

# 15.1 General Regulation and Playing Principles

**15.1.1** Regulation 15 applies to the playing, training and coaching of all variations of rugby for all age groups up until and including Under 18s, including Under 19s playing down into Under 18s rugby ('Age Grade Rugby'). This Regulation 15 applies to both genders unless indicated otherwise.

**15.1.2** A player's age grade is determined by their age at midnight on 31st August at the beginning of each Season and that age grade applies for the whole Season. Players must play in their own age grade unless permitted to play outside their age grade in the limited circumstances set out in these regulations. Players move to their new age grade from 1 August each Season. Age grades and corresponding school years are shown in the first column in the table at 15.5 below.

**15.1.3** Players and Match Officials must comply with the World Rugby Laws of the Games, subject to any permitted Law Variations set out in Appendices of Regulation 15 and such other Law trials and variations as the RFU may adopt.

**15.1.4** All Age Grade Club Players must be registered annually on the RFU's online registration platform: (a) for new Age Grade Players at a Club, within 45 days of them first joining the Club; and (b) for existing Age Grade Players at a Club, within 45 days of them starting a new Season at the Club.

**15.1.5** Constituent Bodies and/or event organisers may require registration cards and copies of any special dispensations issued to be taken to each match or festival. Team managers must produce these documents for inspection by the opposition if requested.

**15.1.6** Disciplinary matters relating to Age Grade rugby shall follow the procedures set out in Appendix 6 of RFU Regulation 19.

**15.1.7** All applications for playing out of age grade in clubs, schools and colleges (Combining, Playing Up, Playing Down and U17s Playing Adult Rugby) must be made on the RFU online forms provided.

## 15.2 Combining of Age Grades

**15.2.1** Certain age grades are permitted to be combined together for training and playing as set out in the table at Regulation 15.5, save in respect of the combining of the male age grades from Under 14s to Under 18s which shall be permitted in respect of the 2024/25 Season.

**15.2.2** If age grades are being combined, the following conditions must be met:

- (a)** the school or club does not have a sufficient number of players to make up a team in the single age grade;
- (b)** the school or club completes the online Combining Out of Age Grade Form and process;
- (c)** the school's headteacher or the club's Constituent Body provides written approval (such approval to be valid for up to one season only);
- (d)** no more than a third of the players of each team on the pitch at any time can be from the older age grade (as shown in Regulation 15.5);
- (e)** the team plays to the rules of the younger age grade;
- (f)** the provisions of Regulation 15.5 are followed in relation to U11 girls and the girls U12, 14, 16 and 18 age bands; and
- (g)** if approval is given, the club/college/school must notify the opposing team at least 24 hours in advance of the game although an opposition's objection shall not prevent the player from playing.

## 15.3 Playing Up

**15.3.1** Certain age grades are permitted to play up one or two age grades for training and playing if recommended by the player's club, school or college as set out in the table at Regulation 15.5.

**15.3.2** If players are playing up, the following conditions must be met:

- (a) in each case an appropriate assessment is carried out (and documented) by the club/school/college. Best practice on carrying out an appropriate assessment is set out in the [Age Grade Codes of Practice](#);
- (b) the club/school/college completes the online 'Playing Up' Out of Age Grade Form and process;
- (c) in clubs, approval is obtained from an individual who has parental responsibility for the player, the club's Age Grade Chair and from the club's Constituent Body;
- (d) in colleges (and irrespective of whether that college plays against other institutions), approval is obtained from an individual who has parental responsibility for the player (who may be the college principal in loco parentis), from the college's principal, and from England Colleges RFU;
- (e) in schools (and irrespective of whether that school plays against other institutions), approval is obtained from an individual who has parental responsibility for the player (who may be the school's headteacher in loco parentis) and from the school's headteacher;
- (f) in respect of school or college rugby for U16s and above, the individual who has parental responsibility for the player (who may be the principal/headteacher in loco parentis) and the school headteacher or college principal is informed that it is possible that this dispensation may result in the player playing with and/or against one or more U19 players who are playing down in accordance with Regulation 15, and the assessment by the school or college includes reference to this age imbalance; and
- (g) if approval is given, the club/college/school must notify the opposing team at least 24 hours in advance of the game although an opposition's objection shall not prevent the player from playing.

## 15.4 Playing Down

**15.4.1** Certain age grades are permitted to play down one or two age grades for training and playing if recommended by the player's club, college or school as set out in the table at Regulation 15.5 and only in the following circumstances:

- (a) the player must be in a younger academic year at school/college than the player's academic birth year; or
- (b) the player's safety may be compromised due to their small stature in comparison to other players in the same age grade or due to a developmental or a behavioural issue; or
- (c) for intra and inter-school/college matches only, the player is an Under 19 (Year 14) and must be in at least their third year of study at the school/college and in their second year of their first full level 3 qualification. They must not have previously completed a full level 3 qualification or embarked on an 'additional' one year programme post 16 at any level.

