

2023-2025

# ULSTER RUGBY FOUNDATION IMPACT REPORT



# A Message From Our Chair

As Chair of the Ulster Rugby Foundation, I'm delighted to share our first Impact Report as we reflect on two years of meaningful progress and growing momentum.

When we launched the Foundation, we had a clear vision to use the power of rugby to create opportunities, build stronger communities, and support those most in need.

Two years on, it's incredibly encouraging to see that vision taking shape, not just through numbers or outcomes, but through the lives being touched across Ulster.

I'm incredibly thankful to the team of people who have worked tirelessly over the past two years to help expand the Foundation's reach, supporting young people, creating opportunities for women and girls, and improving access for people with disabilities.

At the same time, we've remained anchored in the values that define rugby in Ulster, from teamwork and respect, to inclusion and resilience.

Of course, none of what we have achieved would be possible without the generosity of our supporters, individuals, businesses and members of the Ulster Rugby family, all of whom share a belief in the role which our sport can play in creating lasting social impact.

To all of you, I offer my sincere thanks. Your support is not only appreciated, it's vital.

On behalf of our Board of Trustees, thank you for standing with us during these formative years. We are only just beginning, but the direction is clear and the potential is significant.

Together, we look forward to continuing this journey and making a difference.

**Martin Pitt**

**Chairperson, Ulster Rugby Foundation**



# Welcome From the Head of the Ulster Rugby Foundation

It's a privilege to introduce this Impact Report as we mark the completion of the Ulster Rugby Foundation's first two years of operation.

In only a short time, the Foundation has continued to grow its reach and deepen its purpose, and with support from donors, sponsors, volunteers and partners we've been able to invest in a range of community initiatives that broaden the impact rugby has as a vehicle to improve people's lives.



Our mission is simple: to raise funds that create opportunities for all and improve lives through rugby. Whether it's supporting more young people to get involved in the game, or championing participation for women, girls, and those with disabilities, we've seen how rugby can be a real force for good.

We know that better physical and mental wellbeing, greater inclusion, stronger communities, and improved life chances can all begin with feeling part of something, and for many, that 'something' is rugby.

This report shares just some of the ways we've begun to deliver on our core outcomes and priority areas. It also reflects the dedication of our small team, our trustees, our delivery partners and every supporter who believes in our vision.

Thank you to all that have contributed so far. Your support has been vital in helping us build momentum and make meaningful change across Ulster.

There's still much to do, but with your continued backing, we're confident that our next chapter will be even more impactful.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

**David Johnston**

**Head of Foundation, Ulster Rugby Foundation**



# About the Ulster Rugby Foundation

## Our Vision:

To inspire lifelong participation in rugby, in order to provide significant health, well-being and local community benefits.



## Our Mission:

To raise and distribute funds in support of grassroots rugby development throughout Ulster.



## Our Values:

- Respect
- Integrity
- Solidarity
- Fun
- Excellence



# Outcomes

We believe that lifelong participation in rugby can have a lasting and positive impact on people's lives.



## Rugby can:

**1** Improve **physical and mental health and wellbeing** through increased levels of physical activity, volunteerism and by feeling a part of something.

