



RFU

AGE GRADE RUGBY

REGULATION & PLAYING CHANGES v.1

Season 2022-23

Dated: 24th June 2022

AGE GRADE CHANGES

Season 2022-23 Version (v.1 dated 24th June 2022)

The Age Grade Changes document includes the modifications to regulations for summer 2022 and the 2022-23 season. These new regulations kick off from 1st August 2022; that is when players shift up to their new ages and set of playing rules.

The aim of the regulations is to support the safe and consistent playing of the game and development of players. The regulations can be found [here](#) with Regulation 15 covering Age Grade Rugby.

In the past two seasons, faced with the challenges and impact of Covid-19, the drive has been to enable as many options as we can for players to return to rugby, while ensuring their safety remains top priority. This continues to be the case; as does the critical need for everyone involved in the age grade game to apply a player welfare and safety lens at all times.

This document references all the key regulation changes for the 2022-23 season and a reference to Covid-19 related change for summer 2022. This will help everyone involved in Age Grade Rugby to engage in the season well-informed and confidently. We recommend this is shared widely across the age grade club, school and college networks.

1. The Age Grade out of season regulations are suspended for 2022. An RFU Age Grade Summer Activity Framework will be followed in its place. (This is underway as previously communicated)

There is a specific [Summer Activity page](#) with all the detail. The programme maintains the player safety/retention focus and ensures an age grade off-season period remains in 2022. It enables more match opportunities and contact skills development than a normal out-of-season. This is applicable up to the 3rd September 2022.

The framework covers all aspects of age grade training and playing activity (including CB, DPP and Rugby Camps) and is designed to support player safety, contact preparation and player retention.

Additional elements are layered on month by month and coaches can select from the months before, as well as up to the threshold of the current one. The Summer Framework is regulation – no activity is permitted beyond this monthly threshold.

Activity is not compulsory, most players and adults involved in the age grade game will want a rest or to come and go during the summer. Where there is a demand for activity, coaches must still be player-centred and focus on the different levels of readiness in their group.

The additional supporting information on the [Summer Activity page](#) includes tools and resources to aid Age Grade Specific, Girls Rugby Specific, Age Grade to Adult Transition and the Return to Scrumming. These high quality resources are not only relevant to summer but will be useful in re-engaging players throughout the 2022-23 season.

Guidance supporting organisers of Rugby Camps is also included. Those reviewing/giving approval in CBs have received further guidance.

2. The end of the 2022-23 age grade season will be Monday 1st May 2023.

The Age Grade Season 2022-23 will run from Saturday 3rd September 2022 until the end of Monday 1st May 2023.

There will be, as in 2021-22, a window for Representative rugby programmes only, in May 2023. Boys U14 and U15 England Rugby Developing Player Programme and CB U17 playing opportunities will take place at this time. This gives as a dedicated window and reduces clashes with core club, school and college rugby during the season. U16 and U18 girls and boys pathway activity remains during the season due to the GCSE and A-Level exam periods in early summer.

Player Pathway dates are outlined in the [Age Grade Playing Calendar](#).

3. Clarification of the window to affiliate Age Grade club players.

In 2021-22, 150,000 age grade club players were affiliated on the online Game Management System. An excellent effort by players, parents, volunteers and especially club registrars/administrators.

The 2022-23 regulation clarifies that all Age Grade Club Players must be affiliated annually on the RFU's online affiliation platform within 45 days of their start to the season; and that this means:

- For new Age Grade Players, this is from when they first join the Club; and
- For existing Age Grade Players, this is from when they start their new Season at the Club.

This is to provide time for players to settle back in and for new ones to have a go before needing to commit.

Following helpful feedback from clubs, the system will be ready to affiliate players from 1st July this year. This switch-over to season 2022-23 is **within GMS only** and is to help clubs that want, to get ahead on their administration for the new season. As above, new regulations come in from 1st August and the playing season starts on 3rd September. [Click here for a helpful summary of these key dates](#).

