



RFU

GIRLS AGE BANDING CHANGES 2022-23

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS v.1.0

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INTRODUCTION

Following a three year review, consultation and development process, the age bandings in the girls game will change from the 2022-23 season. Through the superb efforts of everyone involved, the number of girls playing rugby is at a point where moving from three age bands to four is realistic and sustainable. This signals an exciting next phase for girls rugby in England and sets up further growth of the game over the next 5 to 10 years.

1. What are the changes to the girls age bands?

From season 2022/23, girls' age bands will move from the current U13, U15, U18 bands to:

- **U12s – single year age band**
- **U14s – two year age band**
- **U16s – two year age band**
- **U18s – two year age band**

2. What about Under 11 girls?

U11/Year 6 regulations will provide more flexibility so that girls can:

- Continue to play **U11 mixed rugby; and/or**
- Play **girls only U11 rugby; or**
- **'Play up' into U12s**, following appropriate playing up sign-off by parent and coaches, following the assessment/approval requirements outlined in [Regulation 15.3](#).

While the default priority in age grade rugby is always to play in your own age grade/year group, regulation will enable U11 girls to play with U12 girls **IF** they are ready. However, regulations will remain tight to prioritise player safety and continue to follow a building blocks approach to learning and development, to ensure players are physically ready/equipped to 'play up.'

We recognise there can be a knock-on benefit to the U12 single age group too, but the priority is the safety of the individual player and playing out of age grade remains the exception.

3. What are the changes to the rules of play?

The rules of play at the new age bands are the same as the boys game, no longer meaning inconsistency and inequality in the game played on the pitch. However, as in all age grade rugby, the rules can be flexed appropriately to the ability and experience of the players involved.

The regulations will provide the highest “threshold” for each age band; i.e. this is the maximum you can play to. The allowance in the age grade game will remain for teams to play at a reduced level (e.g. uncontested scrums or reduced numbers) to account for player readiness, ability and experience. This will continue to be emphasised and encouraged throughout the age grade game.

The age grade rules of play are in the Appendices to Regulation 15 [here](#).

The new age bands and rules of play within each band are summarised on the infographic below:



	YEAR 7 UNDER 12	YEAR 8 UNDER 13	YEAR 9 UNDER 14	YEAR 10 UNDER 15	YEAR 11 UNDER 16	YEAR 12 UNDER 17	YEAR 13 UNDER 18
CURRENT	U13		U15		U18		
NEW	U12 GIRLS SINGLE AGE BAND*	U14 GIRLS DUAL AGE BAND		U16 GIRLS DUAL AGE BAND		U18 GIRLS DUAL AGE BAND	
RULES OF PLAY	REG 15 APPENDIX 6 (ALIGNED TO U12 BOYS)	REG 15 APPENDIX 8 (ALIGNED TO U14 BOYS)		REG 15 APPENDIX 9 (ALIGNED TO U15-18 BOYS)		REG 15 APPENDIX 9 (ALIGNED TO U15-18 BOYS)	

Visit www.englandrugby.com/regulations

*Please read additional detail regarding flexibility for U11s

4. Why have we reviewed the age bands?

The women’s and girls’ game is moving into an exciting new phase having enjoyed an average year-on-year increase of 12% over the past 10 years. Thanks to the fantastic growth in profile and popularity, there are now enough girls playing rugby in England to be able to introduce the additional age band at Under 12 and to reduce the U18 triple age band to a dual band.

Feedback from the game highlighted the need to review the triple age band due to player welfare concerns as well as player development, enjoyment and social factors. There were increasing reports of concerns around expecting 15-year-olds to play with and against 17-year-olds who would turn 18 (adult) during the season, and vice versa.

This was the same at U13, where expecting current Under 11s or new Year 7/Under 12 players to step into a two-year age band, at this major entry point to rugby for girls, presented safety and retention concerns.

5. What is the purpose of the change?

- To create smaller age bands where girls are training and competing against more similar ages and

physiques to support player welfare and skill development.

- To retain teenage players and support their transition – especially 16-18 -year-olds - by no longer having a three-year age band at U18.
- To support the future growth and sustainability of girls' rugby.
- To align playing rules to the boys' game for clarity, consistency and equity as we work towards an equal approach in everything we do.
- To support the increasing number of girls currently playing Kids First Rugby to transition into girls' rugby if they wish. Moving from U11 mixed rugby to U13 girls' rugby has been seen by many as too big a jump. It is important to note there will be more flexibility around the type of rugby U11s can play (see below), so teams don't need to worry about breaking any chain they have previously built.

6. What happens next?

We recognise clubs, schools/colleges, parents and players will have questions around implications on competitions, pathway, regulations and data systems, and support will be required for volunteers, coaches and match officials.

A detailed implementation plan is ready with full guidance and support planned from November 2021, which will be communicated throughout the rest of this season. We will include targeted engagement in the New Year with key groups such as CB Women & Girls representatives (already underway), club volunteers/leads, girls' rugby coaches and referees, schools/colleges, competition organisers and player pathway personnel. The aim is to help everyone plan well ahead of the new age bands coming into effect for the 2022/23 season.

The Girls Age Banding Changes FAQs will continually be updated and provide further detail around the changes and rules of play.

7. Will the new age banding mean changes to the player pathway and national competitions?

The new age bands require some reviewing of the player pathway and national competitions, which currently take place at U18 and U15. Any resulting changes will also be confirmed early in 2022 and included with the Age Grade Playing Calendar to support planning for the new season.

