



**RFU**

# **RETURN TO RUGBY ACTIVITY**

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## **AGE GRADE CHANGES v.7**

**Start of Season 2021-22 Edition**

**Dated: 24<sup>th</sup> August 2021**

# ROADMAP - AGE GRADE CHANGES

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## Start of Season 2021-22 Version (v.7 dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 2021)

The Age Grade Changes document includes the modifications agreed to support the return of Age Grade Rugby in 2020-21, summer 2021 and the 2021-22 season. The aim has been, faced with the challenges and impact of Covid-19, to enable as many options as we can for players to return to rugby, while ensuring their safety remains top priority. It is critical for everyone involved in the age grade game to apply a player welfare and safety lens at all times.

Version 7 of this document references all the key regulation changes, both Covid-19 and non-Covid related, for the 2021-22 season. This will help everyone involved in Age Grade Rugby to start the season well-informed and confidently. We recommend this is shared widely across the age grade club, school and college networks.

*Updated information from the previous version is shown in italics.*

### **1. The end of the 2020-21 age grade season is extended to 31st May 2021.**

This was implemented successfully, supporting players, clubs, schools and colleges to return to rugby activity.

*There are no plans to extend the 2021-22 season at this point. It will run from Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> September 2021 to Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2022.*

### **2. The Age Grade out of season regulations are suspended for 2021. An RFU Age Grade Summer Activity Framework will be followed in its place.**

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 2021. It enables more match opportunities and contact skills development than a normal out-of-season. This is applicable up to the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

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.

Friendly fixtures can be played in August as per the Framework. Age Grade Adapted Contact 15s Law Variations for August (U14+) are also included on the [Summer Activity page](#). These are designed to progress scrums and mauls before the new season starts from 4<sup>th</sup> September. XRugby and non-contact formats can also continue to be played throughout August.

*The supporting information for players, coaches and organisers includes tools and resources to aid Age Grade Specific, Girls Rugby Specific, Age Grade to Adult Transition and the Return to Scrummaging. These high quality resources are not only relevant to summer activity but will be useful throughout the whole of the 2021-22 season, due to the rugby progressions and social connections lost in the last 18 months.*

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

### **3. The shift to the next set of age group rules is delayed until 1 January 2022.**

We need to ensure players and coaches do not miss vital building blocks for a safe and manageable introduction to the full contact game. The rules delay means, as an example, U9s in 2020-21 still become U10s in 2021-22 but will play U9 rules from September to December and U10 rules from January. This will also be the case throughout all the boys-only age groups at U12 onwards.

Please note, all players still do move up an age group for the 2021-22 season as in any other year. The rules are the difference, not their age group. *Age Grade rules of play are in the [Appendices of Regulation 15 here](#).*

*This includes U7s and U9s; they will shift to their new rules from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022. U7 is when players formally start Tag matches and structure. Before this point it is more free-play, multiskill, fun early years ABC activity. Joint sessions with other clubs are fine and a good way of providing a fun experience for everyone. Delaying the start of the next set of rules ensures U7s have had this active, fun, inclusive foundation before it starts to turn into rugby.*

*U9 players will have not fully experienced the team-play and shape of the game progressions of U8 Tag, which build on the basic rugby techniques and skills of U7. They will learn and experience these in the first half of the season and will then importantly, have a greater appreciation of space and attack/defence before contact rugby is introduced from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022.*

*Girls in U13, U15 and U18 multi-age bands will move as usual to that band and play those rules through 2021-22. We have worked with expert groups to develop specific training/playing guidance for coaches working in these age group bands to ensure safe player progression and transition. This applies to the summer 2021 and the 2021-22 playing season and is available on our [Summer Activity page](#).*

There are some age grade players, mostly in one-term rugby schools, that do not usually get the opportunity to play rugby after December. It is important that they are able to develop their skill progression of both the 2021-22 and previous seasons. We also want to enable players who will start their next set of rules/skills in fixtures from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022 to be introduced to and develop them safely in training beforehand.

Therefore, **from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2021, coaches and teachers will be able to introduce the new set of rules to an age group in training.** This includes playing internal training matches to help the players apply the skills in a full game situation. Inter-club, school and college matches must still be played to the previous rules as above; this maintains consistency across the game.

From 1<sup>st</sup> January 2022, everyone can move to their new rules. But we remind coaches and teachers that players must be fully prepared, in particular, to play matches. Safe progression towards contact rugby must always be the priority and not compromised.

We strongly encourage one-term rugby schools and local clubs to work together to signpost players to club rugby from January. There will be four months of rugby activity still available and this opportunity to experience club rugby will help prepare them for a lifelong journey in the game.