Please access the [GMS Help Portal](#) for guides, videos and support for affiliation.

4. New Girls Age Banding is introduced into regulation.

From 2022-23, the new U12, 14, 16 and 18 girls age bands replace the U13, 15 and 18 bandings.

This signals an exciting next phase for girls rugby in England. Through the superb efforts of everyone involved in the last 10 years, the number of girls playing rugby is at a point where moving from three age bands to four is a realistic and sustainable proposition. This sets up further growth of the game over the next 5 to 10 years.

A new resource Growing the Girls Game has been produced to support the development of girls rugby under the new age bands. This will help clubs, schools and colleges to build fun, supportive, attractive and inclusive experiences for new and existing players as well as all those that support them. This includes a guidance section for coaches on how to maximise the experience for girls through each of the new age bands.

The new resource plus further information, FAQs and the new age banding infographic is available on the [Age Grade Rugby page](#).

The following changes to regulations have also been made due to the new girls age bandings:

a) Under 11 Girls flexibility to play out of age grade is provided.

The priority is always for age grade players to play in their defined age/year group. However, the U11 girls regulations have been modified to be more flexible, if appropriate for the player. This enables girls to continue to play mixed U11 rugby or girls only U11 rugby (as some clubs already do). The revised regulations also enable in exceptional circumstances, under Regulation 15.3, an U11 girl to play up into U12 girls rugby.

Please note, that for a girl to do anything out of their current U11 age group, the circumstances within the regulations must first of all apply and then the assessments and approvals required in regulation must be in place beforehand.

We recognise the challenge of player numbers in the new U12 age band. This will need time to evolve as the old girls age bands did. It is imperative however that safety and the safeguarding of all concerned is the overriding factor in any playing out of age grade and a robust assessment process is required beforehand.

See [Regulation 15.2 to 15.5](#) for the detail.

b) Girls rugby Rules of Play are consistent with the boys rules.

The rules of play at the new U12, 14, 16 and 18 age bands are the same as the boys game, meaning consistency and equality in the game played on the pitch. These can be found in the appendices to [Regulation 15](#) and will be available for 1st August 2022.

As in all age grade rugby, the rules can be flexed appropriately to the ability and experience of the players involved. This will be very important in the girls game due to the dual age bands, which mean a greater range of progression, experience and ability in a group of players. Safe participation is again at the core with the need for coaches to plan together the best approach for all the players on the pitch when organising fixtures and joint training sessions.

c) Approval for Girls playing in the Player Pathway and Adult Rugby is confirmed.

The regulations and requirements for talented girls to play in pathway and representative programmes across age groups have been clarified to be consistent with the regulations of the boys game. In addition, the requirements for these players to play in adult rugby have been confirmed.

This can be found under [Regulations 15.6 and 15.7](#).

d) Out of season activity, playing time and when matches are brought to an end in the new girls age bands are confirmed.

The new dual age bands have required confirmation of what is permitted for girls in out of season activity. This is clarified under [Regulation 15.8](#), that the Under 14 dual age band (including both U13 and 14 players) aligns to the permitted activity for U14 players. This ensures that those players in the dual age band can continue to play/train together if involved in out of season activity.

Likewise, the length of time for activity in matches and during a day have been reframed to include the new girls age banding. For the Under 16 dual age band maximum minutes per half are 35 and maximum minutes per day are 90.

Regulation 15.11.3 which states when matches must be brought to an end due to large points differentials has also been updated to reflect the new age bands. Matches in the girls Under 14 age band must end if they reach a points difference of more than 50 points.

5. The regulations limiting combined teams are suspended for the 2022-23 season in the U12 to 18 male game, therefore allowing whole teams to combine up or down one age group.

This continues the change made to 2021-22 regulations after feedback of the benefits from clubs, schools and colleges. This will help to further strengthen the game where otherwise for some teams and players would be lost to the sport.