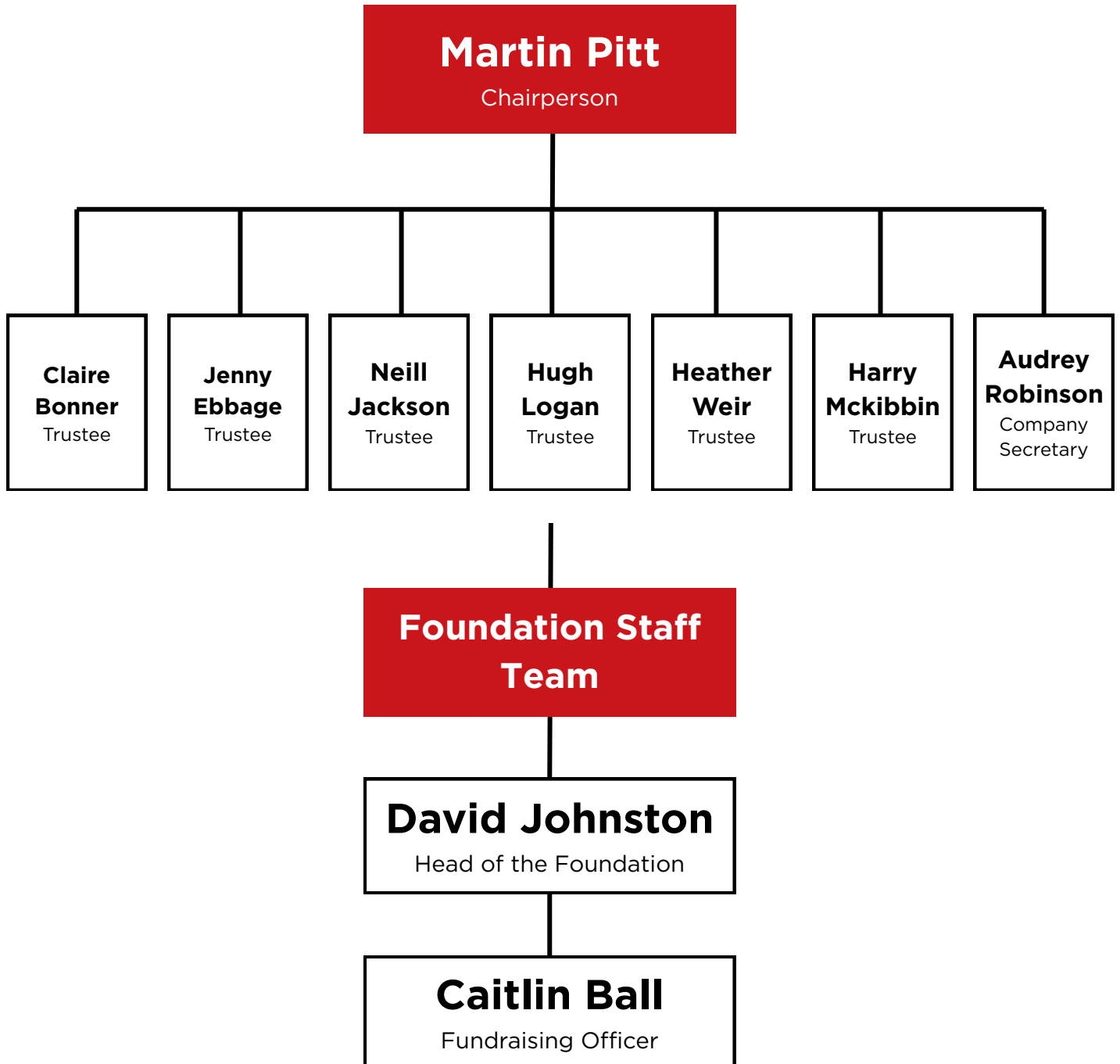
**2** Enhance **inclusivity and opportunity** for underrepresented groups, ensuring equal access to participation for all.

**3** Bring people together through a common interest to **improve cohesion, social inclusion** and integration between and within communities.

**4** Develop **teamwork, respect, discipline and resilience** by being part of a team, a community and a sport – these skills can transfer to other aspects of life.

**5** Enhance **education, skills and employment** prospects through coaching and volunteering, helping people to fulfil their potential.

# Governance



# Launch of the Foundation

While the Ulster Rugby Foundation was officially incorporated on 15 August 2023, it marked its formal launch with a special showcase event at Parliament Buildings, Stormont, in September 2024. The event celebrated the Foundation's first year of work and highlighted the positive impact already being made in communities across Ulster.

We were honoured to welcome a number of distinguished guests, including the First Minister Michelle O'Neill and Deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly, with David Honeyford MLA kindly sponsoring the event.

The afternoon was hosted by former Ulster and Ireland player Darren Cave, who led a compelling conversation with a panel of local voices, people of all ages and abilities whose lives have been positively shaped by rugby.

With a strong commitment to the development of the women and girls' game, guests heard from former Ulster Women's player Sorcha MacLaimhin, who shared her journey from grassroots to provincial rugby. She also spoke passionately about launching 'Yer Ma 7s' at Cooke RFC, an initiative aimed at encouraging more mums to get involved in the sport and enjoy the benefits of rugby, community, and belonging.

Jacob Sullivan, captain of Malone Tornadoes Mixed Ability team, shared his pride in leading his side to the upcoming IMART World Cup in Spain in 2025. He reflected on how mixed ability rugby has changed his life and encouraged others, regardless of ability, to experience the inclusive power of the game.

Lastly, Graham and Lewis Rennie spoke movingly about the strength rugby gave their family after the tragic loss of young Callum, Lewis's brother. Lewis, a dedicated player at Larne RFC, recalled his recent visit to Ulster Rugby where he met the Ulster squad and shared his inspiring fundraising efforts in memory of Callum. Their story brought to life the emotional depth and lasting impact of the youth game, another key focus area for the Foundation.