### **4. The process for 17-year-olds playing adult rugby is suspended until 1st January 2022 (except for in combined U18/19 teams).**

This means that 17 year olds will not be able to play open age adult contact rugby from now until January 2022. Please use the table below for a simple reference point. This includes both male and female players and those with a previous or existing dispensation. Non-contact rugby is still permitted.

These players are at greatest safety and retention risk due to the rugby they have missed in the last 12

months. They need to train and play with their peer group to prepare them for any adult contact rugby. This will affect some clubs at adult level, but the long-term safety and participation picture outweighs the short-term impact.

See 5. below for details of the combined U18/U19 teams changes.

## WHAT TEAMS CAN 17 YEAR OLDS PLAY/TRAIN WITH?



|                    | 2020-2021                         | 2021-2022                             |                                    |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
|                    | 29th March 2021 to 31st July 2021 | 1st August 2021 to 31st December 2021 | 1st January 2022 to 31st July 2022 |
| U17, U18 & U17/U18 | ✓                                 | ✓                                     | ✓                                  |
| U18/U19            | ✗                                 | ✓*                                    | ✓*                                 |
| Open Age Adult     | ✗                                 | ✗                                     | ✓*                                 |

\* - Only with dispensation after assessment and approval in line with Regulation 15.6

- **All of the above includes:**
  - Both contact playing and training
  - Previous, existing and new dispensations after assessment and approval in line with Regulation 15.6
- **Assessment and approval process for new dispensations restarts on:**
  - 1<sup>st</sup> July 2021 to play in U18/19 teams
  - 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 to play in open age adult teams

### 5. The regulations limiting combined teams are suspended for the 2021-22 season in the U12 to 18 male game, therefore allowing whole teams to combine up or down one age group.

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 as below. Individuals playing up and down regulations have not changed.

We already have the dual/triple age band teams in the girls' game. This change means if there are not enough numbers to field full sides in a single age group, boys teams can be combined either up or down one age from U12 to U18. While this will be the exception, the ability to do so provides additional retention options.

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

- CB (clubs) or Head/Principal (schools/colleges) 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 is included. This could help address concerns of players transitioning to open age, after little full contact rugby in the previous 18 months. The 17 year olds playing adult rugby changes have been revised to support this. The assessment and approval process can be followed to gain dispensation to play in an U18/U19 combined team from the start of the 2021-22 season.

The following tables show the **combined teams** that male and female players in the U16 to U19 bracket will be able to train/play in through 2021-22 and where the dispensation for 17 year olds aligns. *Please*

remember, this is not playing up and down of individual players (Regulation 15.3 & 4), which has not changed. 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.

## WHAT COMBINED TEAMS FEMALE PLAYERS WILL BE ABLE TO PLAY IN



| 2020-2021   |         | 2021-2022  |              |   |                     |
|---|---------|--|--------------|---|---------------------|
| From 29 <sup>th</sup> March 2021 to 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2021**              |         | From 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2021 to 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2021 |              | From 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2022 to 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2022** |                     |
| In addition to their own age band, players can play in combined teams with: # |         |  |              |   |                     |
| U16   | U17 U18 | U17 U18  | U17 U18      | U17 U18   | U17 U18             |
| U17   | U16 U18 | U16 U18 U19*   | U16 U18 U19* | U16 U18 U19*  | U16 U18 U19* Adult* |
| U18   | U16 U17 | U16 U17 U19  | U16 U17 U19  | U16 U17 U19   | U16 U17 U19 Adult*  |
| U19   | Adult   | U18 Adult  | U18 Adult    | U18 Adult   | U18 Adult           |

\* From 17<sup>th</sup> birthday subject to receiving dispensation via approval process in Reg 15.6

\*\* Subject to in-season & out-of-season protocols and regulations

# Playing Up & Down for individual players remains as per Reg 15.3, 15.4 & 15.5

## WHAT COMBINED TEAMS MALE PLAYERS WILL BE ABLE TO PLAY IN



| 2020-2021   |       | 2021-2022  |              |   |                     |
|---|-------|--|--------------|---|---------------------|
| From 29 <sup>th</sup> March 2021 to 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2021**              |       | From 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2021 to 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2021 |              | From 1 <sup>st</sup> January 2022 to 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2022** |                     |
| In addition to their own age band, players can play in combined teams with: # |       |  |              |   |                     |
| U16   | #     | U15 U17  | U15 U17      | U15 U17   | U15 U17             |
| U17   | U18   | U16 U18 U19*   | U16 U18 U19* | U16 U18 U19*  | U16 U18 U19* Adult* |
| U18   | U17   | U17 U19  | U17 U19      | U17 U19   | U17 U19 Adult*      |
| U19   | Adult | U18 Adult  | U18 Adult    | U18 Adult   | U18 Adult           |

