



AGE GRADE RUGBY

REGULATION & PLAYING UPDATES

Summer 2023 & Season 2023-24 v.2

Dated: 14th August 2023

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The Age Grade Regulation & Playing Updates document includes the modifications to regulations for summer 2023 and the 2023-24 season. The summer regulations kick off when the off-season starts on Tuesday 2nd May and the new season's regulations kick off from 1st August 2023; 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. The drive continues to be to enable as many options as we can for players to play, while ensuring 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 out of season activity in summer 2023 and for the 2023-24 season. 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.

Summer 2023

1. The Age Grade out of season regulations have permanently changed. An RFU Age Grade Summer Activity Framework will be followed for out of season activity.

There is a specific [Summer Activity page](#) with all the detail. The programme maintains the player safety/retention focus whilst ensuring an age grade off-season period remains in place. It enables more match opportunities and contact skills development than the previous regulations. This is applicable up to 2nd September 2023 when the new playing season starts.

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.

In summer 2023, this will greatly support the safe reintroduction and development of tackling for age grade players alongside the Tackle Height changes in community rugby. There is more information, resource and support for all involved in the game on the Tackle Height hub at www.englandrugby.com/tackleheight. We recommend everyone involved in Age Grade Rugby to take a look.

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 Scrummaging. These high quality resources are not only relevant to summer but will be useful in re-engaging players throughout

the season.

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

Season 2023-24

2. The end of the 2023-24 age grade season will be Monday 6th May 2024.

The Age Grade Season 2023-24 will run from m Saturday 2nd September 2023 until Monday 6th May 2024.

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

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

3. Age Grade Registration replaces the term affiliation.

In 2022-23, over 168,000 age grade club players were affiliated on the online Game Management System (GMS). An excellent effort by players, parents, volunteers and especially club registrars/administrators. Due to future changes across the wider game, this process will be called **Age Grade Registration** from July 2023.

The system will be ready to complete annual registration from Monday 3rd 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. Many did successfully in 2022. A reminder that the new season regulations come in from 1st August each year and the playing season starts on 3rd September.

The 2023-24 regulation clarifies that all Age Grade Club Players must be registered annually on the RFU's online 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. Please access the [Community Rugby Help Portal](#) for guides, videos and support for registration.

4. The regulations limiting combined teams in the U12 to 18 male game are suspended for the 2023-24 season, therefore allowing whole teams to combine up or down one age group.

This continues the change made to the 2021-22 and 2022-23 regulations after feedback of the benefits from clubs, schools and colleges. This will be in place for one more season to further strengthen the game where otherwise for some teams and players would be lost to the sport.

The default as ever is still for players to play in their own age group; recruitment and retention strategies are the first priority to field teams. There appear to be some examples where combined teams are being fielded as an easy alternative to employing such strategies; this is not what this suspension is for.

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 2023-24 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 (if approved) 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 players transitioning to open age. The assessment and approval process can be followed to gain dispensation to play in an U18/U19 combined team this season.

The circumstances, conditions and requirements for approval for both scenarios must be [as per Regulation 15](#) and absolutely grounded in strong risk assessment and safety principles. Combined team coaches must be prepared to flex to enable all players on both teams to be able to play safely and confidently; early communication with opponents before the day of the game is critical and our expectation.

5. Approval is required from the CB for playing up an age group (continued from 2022-23) and online forms and processes are available.

All playing out of age grade needs **prior approval from the CB**. This is for combining teams (15.2), for playing up (15.3) and for playing down (15.4). For clubs, the geographical CB will need to give approval and for colleges the England Colleges RFU. There are online forms to complete the application under Regulation 15 on the [Regulations page](#).

In schools, playing up must be approved by the Head or person in loco parentis and an online form will be available to support schools with this and make the process consistent with the rest of the age grade game. This form will also be on the [Regulations page](#).

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.

6. Approval Requirements for Under 11 Girls to play Under 12 are confirmed.

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 individual 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 apply and then the assessments and approvals required in regulation must be in place beforehand. Although this was in the 2022-23 text, it was not included in the table at 15.5. It has

now been added in for avoidance of any doubt.