Together, these personal stories brought to life the real and lasting benefits of being involved in rugby, not just as a sport, but as a source of connection, inclusion, and resilience. Whether it's through new opportunities for women and girls, inclusive pathways for players with disabilities, or the support networks formed through youth rugby, the Foundation is committed to making the game accessible to all. The launch event served as a powerful reminder of why the Foundation exists: to ensure that more people, in more communities, can experience the transformative power of rugby.



# Messages From Our Ambassadors



# India Daley



Rugby has been a huge part of my life for as long as I can remember, from my first days playing at club level to captaining my school team, to now proudly pulling on the Ulster jersey. I've seen firsthand the power rugby has to bring **people together, build resilience, and open doors.**

That's why I'm so **honoured** to be an ambassador for the Ulster Rugby Foundation. The work the Foundation does right across the province is about so much more than sport, it's about creating real, **lasting impact** for people, no matter their background or circumstance. I'm also naturally particularly interested in the work the Foundation does to help support and grow the **Women & Girl's** game across the province, and I'm excited to see the next generation take their first steps in the game.

As someone who's benefitted from the rugby pathway in Ulster, I know how important it is to have people in your corner, cheering you on and offering **opportunities.** Through the Foundation, we're making sure more people get that chance, not just to play, but to grow in confidence, make connections, and feel like they **belong.**

I'm excited to play my part and help carry that work forward.

# Jacob Stockdale



I'm incredibly **proud** to be an ambassador for the Ulster Rugby Foundation.

The Foundation's aim is all about making a **real difference** to people's lives, whether that's to improve their mental or physical well-being, or simply helping someone **feel like they belong**, and impacts go far beyond rugby.

Some of the stories from people who have benefited from the Foundation's work are nothing short of **inspiring**, and it's a reminder that sport can be a really powerful force for good. It can bring people together, build confidence, and **create opportunities** where they are needed the most.

As a player for the Ulster Men's team, I put my heart into what I do on the pitch, but it's the work off the pitch, through the Foundation, that helps **ensure our impact is long lasting**, and I'm honoured to be able to support the Foundation on that mission.

# Our Key Focus Areas

The Ulster Rugby Foundation exists to make rugby more accessible, inclusive and impactful for everyone in our community. While our work supports a wide range of needs, we have identified three key areas where we believe we can make the most meaningful and lasting difference: Women & Girls', Disability, and Youth.

## Women & girls

Women and Girls' remain underrepresented in rugby, yet they represent the fastest-growing demographic in the sport today.

The Ulster Rugby Foundation is committed to addressing this imbalance by supporting inclusive, welcoming pathways that encourage more females to take part.

By increasing visibility, opportunity and access, we aim to support initiatives that help more women and girls experience the lifelong benefits of involvement in rugby.



## Disability

Rugby is a sport for everyone, and our work is focused on ensuring that people with disabilities are not left behind.

We are committed to improving access, inclusion and awareness so that individuals of all abilities can participate in the game in a meaningful and enjoyable way.

Whether through mixed ability rugby, adapted formats, or wider community engagement, the Foundation supports initiatives that help individuals feel welcome, valued and part of the rugby family.



## Youth

Introducing children and young people to rugby offers them much more than just physical activity, it provides community, structure, life skills and belonging.

The Foundation is focused on growing participation opportunities for young people, particularly those who may face social, economic or geographical barriers to getting involved.

By investing in programmes that expand access to the sport, we aim to empower the next generation through teamwork, resilience and a love of the game.



# Our Fundraising Initiatives

All funds raised go directly toward furthering the Foundation's mission. Here are some of our key fundraising activities:

## Golf Day

The Foundation's inaugural Golf Day, held on Thursday, 17 April 2025, at Shandon Park Golf Club, proved to be a resounding success.

