

## **Guidance to the Age Grade Regulation 15**

### **1. General**

Regulation 15 and this supporting guidance have been devised to assist in developing young rugby players safely. We aim for rugby to be seen as an attractive, fun and enjoyable sport for all.

The U19 Law Variations, Regulation 15 (Age Grade), together with the Safeguarding Regulation (Regulation 21) must be adhered to. This guidance sets out to provide recommendations and best practice. It is recommended that clubs and schools ensure their lead coaches and team managers are aware of their responsibilities under the relevant regulations. The welfare of the young players must be the paramount criteria for any decisions and should be based on the personal development and enjoyment of the players.

Every effort should be made to ensure that players get the best possible experience from being in an age grade rugby squad. Clubs and schools running age grade rugby should formulate policies upon which good planning and sound team management can be based. The coach/manager(s) should, where appropriate, establish club/school links and ensure good communications exist with parents and guardians.

Clubs and schools need to define the responsibilities for those appointed to lead age grade squads and set out a clear, progressive and monitored coaching policy, supported by coach education. Clubs and schools should also control the fixtures and training schedules so these are not increased unduly by an over enthusiastic coach, where the risk of 'clubs within clubs' develops, and where issues of over-playing and over-commitment arise.

### **2. Assessments**

Clubs and Schools need to conduct appropriate assessments and should be clear to whom they delegate authority, and who has the competence to assess players.

A risk assessment for training and matches helps teachers and coaches produce a safe environment for operating age grade rugby. The purpose of a risk assessment should be to guide a common sense approach to identify hazards and then put in place control measures that minimise, or prevent such hazards causing harm.

We are training rugby's level 2 coaches to assess a player's ability to play at different levels. Clubs should use level 2 coaches' current experience for making decisions. Schools will have their own procedures and be able to judge who, other than PE trained staff, have the relevant experience and competence to assess players.

Wherever possible coaches should hold an RFU coaching award and all coaches and teachers are encouraged to extend, or refresh their coach training periodically. We hope clubs and schools will support coach development. Details of coaching awards are at [www.rfu.com/coach](http://www.rfu.com/coach)

Where possible it is best to document any decisions, such as the decision to play someone in a different age grade.

A Risk Assessments should be dynamic, adjusting even on a match day, to take into account unpredicted circumstances, conditions and specific players' needs, so as to reflect changing factors and identify steps to minimise the risk. For example, the risk assessment may cover use of pitches and facilities, arrangements for safeguarding, first aid provision and supporters codes of conduct and how this could be a risk to the players. An example for an assessment is provided below (Appendix A) although it is not drafted to be comprehensive.

A coach or manager can adopt their Club or School's assessment for travel, use of training equipment, and add to it any special medical needs and details relevant to their squad's playing and training schedule.

### 3. Defining Age Grades

Age grades are set at the start of a season and define the age a player will become during that season. For example, a 7 year old on 1<sup>st</sup> September (the start of the season) is an U8 and will become 8 years old during or after that season. Children must play within their own birth age grade although dispensations exist in the regulation to allow some flexibility, subject to satisfying the conditions of those dispensations.

	Key Stage 1		Key Stage 2			Key Stage 3			Key Stage 4			
Year Group	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12+
Age Group	U7		U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17-19

### 4. Playing out of Age Grade

Playing a young person out of their age grade, either 'up' or 'down', requires careful assessment by an experienced or qualified teacher, coach or team manager. Any decision should take into account the following points and should be governed by what is in the best needs of the individual:

- The social and personal development of the young player
- The physical development of the individual in relation to the rest of the team
- The skill level of the individual
- The position that they are playing within a team
- The level that they are playing is appropriate
- The impact this will have on others in the team and opponents

When assessing an U16 or an U17 for playing up two age grades, care is needed to be satisfied that the player is capable of doing so in the context of the planned playing and training programme. It is important to note that players yet to reach their 17th birthday must not play adult rugby, or engage in contact training with adults. Once a player has reached 17 they may play adult rugby provided the conditions of regulation 15.3.7 are met.

A parent or guardian should give consent to any club's assessment for a child to play up or down an age grade; it is important that any identified extra risks are explained in the discussion with the parent. Schools will have their own procedures for assessment and for informing or consulting with parents. In a school year group there are occasional over or under age children, who will routinely

train and play with their peers. Unless there is a significant physical difference, and subject to assessment, their inclusion in that age grade team is permitted; this means a child in a lower year group at school, may be allowed to play down an age grade at rugby. However, age rules in a competition may preclude them from playing in that competition. It is therefore important to always read the competition rules carefully when your team contains a child with a dispensation in it.

