketing Officer at Royal London, said:**

*"It's positive to see access to traditionally 'male' sports improving for young girls. Access to rugby is improving for girls but there is more work to be done. It's clear that there are people who would have liked the opportunity to play and didn't get the chance.*

*This is why we're so proud to be a founding partner of the first ever Lions Women's rugby team and investing into the rugby programmes that will turn the dial even further at a grassroots level across the UK and Ireland. We are aiming to encourage more girls to participate in rugby by presenting more opportunities for them to get involved in a sport that they might not otherwise have considered."*

**ENDS**

## **Notes for the editor**

### **Royal London as founding partner of the Lions Women's team**

Following the success of the 2023 Royal London funded feasibility study into a Lions Women's tour, Royal London has recently been announced as founding partner of the Lions Women's team. The partnership will also see Royal London invest in player development in each of The British & Irish Lions constituent Unions through the delivery of a special Pathways Funding grant. The grants will support the women's player and coach pathways in Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and England, to help Unions develop more players and coaches capable of being selected for the inaugural Lions Women's Tour. In addition, Royal London will also be investing in women's and girls' grassroots rugby across the UK and Ireland in the run-up to the Tour.

### **Methodology**

Research conducted with Censuswide among 3,008 UK and Ireland adults (aged 18+). There was a minimum quota of 750 adults in each nation. The fieldwork was carried out between 17/11/2023 - 23/11/2023

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## **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 €178 billion, 8.6 million policies in force and 4,100 employees. Figures quoted are as of 30 June 2023. Royal London Ireland's office is based at 47-49 St Stephen's Green, Dublin 2.