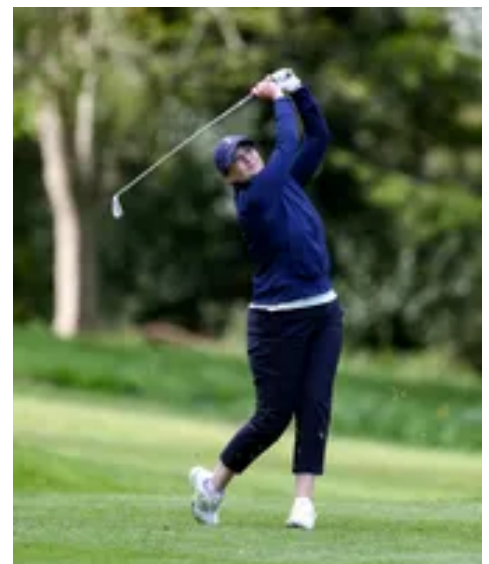
A range of local businesses supported the event, with current Ulster Rugby players Conor McKee, Marcus Rea, and Stacey Sloan taking to the fairways alongside the participating guests.

The event was capped off with a special Q&A session in the evening hosted by Pete Snodden, with features from the Foundation Ambassadors Jacob Stockdale and India Daley who shared personal insights into their rugby journeys and the impact of the Foundation's work.

A special thanks went to Castore, the headline sponsor for the event, and to Golf Now who were also a generous sponsor.



C A S T O R E



## Foundation Day Fixture

The Foundation celebrated its first-ever Foundation Day fixture on Friday 20 December, when Ulster took on interprovincial rivals Munster. The event proved to be a resounding success, with funds raised through various activities including a raffle and online auctions.



This achievement is testament to the generosity, community spirit, and passion of Ulster Rugby supporters.

The success of Foundation Day was made possible by the invaluable support of Pizza Express, this year's Foundation Day Headline Partner. Their partnership was instrumental in ensuring the event was both memorable and impactful.

# Our Fundraising Initiatives

## Match Night Raffles

# NOMADIC

Match Night Raffles have been a key fundraising initiative delivered by the Foundation during selected home fixtures across the season.

These raffles mainly reach out to supporters in the stadium, offering exciting prizes such as signed merchandise, hospitality packages, and partner vouchers, again with all proceeds invested back into the Foundation's core programmes.

Thank you to everyone who supported the Foundation by purchasing a raffle ticket.

A special thanks to Nomadic Watches for generously donating a watch, which was raffled at the Sharks game in April 2025 to support the Foundation.

## End of Season Kit Sale

On Friday 2 August 2024, supporters flocked to Ulster Rugby Stadium for the annual Kit Sale in aid of the Ulster Rugby Foundation.

With exclusive playing and training kit from the 2023/24 season on offer, along with some other small merchandise items, the event gave fans the chance to pick up top-quality gear while directly supporting our mission.

The sale built on the success of previous years and proved once again to be a fan favourite.

## Family Fun Day

Ulster Rugby and the Foundation host an annual Family Fun Day at the stadium.

Featuring appearances from Sparky, the Ulster squad, and inclusive community activities, the event brings together families for engaging games, entertainment, and fundraising.

It showcases our commitment to strengthening community bonds and supporting youth services, while also raising vital funds for our ongoing initiatives.



# Our Programmes

Through the generosity of our donors and partners, the Ulster Rugby Foundation is proud to support a growing number of programmes that use rugby as a tool to change lives. From grassroots development to inclusive participation and targeted outreach, these initiatives reflect our commitment to making the sport accessible, impactful, and open to all.

## Club & Community Rugby Officer (CCRO) Programme

In line with its objectives, the Foundation Board agreed in June '24 to initiate its first distribution of funds in support of grassroots rugby, with **£10,000** allocated towards the Club & Community Rugby Officer (CCRO) programme.

The CCRO programme links with Ulster Rugby's affiliated rugby clubs whose local officers work in schools and community settings to grow grassroots participation across Mini's, Youth, Women & Girls and Disability Rugby.

Last year, the programme employed **32 Club Community Rugby Officers (CCROs)** who visit schools and community groups across the province. These dedicated coaches reached over **43,000 young people (28,000 boys and 15,000 girls)** during the season, delivering coaching sessions in **326 schools**.

The impact of the programme can be seen in various ways. For instance, CCROs have worked with the PSNI to promote **cross-community** rugby initiatives, organised **"Give It A Try"** events to encourage **female participation**, and addressed misconceptions about rugby in areas with limited exposure to the sport. They have also hosted large-scale tag rugby blitzes involving multiple schools and identified and nurtured young players with potential.

The Foundation has also just agreed to provide another **£10,000 of support** ahead of the start of the **2025/26 season**.



# Our Programmes

## Disability Support

Creating inclusive opportunities for people of all abilities to enjoy rugby is a central aim of the Ulster Rugby Foundation.

To help achieve this, we have invested **£22,500** into activities specifically designed to support individuals with disabilities across the province.