Managers or coaches of the opposition must be advised whenever a selected player is “playing down”. We recommend that managers and coaches give each other at least 48 hours notice. Clear communication is key and any decisions should be based around the players.

## **5. Season**

It is recommended that players have a sustained period of rest from contact rugby union over the summer. Players should be encouraged to try a variety of other sports at this time. The season dates are therefore to be enforced.

During the season playing and training times need to be controlled. Over-playing can cause fatigue leading to increased chances of injury, but also it has a long term impact that can produce staleness, lack of motivation and drop-out.

Over-playing and over-committing players is a concern, especially if players are involved in combinations of school, club and representative squad rugby. The Youth Structured Season provides a framework to plan match schedules and prioritise games. If a player is involved in multiple teams it is for the parent, teachers and coaches to communicate with all involved, and not for the player to be put in the middle of selecting his/her schedule. Clear communication between all parties is essential to ensure a common sense player-centered approach applies to help resolve clashes. In general, representative pathway matches should be prioritised over school or club fixtures.

### **5.1 Pre – season**

In the two weeks immediately prior to the start of the Season, U13s to U18s are permitted to participate in pre-season matches, festivals and skills revision training.

Pre-season training should focus on individual physical conditioning and contact skills, especially scrummage and tackle technique, alongside short conditioned games. Coaches should be mindful of the need of the players to fully rest and recover during and between sessions and to watch out for heat exhaustion, hydration and sun protection issues in the summer months.

Pre-season matches should be used for coaching and development purposes. Matches should be divided into thirds or quarters to enable substitutions, rest and some coaching. Festivals should not include knock-out stages or leagues (tournament) but should be formatted around playing on a round robin basis – preparation rather than competition.

Skills revision should consist mainly of handling, support and evasion skills. Contact technique can be included in this but at low level intensity and on an individual basis. The focus should be technique and not within a unit or competitive game situation. Tower of Power, core stability and tackle progressions (to walk) should form the basis of these practices.

## 5.2 Out of season

Players can participate in non-contact activities and other activities that fall within the definition of “Pre-Approved Activity” (as defined in regulation 15.6.5) that allow them to develop their confidence, decision making, game understanding and spatial awareness. Ideas for age appropriate rugby-based activity are provided on [www.rfu.com/summeractivities](http://www.rfu.com/summeractivities) and ideas for non-contact invasion games (where one team invades another’s territory) are provided on [www.rfu.com/non-contactinvasiongames](http://www.rfu.com/non-contactinvasiongames). These activities should not be compulsory and the option to take a break from the club for the duration of the summer should be respected and supported.

Touch rugby is fun for all ages and can be played as a mixed game all year. It allows players to enhance their rugby skills of ball handling, evasion and support play. It should, however, be risk assessed in the usual way in accordance with RFU Regulation 15.7.

Under 7s and 8s should not take part in contact rugby activities. At a latter stage of the U8 season coaches may wish to include some of the activities outlined in the RFU Tag to Tackle resource, which enables children to prepare for contact in an enjoyable and safe way, whilst retaining the core elements of evasion, handling and support. Tag to Tackle helps add variety to the coaching sessions. It is important that children are allowed to enjoy Tag rugby, before being introduced to the contact game.

## 6. Training

Sufficient time in the season should be given to train players and to develop their game understanding, skills and team cohesion. It is important that a balance is struck between training and playing. Coaches should avoid “doing their own thing” in arranging additional fixtures or mid- week training.

The frequency of matches in a team’s fixture list and the amount of training will depend on squad size and other events. We recommend that 2 Sunday training sessions are provided between each match from U7-U10, and from U11-U18 clubs should plan a training session between each game, exclusive of any mid-week training.

Mid-week training can be positive if it concentrates on player skill development, rather than on team preparation to win the next game, or training for the sake of holding training. Coaches must avoid the temptation to run too much team preparation. Clubs must be respectful of other community activities and players’ academic commitments and not put pressure on mid-week attendance that conflicts with these and then contributes to the issue of an over-commitment to rugby – a reason that turns many away from team sports, especially 15-18 year olds.

