



To: CB Hon Secretaries
CB Age Grade Leads
CSU Representatives
RPPG Chairs

From: Rob Briers – CGB Chair
Phil Attwell – EAGSC Chair
David Roberts – CCBSC Chair
Fred Batchelor – ERFSU
Mark Saltmarsh

Cc: RFU Council Members
Area Managers

Date: 30th January 2020

Subject: EDUCATION & AGE GRADE ALIGNMENT PROJECT

The retention and transition of age grade players into adult rugby is a major priority for the game. We need a rugby community where players seamlessly progress through club and school into college and university, or into the adult teams of their existing clubs with many more players staying in the game through adulthood. In many areas, a disconnect and tensions between clubs, schools, colleges and universities and the organisations they are linked to, are diverting energy from this. We need to address it by ensuring increased dialogue and stakeholder collaboration at local level.

The Education & Age Grade Alignment Project has kicked off to drive a stronger connection across Age Grade Rugby. A small group of RFU Board and Council Members, other key CB personnel and senior staff met in early summer 2019 to consider this issue and explore steps/opportunities to improve the relationships between the club and education sector.

Subsequently, the Community Game Board (CGB) and Education & Age Grade Sub Committee (EAGSC) have endorsed the work with EAGSC taking responsibility for overseeing the initiative.

Progress So Far

At a series of Age Grade sessions with county colleagues across the country in August 2019, there was agreement that greater alignment was vital. In addition, there was understanding that it would potentially require direction from the centre and perhaps structural changes at county level to set the ball rolling and maintain momentum. However, all strongly agreed that if the outcome was improved player retention, then this approach would be supported and worth taking.

England Rugby Football Schools Union (ERFSU) has already started a major modernisation and change programme to become closer to the rest of the game and play a proactive part in the Alignment Project. England Colleges and Students RFU (our Universities CB) have also backed the project and are mobilising their local networks to support. A game-wide drive with clear endorsement and direction from the RFU is therefore in place.

In light of a number of changes to the Age Grade regulations for 2019-20, we decided to hold off implementing the Alignment Project until the New Year. Now that we are into 2020 and the new regulations are more bedded in, we will drive this forwards.



GAME OF OUR LIVES

Next Stages

Our aim is for the county/regional bodies in education and clubs to create a strong bond that focuses on the player's journey; and then critically, model this to their clubs and education institutions locally.

There are a few counties where the CB, CSU, other education/club representatives and player pathway groups have nailed this. They have or are in the stages of embedding an intent and structure that enables them work closely together on a regular basis. We will work in the next few weeks with this group of "trailblazer" counties to learn from their successes/challenges and develop a good practice model. We will then engage with other counties in three phases to deliver the project and resulting joined-up movement across the Age Grade game.

There is an expectation that everyone will come on this journey. While the August 2019 sessions showed great appetite to do so, we recognise that this will be easier for some counties to do than for others. We will start with those ready to proactively take the steps and then move on to those we need to help more with the transition. The aim is to land the new approach and a network of new Age Grade Rugby groups right across the country for the start of the 2021-22 season.

What It Means

There is a need to engineer a group locally to address the lack of connection. To have the effect we all seek, this must be different, not a "talking shop" or traditional committee but a group that through direct dialogue delivers a set of joint tangible actions and is committed to change. Our geographical CBs will act as the base for facilitating collective action and this work will, if needed, be supported by RFU staff.

Conversation is required involving the relevant representation and voices around the table. The Player Pathway (eg. RPPG representative) needs to be involved in the conversation but must not dominate as may have been the case in the past.

This group needs to have a clear and consistent agenda and set of outcomes, focussed on how the barriers to retention and collaboration can be effectively broken down. We will identify with the trailblazers the core agenda areas that help address this. We acknowledge that solutions may be geographically different; this is not a problem, it is why the local joint discussion is critical.

We look forward to working with you on this exciting initiative which will play an important part in getting the game right for our age grade players and retaining them on into adult rugby.

If you have any questions, please direct them in the first instance to Mark, who will be the RFU staff lead on the Alignment Project.

Many thanks and Kind Regards.

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