This funding is helping clubs to develop new disability teams and build stronger links with local schools. There is also a concentrated effort to expand inclusive playing opportunities, growing **Disability Tag Rugby** and **Mixed Ability Rugby** while also supporting Club Development and Volunteer Education activities so that clubs can build high quality and long lasting structures for the benefit of those with disabilities.

**£5,000** of this funding will also be directed toward providing specialist disability equipment for **14 clubs**, helping to break down practical barriers and enable meaningful participation.

Through this type of investment, the Foundation is supporting a more accessible and sustainable rugby landscape where people with disabilities can be **welcomed, included** and **empowered** through the sport.



# Our Programmes

## Rugby Participation Programme

So far, the Foundation has also invested **£27,500** into Ulster Rugby's Rugby Participation Programme, with Participation Officers working to deliver a series of outreach programmes to expose new audiences to the sport.

This has included activities targeting Rugby Clubs, Primary Schools and Secondary schools from across all corners of the province, delivering organised **events** and **festivals** and **introductory sessions**.

They also play a key role in ensuring other coaches based in clubs and schools have the support and resources they need to develop players of all ages.

Through these efforts, the Participation Officers help build a vibrant, inclusive rugby culture that encourages lifelong involvement in the sport.

They also have a role to play in helping to **identify and nurture potential talent**, guiding them through development pathways while maintaining a focus on fostering a love of the game.



# OUR IMPACT



€70,000

DISTRIBUTED TO PROMOTE GRASSROOTS RUGBY



5

PROGRAMMES FUNDED ACROSS...



3

PRIORITY AREAS; WOMEN AND GIRLS', DISABILITY AND YOUTH



# The Stories That Drive Us

## Lewis & Graham's Story

For father and son, Graham and Lewis Rennie, rugby became their refuge, helping the family to navigate their grief after losing their son and brother, Callum, at the age of three to cancer.

Amidst the pain of loss, Graham and Lewis found comfort in rugby. Graham started coaching the minis at Larne RFC, and Lewis took to playing for the team.



*It has 100% kept me going through everything. I don't know how things would be for me personally if it wasn't for coaching the minis ... It's more than a club, it's a family.*



# The Stories That Drive Us

## Sarah's Story

For Sarah, rugby is a passion that she eagerly anticipates every week. Sarah began playing rugby in 2014 and is one of the founding members of the Clare Hares.

For Sarah and her teammates, Ballyclare Rugby Club is more than just a sports venue – it's a second home.

Through the Clare Hares, Ballyclare RFC is championing the values of inclusivity, friendship, and the sheer joy of playing rugby. Through her passion, perseverance, and positive attitude, Sarah exemplifies the spirit of women's rugby in Ulster, inspiring others to embrace the game, no matter what.

*I've been playing for years now. It makes me feel free. It is a really nice feeling.*

*Ballyclare Rugby Club is my most favourite place in the whole wide world.*



# Our Community Impact Awards

The Ulster Rugby Foundation Community Impact Award recognises individuals or clubs that have made a significant positive contribution to our community through rugby and shared in our aim to inspire lifelong participation and social impact.

## 2023/2024

The inaugural winner of our Community Impact Award in 2023/24 was **Civil Service NI RFC** in recognition of their ongoing work within the Women and Girls' game, and for their continued efforts to engage with their local community.



The club have worked extremely hard to expand their community outreach, and their efforts to fundraise for Breast Cancer Now during the season also contributed to the club being crowned winners.

## 2024/2025

The 2024/25 Community Impact Award was proudly presented to **Ashley Mulligan**, a dedicated coach with the Malone Tornadoes Mixed Ability Rugby Team.



Ashley was recognised for his outstanding commitment to creating and supporting participation opportunities for individuals with learning disabilities.

His energy, empathy, and unwavering belief in the power of inclusive sport have helped grow the Tornadoes into a thriving team where every player is valued and empowered.

# Our Volunteers

Rugby connects people, and our volunteers are a vital part of that connection.

Our Foundation volunteers bring energy, warmth, and purpose to every match night at the Stadium. Whether they're selling raffle tickets, greeting fans, or helping share our message, they are often the first point of contact for fans who want to learn more or provide their support.

Their presence helps raise crucial funds, increase awareness of our work, and ensure that the values of Ulster Rugby extend beyond the pitch. We're incredibly grateful for the time, passion and dedication our volunteers bring as they help create a sense of belonging, not only for our supporters, but for the communities we serve.