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.

7. Clubs applying for Playing Adult Rugby approval need to define if they are applying for males or females or both.

For 17 year olds to play adult rugby, there is the two-step approval process.

Firstly, the club applies to be able to play 17 year olds in adult rugby by demonstrating it has the correct management processes and people in place to support and safeguard those involved. Then, once approved, the club applies for the specific individual player(s) to be approved by showing their ability and readiness to step up to the adult game.

The online forms for these processes have been well received by the game. However, greater definition in step 1 of whether the club is applying for approval for its male or female section, or both is required. There will usually be different people involved between the mens and womens rugby sections in the club, ensuring the appropriate safeguards and expertise are in place to support a 17 year old girl compared to a 17 year old boy for example.

The regulation and online form have been updated so clubs can define this in their application.

8. Regulations for Centre of Excellence players are clarified and confirmed.

We have confirmed in a number of areas where Centre of Excellence players can play and where they have options to experience other playing opportunities. The following regulations have been updated accordingly:

- a) Playing Up (15.3) – the regulation previously included reference to U16 Centre of Excellence players. There are no U16 players in the CoE, so this has been deleted.
- b) Playing Adult Rugby (15.6) – the requirements for approvals, who gives approval and the competitions that can be played in by Centre of Excellence players have been clarified.
- c) Performance Pathway Playing Up (15.7) – the circumstances, conditions and approvals required have been confirmed for Centre of Excellence players.

9. Approval of Competitive Activity, Rugby Camps and Tours can be applied for using an online form (as for Playing Out of Age Grade)

This relates to Regulation 15.9. The regulation has not changed but a new online form will be made available in before the 2023-24 season to support applications for approval to CBs for the activities included. This form will be similar to the Playing Out of Age Grade online forms which have reduced the burden on volunteers applying and those approving. It also provides a consistent approach across the country which is helpful for all concerned.

The link to the online form will be accessible in the Regulation 15 section of the [Regulations page](#).

10. Fifteen minutes of Activate preparation time can be added to the maximum minutes per day on match and festival/tournament days

Each age group has a maximum minutes of playing time per day as outlined in Regulation 15.11. An additional 15 minutes per day on top of this is permitted for delivery of the RFU's injury prevention exercise programme, Activate.

For example, U16s and above may engage in a total of 105 minutes of rugby activity on a match or festival day, where 90 minutes is attributable to playing and 15 minutes is attributable to the delivery of Activate.

Activate is an essential pillar of our drive on Player Safety and a vital element of any coach's toolkit. You can access the [RugbySafe Activate Toolkit here](#).

11. 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 2024-25 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.

12. Rules of Play in Regulation 15 reflect the change in Tackle Height.

In Regulation 15, for each age group there is a set of playing rules in the appendices. These provide the building blocks to introduce the game based on children's age, stage and both physical and emotional development. They can play anything up to the threshold of the rules, but not go beyond them.

This helps coaches to introduce new skills, to revisit techniques and to be flexible in the format of matches for the benefit of the players' understanding, safety and individual growth.

The rules of play have been updated to reflect the introduction of the new tackling laws across Community Rugby from 1st July 2023. The appendices are available in the Regulation 15 section of the [Regulations page](#).

There is more information, resource and support for all involved in the game on the Tackle Height hub at www.englandrugby.com/tackleheight. We recommend everyone involved in Age Grade Rugby to take a look.

Regulation 15 - Age Grade Rugby.

Regulation 15 still governs Age Grade Rugby across the game. The only exception which is referenced in 15.2 for the 2023-24 season is the Combining of boys U12 to U18 teams (see 4 above).

The rest of the regulations for 2023-24 are as per Regulation 15 and must be applied and followed. Failure to follow the regulations of the game leads to potential disciplinary action because of the risk that entails to players and the game.

The areas which we receive the most questions about are as follows. We recommend all involved with the age grade game take time to familiarise themselves with these so they can apply them confidently during the season:

- 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 **Community Rugby Help Portal** provides additional support and information about the Age Grade Regulations.

