

# AGE GRADE RUGBY GUIDANCE

July 2016



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## 1. General

Regulation 15<sup>1</sup>, Regulation 9 and this supporting Guidance have been devised to assist in developing Age Grade Players safely. This Guidance aims to expand on these areas for greater understanding.

The RFU's aim is for rugby to be an inclusive and enjoyable sport for all, with the children being at the centre at all times. If at any time advice is required on the interpretation of any aspect of the RFU Regulations this may be sought by contacting [Regulations@RFU.com](mailto:Regulations@RFU.com).

Age Grade Rugby is the structured progression to cover the introduction, teaching, playing, coaching and refereeing of the Game in stages from U6 to U18. An Age Grade Player means all male and female players participating in Age Grade Rugby from U6s to U18s. In legal terms, a child is anyone under the age of 18; for the purposes of this Guidance, Age Grade Players include 18 & 19 year olds playing for U18s teams. Throughout this document the term "child" and "children" is used to refer to these players as well as "children and young people"; these terms are used to refer to the same group of individuals and are not mutually exclusive.

It is important to note that RFU Regulation 15 applies to schools and colleges as well as clubs. Every effort should be made to ensure that boys and girls get the best possible experience from being in a Rugby squad. Clubs, schools and colleges running Age Grade Rugby should formulate policies upon which good planning and sound team management can be based.

The coach or team manager should, where appropriate, establish club/education links and ensure good communications exist with parents and guardians as well as local schools and colleges to ensure all players have the appropriate balance of playing opportunities.

The World Rugby U19 Law Variations<sup>2</sup>, Age Grade Regulations (RFU Regulation 15)<sup>3</sup>, together with the Safeguarding Regulations (RFU Regulation 21)<sup>4</sup> and the Player Safety Regulation (RFU Regulation 9)<sup>5</sup> must be adhered to by all those involved in Age Grade Rugby. This Guidance provides recommendations, statements, codes and best practice guidance on how best to apply these regulations.

It is recommended that clubs and schools ensure that their organisers, coaches and team managers are aware of their responsibilities under the relevant regulations. The welfare of children and young people playing rugby union must be the paramount criteria for any decisions made and should be based on the personal development and enjoyment of all children.

Regulation 15.1.2 states that boys and girls play mixed rugby until they reach the U12 age grade; once they are in the U12s age grade girls must play in a girls' U13 team. Girls' teams are banded to make allowances for the reduced number of players; so U12s and U13s play together, U14s and U15s play together and U16s, U17s and U18s play together. It should be noted that while the majority are consistent with the boy's game, there are some different

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<sup>1</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/)

<sup>2</sup> [www.laws.worldrugby.org/?variation=1](http://www.laws.worldrugby.org/?variation=1)

<sup>3</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/)

<sup>4</sup> Regulation 21: [www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/)

For the RFU Safeguarding Policy see: [www.englandrugby.com/governance/safeguarding/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/safeguarding/)

<sup>5</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/)

playing rules for girls, which may be found in Appendix 3 of Regulation 15<sup>6</sup>. However, it is important to recognise that there are some regulations which do not apply to the girl's game such as Regulation 15.3.5 relating to the playing up of U12s to U15s, Regulation 15.3.7 relating to adult rugby and in limited aspects Regulation 15.4.3 about the dispensation for playing down an age grade.

It is advised that if there is any doubt about the interpretation of a regulation advice is sought from the RFU.

### ***Age Grade Responsibility:***

***Clubs, schools and colleges should define the responsibilities for those appointed to lead Age Grade Rugby squads and set out a clear, progressive and monitored coaching policy, supported by coach education and development. Clubs and institutions should also control the fixtures and training schedules so that these are not increased unduly by an over enthusiastic coach, where the risk of 'clubs within clubs' develop and where issues of over-playing and under-playing arise.***

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<sup>6</sup>[www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/Governance/Regulations/01/30/47/24/RFU\\_Regulation\\_15\\_Appendix\\_3\\_Neutral.pdf](http://www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/Governance/Regulations/01/30/47/24/RFU_Regulation_15_Appendix_3_Neutral.pdf)

## 2. Age Grade Player Welfare

Those involved in Age Grade Rugby should have the following in mind when making decisions involving children and young people in rugby union:

- Children and young people's safety and development should always be put above winning.
- Children should be fit to play, have fully recovered from any injury and if necessary have been reviewed by a health care professional e.g. following concussion. All Age Grade Players who have suffered a concussion<sup>7</sup> should be reviewed by a doctor before they return to contact training and playing. Verbal confirmation from a parent or guardian that their child/ward has been seen by a doctor and is clear of symptoms is satisfactory and clubs and schools are advised to keep a record of such confirmation.
- Ensure children are competent in the core skills appropriate for their age and position i.e. tackle, scrum etc.
- Ensure children understand their responsibilities towards other children's safety.
- Ensure children train and play at a level appropriate to their physical, psychological and skill development, within the constraints of the regulations. Physical mismatches, which might occur as a result of a child with exceptionally advanced physical and/or technical development playing in an inappropriate age grade, are catered for in the regulations.