## Volunteer Testimonial – Chris Henderson

*I've been involved with Ulster Rugby for many years as a supporter, but volunteering with the Foundation has given me the chance to give something back in a really meaningful way. Helping out on match nights, whether it's selling raffle tickets or just chatting to fans about the work the Foundation does, is always rewarding.*

*What I love most is seeing how rugby is being used to make a real difference to people's lives. Whether it's helping young people build confidence, opening up opportunities for women and girls, or supporting more people with disabilities to get involved in the game, the Foundation is creating real, positive change in our communities, and it's a real privilege to be even a small part of that.*

# Continuing the Journey

As the Ulster Rugby Foundation looks ahead to 2025/26, we're focused on building on the strong foundations already in place, with the goal of growing our impact even further in the coming 12 months.

## We're excited to bring back some of our most popular events, including:

- Our much loved **Family Fun Day** (Friday 15th August 2025)
- Our next **Foundation Day** at the Stadium on Friday 17th April 2026 when Ulster take on Leinster in the URC.
- **Golf Day** on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2026.
- Our **Match Night Raffles** will also continue, helping raise vital funds while bringing supporters closer to our mission.

Over the next 12 months, we'll be working hard to **grow our regular giving and corporate donation programmes**, and sharing more stories behind the impact of the Foundation's work.

We're also keen to expand our network of **dedicated volunteers** who play a key role in supporting everything we do.

We also have plans in motion for a number of new fundraising initiatives, so keep an eye out for further announcements in the months ahead.

With your continued support, we're setting our sights on a bigger, better and even more impactful 2025/26.

**TOGETHER, WE'RE  
MAKING 2025/26 OUR  
MOST IMPACTFUL  
YEAR YET.**

# Support the Foundation

The amazing work of the Foundation couldn't happen without support from the community, whether from individuals as volunteers or as donors, or from businesses becoming corporate partners or sponsoring events. Here's some more information on how you can help the Foundation.

## Become a Friend of the Ulster Rugby Foundation

From just £5/month, join a community driving inclusive rugby across the province.

Support monthly or with a one-off gift and help to fund equipment, sessions, and new programmes.

Scan our **QR Code** for more information on the Friends of the Foundation programme.



## Become a Corporate Partner

Businesses can choose to become a Corporate Partner of the Foundation, providing a financial contribution which will help us grow our work and ultimately make a significant difference to the lives of the people we support.

Support our work year-round as a Corporate Partner:

- **Founding Partner - £5,000/year**
- **Corporate Friend - £1,000/year**

## Become an Event Sponsor

Become a headline sponsor for key events like Foundation Day or Golf Day, or fundraise your own way.

Get in touch at [urfoundation@ulsterrugby.com](mailto:urfoundation@ulsterrugby.com)



*Here at PizzaExpress and Milano, our communities are at the heart of what we stand for, so we are proud to partner with the Ulster Rugby Foundation to support their mission to inspire lifelong participation in rugby and create lasting community impact.*

**Clare Boyd, PizzaExpress & Milano Territory Manager.**

# Our Partners & Supporters

We are incredibly grateful for the support of many corporate partners over the past two years, as without them, our impact just wouldn't be the same.



CASTORE



TETRA TECH

NOMADIC



Alpha



BeyondHR

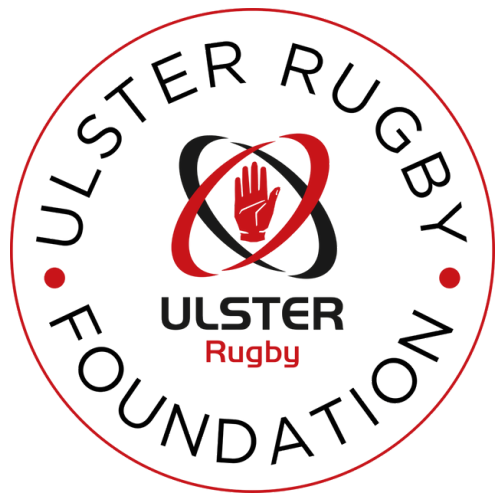
DIAGEO



# Our Partners & Supporters

The logo for nicssa, featuring the word "nicssa" in a bold, lowercase, blue sans-serif font.

A special thank you also goes to all those who have provided individual donations to the Foundation over the last 2 years, and those who are part of our Friend of the Foundation programme as regular givers.



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109970

[ulster.rugby/rugby-in-ulster/foundation](http://ulster.rugby/rugby-in-ulster/foundation)