



RFU

RETURN TO RUGBY ACTIVITY

AGE GRADE CHANGES v.5

Dated: 13th May 2021

ROADMAP - AGE GRADE CHANGES (v.5 dated 13th May 2021)

The Return to Rugby Roadmap released in March 2021 includes specific changes that support the return of Age Grade Rugby to the end of the current 2020-21 season, out of season 2021 and next season 2021-22. The next 12 to 18 months is about enabling as many options as we can for players to return to rugby, while ensuring their safety remains top priority. For these and the unchanged regulations, it is critical for everyone involved in the age grade game to apply a player welfare and safety lens at all times.

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 means that rugby activity is permitted during May 2021 in line with the current stage on the Return to Rugby Roadmap and guidance.

This aims to support players, clubs, schools and colleges to return to rugby activity. The priority is friendly fixtures that maximise the number of players safely getting out on a rugby pitch, rather than focus on the match result. Consideration of other sports participation and Year 11/13 academic assessments is important.

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.

The Summer Activity Framework is available on the [Return to Rugby page](#).

The programme to be followed will maintain the player safety/retention focus and ensure an age grade off-season period remains in 2021. For those providing activity, it will enable more match opportunities and contact skills development than a normal out-of-season. 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 advice and support for specific Age Grades (boys and girls) will be available from the middle of May, along with guidance on Age Grade to Adult rugby transition.

Guidance supporting organisers of Rugby Camps and those reviewing/giving approval in CBs is being updated to help achieve alignment with the Summer Activity Guide. This will be available by the beginning of June.

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 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.

Girls in U13, U15 and U18 multi-age bands will move as usual to that band and play those rules through 2021-

22. We are providing specific training/playing guidance for coaches working in these age group bands to ensure safe player progression and transition, throughout the summer 2021 and the 2021-22 playing season. The first element of this is available within the Summer Activity Framework on the [Return to Rugby 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 1st January 2022 to be introduced to and develop them safely in training beforehand.

Therefore, from 1st 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 1st 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:**
 - 1st July 2021 to play in U18/19 teams
 - 1st December 2021 to play in open age adult teams

5. The regulations limiting combined teams are suspended for the 2021-22 season.

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 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.

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.

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.

WHAT COMBINED TEAMS FEMALE PLAYERS WILL BE ABLE TO PLAY IN



2020-2021		2021-2022			
From 29 th March 2021 to 31 st July 2021**		From 1 st August 2021 to 31 st December 2021		From 1 st January 2022 to 31 st 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*	Adult*
U18	U16 U17	U16 U17 U19	U16 U17 U19	U16 U17 U19	Adult*
U19	Adult	U18 Adult	U18 Adult	U18 Adult	U18 Adult

* From 17th 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 th March 2021 to 31 st July 2021**		From 1 st August 2021 to 31 st December 2021		From 1 st January 2022 to 31 st 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*	Adult*
U18	U17	U17 U19	U17 U19	U17 U19	Adult*
U19	Adult	U18 Adult	U18 Adult	U18 Adult	U18 Adult

* From 17th 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 Age Grade Information:

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.