Duration of training time needs to be judged considering players many developmental factors, and their level of competition and conditions. Some guidance is shown:

Recommended Duration of Training Sessions	
	Minutes
U7 – U8	60
U9 – U10	90

## 6.1 Coach Conduct

It is important for adults to note that ALL players under the age of 17 may not play, or train with other adults. This also includes adult coaches who should not

- Demonstrate or participate in contact on/with a player who is under 17
- Hold a pad for a player to run into, or run into a pad held by a player who is under 17
- Demonstrates or participates in scrummage technique against a player under 17
- Demonstrates or participates in “lifting” of a player in a line-out who is Under 17
- Demonstrates or participates in ruck/maul technique on or with a player who is Under 17

## 7. Match Playing Time

In Regulation 15.14.1, players, schools and clubs must ensure that no player plays more than 35 matches per Season and plays no more than 90 minutes of match time in a day.

Although a club can ensure that this is the case in relation to matches for that club and a school can ensure that this is the case in relation to matches for that school, it is much more difficult if a player is playing for both a club and a school. In these circumstances, neither the club nor the school would be able to stipulate how many matches that player could play for the other. If a player is involved in club, school and constituent body rugby, it would therefore be for the parents or guardians of the player to work with both the club and the school in these circumstances in a practical and sensible way to plan the player’s match schedule and training to ensure that the player has adequate time for rest and recovery between matches. Clear communication is essential to ensure a common sense approach.

When managing large squads it is important that all players are given an opportunity to play, regardless of ability (but taking their safety into account). Rolling substitutions can ensure that all squad players get fair playing time. Other welfare aspects to consider are proactively resting tired or partially injured players and the gentle re-introduction of players post-injury or illness.

## 8. Festivals & Tournaments

Festivals and Tournaments give players the opportunity to experience playing against other teams.

Tournaments tend to be less inclusive, more selective and provide small league structures and/or knock-out elements with regulations that may denote age and squad size restrictions.

Festivals provide inclusive opportunity for children and young players to play other teams without the pressure to win. Many tournaments endeavour to be more inclusive by having winners at various levels.

Festivals and Tournaments need planning in liaison with your constituent body so that events in the constituent body area are properly managed and new events do not cut across existing established activity. Hence permission from your constituent body to run a Festival or Tournament is a regulation.

## 9. Non-contact rugby

The intent behind RFU Regulation 15.7 regarding contact is to prevent full on contact sessions in preparation to "win" in the new Season - this in turn may help in preventing injury, fatigue and in some cases demotivation. It certainly is not intended to prevent coaching of the technical aspects of contact which better prepare players to avoid injury. Therefore the stages of tackling (kneel, squat, stand walk), Tower of Power, core body positions and initial stages of supporting in the line-out using pads and bags are perfectly acceptable - individual development rather than team or unit preparation.

## 10. Summer Camps

Rugby Summer Camps are an opportunity to promote the game to new players and give a focus for players to experience general sports activity, or team-building and bonding. For more information on how to organise a camp please see the RFU Local Rugby Delivery Department.

## 11. Tours

Tours are an excellent way to build team spirit and visit other areas and experience other cultures. Organising a tour takes a lot of time and commitment and is a big responsibility. For more information on arranging a tour please see the Tour Guidance and Checklist, and the Touring with Children & Valuable Adults Safeguarding Guide before you start.

On tour you play to the host union's rules and regulations, and you may face players of a different age band. In advance of the tour you should ensure that you are aware of the rules and regulations of the union you are visiting and you communicate about this and team strengths & weaknesses with your opponents to help engineer a balanced match. It is essential to follow the regulations for Touring set out at RFU Regulation 10. In particular note the permission from the constituent body required to tour overseas.

## 12. Player Safety – General

- Player safety and development are always to be put above winning
- Ensure players are fit to play and have fully recovered from any injury and if necessary been cleared to play by a health care professional e.g. following concussion. All Age Grade player who have suffered a concussion MUST be cleared to return to play by a doctor.
- Ensure players are competent in the core skills appropriate for their age i.e. tackle, scrum
- Ensure players understand their responsibilities towards other players' safety
- Ensure players train and play at a level appropriate to their physical, psychological, and skill development. Physical mismatches are potentially unsafe and have no player development value.