### ***Player Streaming:***

- ***The streaming of players within an age group into graded squads (such as A and B teams) based on perceived ability is an issue. The RFU believes that this, especially at primary school ages, is not inclusive or within the game's ethos and values. Every effort should be made to ensure that all children and young people are provided with equal opportunities to play, train and develop alongside their peers in an open and transparent manner. Some coaches are too quick to substitute good coaching and teamwork development for streaming of players. This does not mean that there should be no differentiation based on merit, attendance and development, but does mean that players being given equal opportunities to play and compete should be prioritised.***

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<sup>7</sup>[www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/MyRugby/Headcase/01/30/49/51/3RecogniseandRemove\\_English.pdf](http://www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/MyRugby/Headcase/01/30/49/51/3RecogniseandRemove_English.pdf)

### 3. Injury

RugbySafe<sup>8</sup> is the RFU's overarching player safety and wellbeing programme to support clubs, schools, colleges, universities and participants at all levels of the game. It has five different strands all of which contribute and provide input to how the game should be played and managed to ensure that rugby is as safe as possible.

It is important to ensure that suitable first aid cover and equipment is provided at all contact training sessions and at matches. RFU Regulation 9 (Player Safety) and the RFU Community First Aid and Immediate Care guidelines<sup>9</sup> set out the first aid provision clubs, schools and colleges should have in place for Age Grade training and matches. Details regarding the playing environment<sup>10</sup> are also available.

On the rare occasions when a serious injury<sup>11</sup> does occur it is important that the RFU and the local Constituent Body are notified as soon as possible to access the RFU's welfare support system. Clubs, schools and colleges therefore must report:

- Any 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); and
- Deaths which occur during, or within six hours of a game finishing.

To notify the RFU Serious Injuries Administrator please phone 0800 298 0102, or complete an injury report form, which can be downloaded or printed from the RFU website<sup>12</sup> as soon as the seriousness of the player's condition is known 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 in accordance with their reporting procedure.

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<sup>8</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe/](http://www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe/)

<sup>9</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe/playing-environment](http://www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe/playing-environment)

<sup>10</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe/playing-environment](http://www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe/playing-environment)

<sup>11</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe](http://www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe)

<sup>12</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe](http://www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe)

## 4. Concussion

Concussion puts a player at increased risk of further injury, which may be very serious and on very rare occasions fatal, particularly in children and young people, 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 should be avoided by managing concussion correctly. Coaches should therefore make themselves and their players familiar with the RFU's Concussion Guidelines<sup>13</sup>.

### **Recommendations and Code:**

***The RFU has produced a short animation video<sup>14</sup> to inform children and young people as well as coaches and parents about concussion, its signs and symptoms and how it should be managed. Preventing concussions occurring in the first place is the aim, and there are some measures that can be taken during rugby training and games that have the potential to reduce the number of concussions that occur.***

### **Recommendations include:**

- Ensure the playing or training area is safe;***
- Ensure correct techniques are coached and performed consistently by all players particularly the tackle to avoid head impacts in particular; and***
- Different variants of the game should be used including touch to provide an appropriate level of contact to support player development and reduce the risk of injury;<sup>15</sup>***
- Everyone involved in Age Grade Rugby should ensure the following: All players are provided with information on concussion awareness and encouraged to report any suspected concussion in themselves or other players;***
- All players with suspected concussion should 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 should undertake a Graduated Return to Play and should be reviewed by a doctor before returning to contact training or playing; and***
- Any player who sustains a repeated (i.e. second concussion in the same season) concussion should 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<sup>16</sup>, yet the RFU recommends that the above are followed if not part of such policy.***

<sup>13</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/headcase](http://www.englandrugby.com/headcase)

<sup>14</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/headcase](http://www.englandrugby.com/headcase)

<sup>15</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/MyRugby/Headcase/01/30/49/17/coachesgeneralinfo\\_Neutral.pdf](http://www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/MyRugby/Headcase/01/30/49/17/coachesgeneralinfo_Neutral.pdf)

More information can also be found at: [www.englandrugby.com/my-rugby/players/player-health/concussion-headcase/coaches/](http://www.englandrugby.com/my-rugby/players/player-health/concussion-headcase/coaches/)

<sup>16</sup> [www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/concussion-guidelines](http://www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/policy/research-publications/concussion-guidelines)



## 5. Defining Age Grades

Age Grades are established at the start of a season as set out in RFU Regulation 15.2. The cut-off point is midnight on 31 August, so, a 7 year old on 1<sup>st</sup> September (the start of the season) is an U8; the child will have their 8<sup>th</sup> birthday during that season.