Please note, that **combining team** regulations involve whole groups of players in defined circumstances. This is **different from playing up and down** regulations, which are about individual players in defined circumstances. Combining a whole group of players with another age if they are short of numbers is what has changed in the 2022-23 season from the published regulations.

We already have the dual age bands which combine teams in the girls' game; girls can only combine in those ages. This change is for the boys game and means if there are not enough numbers to field full sides in a single age group, teams can be combined either up or down one age from U12 to U18.

Normal combined team conditions (as per [Regulation 15.2](#)) apply:

- CB (in clubs) or ECRFU (in colleges) or Headteacher (in schools) approval is required;
- No more than half the players on the pitch at any time can be from the older age;
- Matches must be played to the younger age rules.

The option of combined U18/U19 teams in the boys and girls game is included. This could help address concerns of players transitioning to open age, after less full contact rugby in the previous two seasons. The assessment and approval process can be followed to gain dispensation to play in an U18/U19 combined team this season.

Please remember, this is not playing up and down of individual players (Regulation 15.3 & 4). This is combining an entire age group (Regulation 15.2). The circumstances, conditions and requirements for approval for both scenarios must be [as per Regulation 15](#).

6. Approval is required from the CB for playing up an age group.

All playing out of age grade will now need **prior approval from the CB**. This was already the case for combining teams (15.2) and for playing down (15.4), however **playing up (15.3) now also requires approval**. For playing up in clubs, the geographical CB will need to give approval and for colleges the England Colleges RFU. In schools, playing up must be approved by the Head or person in loco parentis.

The change was agreed after consultation with CB representatives and is to ensure a robust and neutral assessment process takes place, in order to safeguard everyone involved, especially the player.

It is important to reiterate that the default priority is always for players to play in their own age grade with their immediate peers and support groups. Playing out of age grade is the exception and should be treated as such. This is why it requires an assessment and approval process and can take place only under the circumstances specified in the regulations.

7. Playing Down in colleges rugby is permitted for U19s.

Due to the changing landscape in further education and sixth form colleges, the playing down regulation is changed. The number of third year students at college is increasing significantly. This is due to the advent of T-levels (which require 3 years to complete) and the number of students completing Level 2 education courses in their first year at college before moving on to their full time Level 3 course, such as a BTEC Diploma.

As a result, [Regulation 15.4](#) has an additional element. It now also states that college players of Under 19 (Year 14) age can play down, as long as they are studying in the second year of a full time, two-year level 3 course, and they have not previously completed a full level 3 qualification.

The circumstances, assessments and approvals in the regulation are all still required before the player can play down. Approval is through England Colleges RFU.

8. National Competitions are to be played to the playing out of age grade regulations.

[Regulation 15.13](#) covers the RFU National Age Grade Competitions. This is now updated to specify that Regulation 15.2, 15.3, 15.4 and 15.5 will be applied to all RFU National Competitions. There will not be specific clauses added on, for example, number of overage players allowed.

CBs/Divisional Organising Committees/third party organisers are strongly recommended to follow the same approach for their formal competitions, in anticipation of the introduction of a mandated regulation in the 2023-24 season.

This change has been introduced after legal advice regarding equal opportunity and potential discrimination and the drive to simplify activity by applying Regulation 15 as it is.

Regulation 15 - Age Grade Rugby.

[Regulation 15 still governs Age Grade Rugby](#) across the game. The only exception to this for the 2022-23 season in the Combining of boys U12 to U18 teams. This has been agreed as a continued change to aid the rebuild after Covid-19.

The rest of the regulations for 2022-23 are as per Regulation 15 and must be applied and followed. This includes areas which we have received the most questions about in the last two disrupted seasons, such as:

- Playing Up (15.3) criteria, conditions and approvals
- Playing Down (15.4) criteria, conditions and approvals
- Playing Adult Rugby (15.6)
- Out of Season Activities (15.8)
- Approval of activities (15.9)
- Half Game Rule (15.12)

The [Club Support Help Portal](#) provides additional support and information about the Age Grade Changes.