## 13. Concussion:

Concussion puts a player at increased risk of further injury, which may be very serious and on very rare occasions fatal, particularly in youth players, whose brains are still developing and therefore more vulnerable. Concussion can also mimic a more serious head injury. Repeated concussions and/or concussion occurring before full recovery may be associated with long term health problems.

Expert opinion is that these situations must be avoided by managing concussion correctly. Coaches are therefore to make themselves and their players familiar with the RFU Concussion Guidelines at [www.rfu.com/headcase](http://www.rfu.com/headcase) and are to ensure the following:

- All players are to be provided with information on concussion awareness and encouraged to report any suspected concussion in themselves or other players.
- All players with suspected concussion **MUST** be removed from play immediately and referred for assessment by a health care professional.
- No player can return to play until fully recovered from their concussion.
- All players must undertake a Graduated Return To Play and **MUST** be cleared to play by a doctor before returning.
- Any player who sustains a repeated (i.e. second concussion in the same season) concussion **MUST** be seen by his/her GP/School Doctor to see if referral to a head injury specialist is required.

It is appreciated that schools will have their own policies on head injuries, yet we recommend that the above are followed if not part of such policy.

#### **14. Injury**

It is important to ensure that suitable first aid cover and equipment is provided at all contact training sessions and at matches. More details on what is suitable cover can be found at [www.rfu.com/firstaid](http://www.rfu.com/firstaid).

On the rare occasions when a serious injury does occur it is important that the RFU and local Constituent Body are notified as soon as possible to access our welfare support system. Clubs and Schools therefore need to report:

- An injury which results in the player being admitted to a hospital (other than attending an Accident and Emergency Department and being discharged home the same day).
- Deaths which occur during, or within six hours of a game finishing.

To notify the RFU Serious Injuries Administrator please phone on 0800 298 0102, or complete an injury report form, which can be downloaded or printed from the RFU website at [www.rfu.com/firstaid](http://www.rfu.com/firstaid), as soon as the seriousness of the player's condition is confirmed and within 48 hours of the game or training session. Please also provide the local Constituent Body with a copy of the form or details of the injury.

## Appendix A – example of a rugby risk assessment

Hazard	Control measures
<p><b>Playing Area</b></p> <p>Playing surfaces are visibly free from stones / glass / dog faeces</p> <p>The ground condition e.g. not frozen, too hard for contact</p>	<p>Coaches check the ground before a game or training session</p> <p>Light levels are adequate</p> <p>Water is available in hot weather; warm clothing for reserves in cold, weather etc</p>
<p><b>Players' clothing</b></p> <p>Clubs and Schools should have a policy relating to mouth guards It is recommended that correctly fitted mouth guards are worn during training and match activity</p> <p>Boots and studs should conform to BS636 (1983) and IRB kit regulations. Aluminium studs are recommended</p>	<p>Check for conformity with policy prior to kick off/training</p> <p>Referee or coach to check studs and ensure none are worn or have rough edges</p> <p>No jewellery of any sort is permitted</p>
<p><b>Registration and medical info</b></p> <p>The need to contact parents in an emergency or pass on vital medical information to medical professionals</p> <p>Specific medical needs of squad – note here: E.g. John Taylor is Asthmatic George Brown is hyperallergic to wasp stings</p>	<p>Squad management to ensure that this information is kept up to date, and is available when the squad train or play</p> <p>Coach to have John's ventolin (he self administers) and an epipen in case George is stung by a wasp. (Ensure Mrs Brown has shown coaches how to use the epipen)</p>
<p><b>First aid</b></p>	<p>Check First aid equipment is in good order and that medical supplies are adequate</p> <p>A first aid trained person is available and a phone is working to contact emergency services</p>
<p><b>Safeguarding and player injury &amp; Supervision of training or playing</b></p>	<p>Checks made that changing arrangements conform with safeguarding protocols</p> <p>Young players to be properly supervised to ensure no horseplay that could lead to accidents</p> <p>Coaches to ensure that contact training is appropriate and supervised. Warm up exercises prepare players for intense activity/ matches</p> <p>Club/School to ensure authorised, experienced, trained and qualified coaches are present</p> <p>Referees and coaches monitor play, especially scrums for safety</p>



	<p>and control team conduct on and off field. If game seriously imbalanced due to physical / skill levels that consideration is made to halting game or removing some players</p> <p>Spectators advised of expected standards of conduct and challenged if necessary to conform</p> <p>As far as possible ensure appointed Referee is of sufficient experience/ standard for match</p>
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