\* From 17<sup>th</sup> birthday subject to receiving dispensation via approval process in Reg 15.6

\*\* Subject to in-season & out-of-season protocols and regulations

# Playing Up & Down for individual players remains as per Reg 15.3, 15.4 & 15.5

### Additional Important Age Grade Regulation Changes 2021-22:

## **6. The maximum tackle height across all Age Grade Rugby is the line of the armpit.**

*This change is a key element of the drive to prioritise player safety across the game.*

*The existing rules for those playing full contact rugby at Under 9 to Under 14 levels has an imagined line between the armpits as the maximum height of a legal tackle. Under the law change, approved by the RFU Council, this rule now extends to Under 15 to Under 18 levels bringing the tackle height down from shoulder level to the armpit for those age groups.*

*This means all players who are permitted to tackle in full contact Age Grade Rugby (Under 7 and Under 8 continue to play non-contact rugby) will do so at the same consistent height throughout their age grade years.*

*More information is available [here](#).*

## **7. Global Law Trials (GLTs) will apply to the age grade game when playing and training to the Under 15 Laws or above.**

*Following RFU review and Council agreement, we confirm the new Global Law Trials (GLTs) are now applicable to the Under 15 rules and above in Age Grade Rugby. Therefore all matches and training played to Under 15 rules from this point will include the GLTs.*

*This means the Under 15 age group will play to them from 1st January 2022 (due to the delayed shift in rules for 2021-22) and Under 16 and above, from now onwards. Detail of the GLTs is available [here](#).*

## **8. Duration of Age Grade Rugby activity can be extended by 15 minutes to allow for Activate.**

*From 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021, regulations now allow an additional 15 minutes activity per day per age group. This is specifically allowed for the delivery of the RFU Activate injury prevention exercise programme only. For example, U16s and above may now engage in a total of 105 minutes of rugby activity per day; 90 minutes is for training/playing and up to an additional 15 minutes is available for the delivery of Activate.*

*The Activate “hub” has a range of tools and videos to support coaches with their player safety drive. We recommend that Activate is a part of every session. For further detail and all the resources please click [here](#).*

## **9. Annual Age Grade Club Player Registration is applicable to all age grades and has changed name to Affiliation.**

*The three-year project to rollout annual registration across the age grade club game is completed this season. This follows the introduction of the online platform in 2019-20 for initial age groups and the additional ages and optional de-registration in 2020-21. Thank you to all in the age grade game who have supported this development.*

*Under Regulation 15, all club age grade players need to be affiliated on the RFU Game Management System (GMS) annually.*

*Existing players had their status changed from active to inactive player in August 2021. No data is deleted in this central process, their full record is still under the parent and club. To re-affiliate for the year, parents simply login to the Game Management System, click on the reaffiliate link in their green actions box or their child in their profile, update any details that may have changed and click Save. The club registrar will receive a*

notification that this has been done.

For brand new players and parents the process has also been further improved. The parent or guardian sets up their profile and then adds a child or children on their affiliation record. The club registrar then gets an approval message on their Affiliation dashboard. Improvements include making the system more mobile device friendly. Very little has changed in the processes, apart from the name to Affiliation to better reflect and align with the adult game.

The GMS Help Portal has support articles, many with step by step videos, that walk users through the various affiliation processes. These are for both parents/players and club volunteers. We recommend clubs access these for support and share the links with their parents to help them with completing their affiliations.

[Click here for the GMS Help Portal](#)

[Click here for the GMS login page](#)

## **10. CB Representative Rugby activity is permitted up to and including the last May Bank Holiday Monday.**

This was introduced into the Age Grade Playing Calendar when communicated to the game in December 2020. The aim is to reduce the amount of player pathway activity during the season at these ages that impacts on club, school and college rugby and to provide a more dedicated space in the year for CB representative rugby and player development.

Under 16 and 18 CB rugby remains in its usual windows to take account of and prioritise GCSE and A-Level/BTEC exam and assessment periods.

The Age Grade Playing Calendar is available [here](#).

## **Regulation 15 - Age Grade Rugby.**

**Regulation 15 still governs Age Grade Rugby** across the game throughout this period.

The majority of the regulations remain in place and must be applied and followed. This includes areas which we have received questions about, such as:

- Playing Up (15.3) criteria, conditions and approvals
- Playing Down (15.4) criteria, conditions and approvals
- Approval of activities (15.9)
- Half Game Rule (15.12)

The [Helpdesk FAQs](#) provide additional support and information about the Age Grade Changes.