Children **must** play within their own birth Age Grade although limited dispensations exist within RFU Regulation 15 to allow some flexibility, subject to satisfying the conditions of those dispensations. Below is a table which sets out the Age Grades in relation to school year groups as well as those for girls showing when they move from playing mixed rugby to girl's teams.

The Age Grade Rugby timeline<sup>17</sup> is a useful info graphic showing the changes in the Rules of Play, progression from tag through to the full 15 a-side games and the types of competitions which may be played at each Age Grade.

	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	13	
Age Grade	U6	U7	U8	U9	U10	U11	U12	U13	U14	U15	U16	U17	U18	
Girls' Age Grades	Mixed with boys age groups until the end of U11 season						U13		U15		U18			

### 5.1 Playing out of Age Grade

There are a few simple “Golden Rules” which should be remembered when considering whether or not a player may play out of age grade. These are as follows:

- Children and young people must play rugby in their correct age grade;
- Children must not play in any matches or festivals until they are 6 years old;
- There is no “playing up” an age grade until U12 (for boys);
- There are no dispensations in the girls’ game due to the age banding which already exists;
- U7s and U8s must not play contact rugby under any circumstances;
- Children must not play with adults until they are 17 (boys) (with conditions) or 18 (girls) ; and
- Only in exceptional circumstances may children “play down” an age grade.

<sup>17</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/MyRugby/Players/01/31/70/41/AGPoster\\_A3\\_Neutral.pdf](http://www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/MyRugby/Players/01/31/70/41/AGPoster_A3_Neutral.pdf)



## ***Playing Up and Down conditions:***

***The conditions relating to playing out of Age Grade are set out in RFU Regulations 15.3 and 15.4 and should be read in conjunction with this Guidance.***

***Playing a child out of their Age Grade, either ‘up’ or ‘down’, may only be done in accordance with RFU Regulations 15.3 and 15.4 and requires careful assessment by an experienced coach, team manager or qualified teacher. Any decision should take into account the following points and should be governed by what is in the best needs of the individual child:***

- ***the social and personal development of the child;***
- ***the physical development of the child in relation to the rest of the team;***
- ***the skill level of the child;***
- ***the position that they are playing within a team;***
- ***the level that they are playing is appropriate; and***
- ***the impact this will have on others in the team and opponents.***

***U7s and U8s must not take part in contact rugby activities as they are not allowed to play contact rugby. It is important that children are allowed to enjoy Tag rugby, before being introduced to the contact game at the start of the U9 season. The four weeks at the start of the new season for U9s is the time to teach children to tackle and there is no reason to introduce the tackle before this time.***

A parent or guardian should be asked to give consent to any club’s/school’s/college’s assessment for a child or young person to play up or down an Age Grade; it is important that any identified extra risks are explained in the discussion with the parent or guardian. It is known that the risk of injury increases with the age of the child, so all children playing up will be exposed to a higher risk of injury and this should be fully explained to the child’s parents.

In a school/college year group there are occasionally over or under age children, who will routinely train and play with their peers. Unless there is significant physical difference, and subject to assessment, their inclusion in that Age Grade team is permitted where this is allowed in accordance with the regulations; this means that a child in a lower year group at school, may be allowed to play down an Age Grade at rugby.

Playing up an Age Grade is not allowed until the child is in the U12 Age Grade. However, even if a player is playing up from U12 and above in accordance with the Regulations, age rules in a competition may preclude them from playing up in that competition. It is therefore important to always read any competition rules carefully when a team contains players playing outside of their age grade.

***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 of a child playing out of age grade in their team. Clear communications is the key and any decisions should be based around the best interests of the children and young people involved.***

When assessing an U16 or an U17 boy for playing up two Age Grades<sup>18</sup>, particular care is needed, to be satisfied that the boy is capable of doing so in the context of the planned playing and training programme and is in the development interests of that child.

It is important to note that boys yet to reach their 17th birthday must not play adult rugby, or engage in contact training with adults. Once a boy has reached 17 they may play adult rugby provided the conditions of RFU Regulation 15.3.7 or 15.3.8 are met, including completing the appropriate form<sup>19</sup>. It should be noted that failure to follow this process may put the child at risk of injury, expose those responsible to a legal claim if this were to happen, and if the RFU identifies a case where the process has not been followed, disciplinary action may be taken.

## 5.2 Player Assessments

***Clubs, schools and colleges need to conduct appropriate assessments and should be clear to whom they delegate authority, and who has the competence to assess children playing out of Age Grade. Assessments should be bespoke, looking at the whole picture around each individual child. Parents or guardians should always be consulted when making these assessments.***

Clubs should use Level 2 coaches' current experience for making decisions. Schools and colleges will have their own procedures and be able to judge who, other than PE trained staff, have the relevant experience and competence to assess children to play out of Age Grade. Such assessments should usually include a member of staff who has welfare/pastoral responsibility for the child, particularly where the school is acting in loco parentis.