**15.4.2** If players are playing down an age grade, the following additional conditions must be met:

- (a) in each case an assessment of risk to the individual and the potential players they will play with and against is carried out by the club/college/school. In respect of U19s playing down, the assessment must take into account the possibility of the U19 playing with and against 15-, 16- and 17-year old players. Best practice as to how to carry out an assessment is set out in the [Age Grade Codes of Practice](#);
- (b) the club/school/college completes the online 'Playing Down' Out of Age Grade Form and process;
- (c) in clubs, the approval of an individual who has parental responsibility for the player and the club's Age Grade Chair, and for all ages, the approval of the club's Constituent Body is obtained;

(d) in colleges (and irrespective of whether that college plays against other institutions), the approval of an individual who has parental responsibility for the player (who may be the principal in loco parentis) and the college principal, and the approval of England Colleges RFU is obtained;

(e) in schools (and irrespective of whether that school plays against other institutions), the approval of an individual who has parental responsibility for the player (who may be the headteacher in loco parentis) and the approval of the school headteacher is obtained, and for U19s playing down, the approval of England Rugby Football Schools Union is obtained;

(f) if approval is given, the club/college/school must notify the opposing team at least 24 hours in advance of the game although an opposition's objection may not prevent the player from playing;

(g) any permission to play down is valid for up to one season only and the player must remain in that lower age grade for the entire Season; and

(h) For U18s and younger and if playing down two age grades, the written approval of the RFU Legal & Governance Director must also be obtained by sending a completed copy of the 'Playing Down' Out of Age Grade Form to [regulations@rfu.com](mailto:regulations@rfu.com).

## 15.5 Playing Out of Age Grade Table

AGE GRADE (SCHOOL YEAR)	COMBINING AGE GRADES	PLAYING UP	PLAYING DOWN
<b>MALE AND FEMALE PLAYERS</b>			
U10s (Yr5)	U10s are permitted to be combined with U9s or with U11s in accordance with  15.2.2 (max 3 U11s on the pitch)	No playing up is permitted	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with  15.4
U11s (Yr6)	U11s are permitted to be combined with U10s or with U12s in accordance with  15.2.2 (max 3 U12s on the pitch)	U11 girls are permitted to play with U12 girls in accordance with 15.3.2.  U11s boys are not permitted to play up.	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
From U12s and above, mixed rugby is no longer permitted and different regulations apply to male and female players as below			

<b>FEMALE PLAYERS</b>			
U12s (Yr7)	No combining is permitted	No playing up is permitted	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U13s (Yr8)	U13s are permitted to play with U14s	No playing up permitted	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U14s (Yr9)	U14s are permitted to play with U13s	No playing up permitted	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U15s (Yr10)	U15s are permitted to play with U16s	No playing up permitted	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U16s (Yr11)	U16s are permitted to play with U15s	No playing up permitted	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U17s (Yr12)	U17s are permitted to play with U18s	17 year olds are permitted to play up in accordance with  15.6 & 15.7	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U18s (Yr13)	U18s are permitted to play with U17s	18 year olds are permitted to play up in accordance with  15.6 & 15.7	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U19s	No combining permitted	Not applicable as U19s are adult players	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4

<b>MALE PLAYERS</b>			
U12s (Yr7)	U12s are permitted to be combined with U11s or with U13s in accordance with  15.2.2 (max 4 U13s in a team on the pitch)	Yes, playing up one grade is permitted in accordance with 15.3.2	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U13s (Yr8)	U13s are permitted to be combined with U12s in accordance with 15.2.2 (max 4 U13s in a team on the pitch)  Combining with U14s is permitted (max 4 U14s in a team on the pitch)	Yes, playing up one age grade is permitted in accordance with 15.3.2	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U14s (Yr9)	Combining with U15s is permitted (max 5 U15s in a team on the pitch)	Yes, playing up one age grade is permitted in accordance with 15.3.2	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U15s (Yr10)	Combining with U16s is permitted (max 5 U16s in a team on the pitch)	Yes, playing up one age grade is permitted in accordance with 15.3.2	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U16s (Yr11)	Combining with U17s is permitted (max 5 U17s in a team on the pitch)	Yes, in accordance with 15.3.2 and below:  playing up one age grade is permitted, including playing in the front row;  playing up two age grades is permitted but not including in the front row of contested scrums in  15 a-side rugby	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4