8. What other changes to regulations will be required?

There are a few other areas of [Regulation 15](#) that will be re-written to reflect the new age bands and consider consistency between the boys and girls game, including:

- Out of season activity in Reg 15.8 will be redefined to clarify permitted activity for both the male single U14 age group and for the female dual U14 (and U13) age band.
- Duration of matches in Reg 15.11 will be redefined to clarify permitted maximum timings for both the male single U15 age group and for the female dual U16 (and U15) age band.

9. Can girls play up into the U18 age band?

Playing up in the U18 age band under the conditions and assessment requirements in Reg 15.3 will be permitted for U16/Year 11 girls (not U15/Year 10) in the Centre of Excellence programme. This is to support the development, if deemed appropriate, of girls on the post-CB player pathway and to ensure greater gender equity. Approval will be required from the Centre of Excellence or CB. As per current Reg 15.5 for male players, they will not be permitted to play in the front row of a contested scrum.

The Regulations can be found [here](#).

10. Are playing numbers robust enough post pandemic to implement these changes?

The pandemic delayed this progression, however, having conducted research into girls' participation levels post Covid, we are confident numbers are still strong enough to proceed with the implementation of these changes.

The Community Game Board (CGB) asked the review group to check that girls participation numbers post-covid still supported the original recommendations. The review group did this and presented back to CGB that it was confident numbers are still strong enough to proceed with the recommendations, which were then endorsed by the CGB and Governance system, concluding with approval from RFU Council on 19 November 2021.

11. What if we don't have enough U12s for a team?

A key ingredient to the successful growth of the girls game in the last 10 years has been the approach by everyone involved. We strongly encourage the same joined-up approach in strengthening the new age bands. Club clustering, pitch up and play events and flexible formats that have built the participation base and provided great opportunities for girls until now, will need to continue to be elements of rolling out the new age bands.

Flexibility is available across age grade rugby with numbers and game elements able to be modified back to ensure the game being played is right for the players on the pitch. The rules of play are the maximum threshold that can be played to. If reducing the pitch size, playing with less players, going for uncontested scrums or modifying contact at the breakdown are necessary to be player-centred this is fine and encouraged as good practice. This will help build up the U12 band in the coming seasons.

At U12, this joint approach will be vital in the next couple of years. The proactive culture in the women and girls game gives a strong foundation for success, along with the potential opportunity to host the RWC in 2025. We are also working with our national education sector partners to build participation in Year 7 rugby at school and expand the pipeline on into club rugby.

12. Will help be available to recruit and support new volunteers and coaches for the additional age band?

Yes, we recognise that a fourth age bands requires more volunteer and coach capacity. The recently released Volunteer Recruitment Toolkit is an excellent resource, with step by step guidance, tips and resources to help build your volunteer base. We strongly encourage clubs and schools to use the toolkit.

The Volunteer Recruitment Toolkit can be found [here](#).

While the U12 single age group requires additional volunteers, it also gives us the entry point into girls only rugby and aligns with the academic system. This takes away the pressure of having primary and secondary school players as a formal dual age band and provides significant potential for growing the game. The high profile of the Red Roses and potential of Rugby World Cup are great drivers for girls to try the game when they reach secondary school.

For example, a group of U12 girls playing at school can then go to a club and move up the age groups as a core group on their rugby journey. There will also be a new intake of U12s each year to help with the development of teams in the clubs.

13. The changes seem appropriate, but is the game ready?

There are broad plans in place within the 'Every Rose Action Plan' to increase the number of volunteers, coaches and match officials and to support their development and deployment. If we are successful in our bid to host RWC 2025 then this is an area that would see significant additional resource and funding.

14. Are there future plans as part of this review?

The changes in this review are the basis of girls rugby going forwards. It is important to focus energy on the transition to the new age bands and consolidate them over the coming years. This does require change in the girls game and therefore we need to ensure appropriate time is taken to support everyone involved to bed this in.

However, the development of the playing base at all ages will continue to be closely monitored. This ensures that we keep our eye on the broad participation base and whether there are opportunities or challenges to be addressed.

15. What was the process to decide these changes and who was consulted?

Louise Latter, RFU Women & Girls Council Rep chaired the Girls Game Review Task Group which consisted of a blend of volunteers, sector experts and staff from across the country and some external organisations. The volunteers were specifically from the women's & girls' game.



The review group was formed to review the girls game as a whole, to review the current structure, to evaluate its effectiveness in maximising participation at all levels and to create a direction of travel for the player journey for girls of all abilities into the adult recreational and performance game.

The review was to future-proof the girls' game to cope with increasing numbers of players so we looked at what this would look like over the next 10 years. Ultimately, it was to ensure that the girls age grade game remained player centred, development driven, and competition supported.

We identified four key areas for the scope of work:

1. Structure and age bandings (U7 to U18)
2. The player journey and pressures that hinder transition into the club game (U7 to U18)
3. Formats of the game and access to the performance pathway (U7 to U18)
4. Consider a seamless transition into the adult game.

16. What information was collected to help the Review Task Group?

We compiled stats from the RFU, Club data, Schools/Colleges and youth partnerships that fed into forecasting what the girls' game would look like over a ten-year period (this was before the arrival of Covid). Four sub-groups conducted their own surveys and research into their areas.

For example, the game volunteers on the working groups ran a survey within their CBs. This was also supported by feedback regularly requested from the game, either by the Women & Girls CB Leads or via social media