U17s (Yr12)	U17s are permitted to play with U18s  Combining with U16s is permitted(max 5 U17sin a team on the pitch)	U17s are permitted to play with U18s, and 17 year olds are permitted to play up in accordance with  15.6 & 15.7	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U18s (Yr13)	U18s are permitted to play with U17s	18 year olds are permitted to play up in accordance with  15.6 & 15.7	U18s are permitted to play with U17s  Playing down two age grades is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U19s	No combining permitted	Not applicable as U19s are adult players	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4

## 15.10 Clothing and Goggles

**15.10.1** Age grade players are permitted to wear base layers (including both long and short sleeve tops and full length tights) provided they comply with the World Rugby Regulatory requirements set out in World Rugby Regulation 12 and Law 14 which are available on [www.worldrugby.org](http://www.worldrugby.org). The Rugby Safe Essential Guide provides guidance on base layers in the frequently asked questions:

<https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/playing/player-welfare-rugby-safe>

**15.10.2** Players of all age grades are permitted to wear spectacles, glasses or specifically designed sports goggles in all forms of non-contact rugby. Players are permitted to wear specifically designed sports goggles in any form of contact rugby only where the following conditions are satisfied:

- (a) the sports goggles must be dispensed by a General Optical Council (“GOC”) registered dispensing optician or an optometrist registered with the GOC; and
- (b) the player must have written confirmation from the registered dispensing optician or optometrist that:
  - i. the goggles are required to correct the vision of the player or are required to protect the player’s eyes due to a medical or optical condition, to enable the playing of rugby union; and
  - ii. the goggles do not substantially restrict any normal field of vision and are suitable for use in evasion contact sports; and
  - iii. the goggles do not constitute a physical danger to the player or other players; and
  - iv. the player is not capable of wearing contact lenses and why this is the case; and
- (c) the player must have the consent of their parents or guardian to the wearing of the sports goggles.

**15.10.3** Clubs/schools must report any injuries caused as a result of the sports goggles to the RFU Community Medical Team by emailing [sportsinjuriesadmin@rfu.com](mailto:sportsinjuriesadmin@rfu.com) and the player’s parents or guardian must report the injury to the dispensing optician or optometrist who prescribed the goggles.

Note: If an optician is registered with the GOC they will be listed on the GOC's list of registered members which is available at [www.optical.org](http://www.optical.org). Please check the list by inserting the name of the individual

## 15.11 Duration of Matches, Coaching and Training Sessions

15.11.1 All players, match officials, schools, colleges and clubs must ensure that no player plays more than 35 matches per Season and in respect of all matches and festivals, plays no more than the maximum playing times set out in the table below:\*

AGE GRADE/BAND	MAXIMUMMINUTES EACH HALF	MAXIMUMMINUTES PER DAY
U11s & U12s	20	70
U13s & U14s	25	80
U15s	30	90
U16s and above (including the girls dual U16/15 age band)	35	90

*\* save that for each Age Grade group an additional 15 minutes per day shall be allowed 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.*

Important guidance as to playing times and durations for single fixtures, festivals, tournaments and coaching and training sessions are set out in the [Age Grade Codes of Practice](#).

15.11.2 No extra time is permitted in any match except that added for injury time.

15.11.3 Matches must be brought to an end if:

(a) at Under 7s to Under 13s the try difference rises to more than six; or

(b) at Under 14s to Under 18s (including the girls dual U14/13 age band) the points difference is more than 50 points.

## 15.12 Half Game Rule

15.12.1 Other than set out in Regulation 15.12.2, all clubs, teams, schools and colleges must ensure that each player selected in every match day squad plays at least half of the Available Playing Time. This requirement is mandatory across the entire age grade game and in respect of all contact and non-contact age grade matches, including 7 a-side matches and festivals/tournament matches.

15.12.2 In respect of the U18 Academy Competition only, all clubs must ensure that each player selected in every match day squad plays at least 20% of the Available Playing Time.

**15.12.3** 'Available Playing Time' means the total amount of time allocated to a particular match (or matches) by RFU Regulations, any competition specific regulations or by the coaches of the playing teams (in circumstances where those coaches have agreed to play a shortened match). Any stoppages that may occur during a match are not to be taken into account when calculating the Available Playing Time. For example, where a match is 70 minutes long, the Available Playing Time is 70 minutes and each player must receive a minimum of 35 minutes playing time under the Half Game Rule. Where a team is participating in multiple matches in one day, the Total Available Playing Time will be the total number of minutes allocated to all matches played by the team on that day; and in all cases (a) includes playing time spent off the pitch due to a temporary injury or yellow card and (b) excludes playing time that would have been available had a match not been abandoned or shortened due to bona fide reasons or in accordance with Regulation 15.11.3.

**15.12.4** Regulation 15.12.1 will not apply in the event that a player is permanently removed from the match:

(a) due to an injury incurred during the match;

(b) as a result of a bona fide risk of injury; or

(c) as a result of a red card or in the event of the referee requesting that a player be permanently removed from the match.