Wherever possible coaches should hold an appropriate RFU coaching award and all coaches and teachers are encouraged to extend, or refresh their coach training regularly through the nationally available programme of continual professional development (CPD)<sup>20</sup>. Coaches who continue to develop are recognised through the RFU Coach Licensing Scheme. Clubs and institutions are expected to support coach development.

It is best that any decisions, such as the decision to play someone in a different Age Grade are clearly documented and kept securely. A standard form<sup>21</sup> is available on the England Rugby website, but it should be noted that some Constituent Bodies have bespoke forms which should be completed and returned to the appropriate individual.

## 5.3 Risk Assessments

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

A risk assessment should be dynamic, adjusting even on a match day, to take into account unpredicted circumstances, conditions and specific children's 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 children. An example of an assessment is provided below (see Appendix A), although it is not drafted to be comprehensive.

<sup>18</sup> RFU Regulation 15.3.6 to be found at [www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/)

<sup>19</sup> The form is listed under Regulation 15 and may be found at [www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/)

<sup>20</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/my-rugby/coaches/](http://www.englandrugby.com/my-rugby/coaches/)

<sup>21</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/)

A coach or manager can adopt their club, school or college's standard risk 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.

## 6. Season

***The Season is set out in RFU Regulation 15.6<sup>22</sup>. It is recommended that children have a sustained period of rest from contact rugby union over the summer. Children should be encouraged to try a variety of other sports at this time. The season dates must therefore be enforced by clubs, schools, colleges and Constituent Bodies; the RFU will take disciplinary action against those found to be in breach of this regulation.***

During the season playing and training times should be controlled; the times shown in the section below<sup>23</sup> are maximum times. 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. Under-playing of children is also a major concern and a direct negative consequence of over-playing other children. Age Grade Rugby should be inclusive and provide as much opportunity for all children of all abilities to play as much as each other.

The Competitive Menu and Competition Playing Calendar<sup>24</sup> are a more consistent approach than the previous Youth Structured Season and will be rolled out right across the country. The aim is to ensure that what is played and when, is driven by the motivations of all of our players. This will provide a model which supports inclusivity of all players, guards against overplaying and underplaying and limits conflict between club and school/college rugby maintaining choice for players to play with their peer groups. The new template will be rolled out fully over two seasons from the 2016-17 season.

***Competition and representative rugby organisers will ensure that their activities align to this framework, and clubs, schools and colleges should do the same.***

If a child is involved in multiple teams it is for the parent/guardian, teacher and coaches to communicate with all involved and not for the player to be put in the middle of selecting his/her schedule. The Competitive Playing Calendar is designed to facilitate this communication. Clear communication between all parties is essential to ensure a common sense child-centred approach applies to help resolve clashes.

### 6.1 Pre-Season

In the two weeks immediately prior to the start of the season, U12s (as they will be on the 1<sup>st</sup> September of that season) to U18s are permitted to participate in pre-season development matches, festivals and skills revision training. These could be development matches and festivals as outlined below.

***Pre-season Advisory statement:***

***Pre-season training should focus on individual conditioning and skill development through adaptive games. Sessions should be delivered using the APES principles – Active, Purposeful, Enjoyable and Safe. Coaches should be mindful of the need of the children 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.***

<sup>22</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/regulations/)

<sup>23</sup> Section 10

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.englandrugby.com/my-rugby/players/age-grade-rugby/competition-menu-calendar/> There is more information on the Competitive Menu and Competition Playing Calendar at point 7 below.

***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. Skills revision should consist mainly of handling, support and evasion skills. Contact technique, including revisiting tackle technique, can be included in this but at low level intensity and on an individual basis.***

## **6.2 Out of Season**

The RFU do not recommend children and young people playing rugby union year round; for this reason there is a period of the year which is out of season and during which only limited rugby union style activities are allowed to be played. These become more game orientated as a player gets older and as a result by the time a child is in the U12s they are allowed to play contact seven-a-side matches out of season.

Children may participate in non-contact activities and other activities that fall within the definition of “Out of Season Activity” (as defined in RFU Regulation 15.6.2) that allow them to develop their confidence, decision making, game understanding and spatial awareness. Ideas for age appropriate rugby-based summer activity<sup>25</sup> and non-contact invasion games (where one team invades another’s territory) are available on the Regulations<sup>26</sup> pages of England Rugby website.

These activities should not be compulsory and the option to take a break from the club, school or college rugby programme for the duration of the summer should be encouraged, respected and supported.

Touch rugby is fun for all ages and can be played as a mixed game all year round; however, it is important to properly risk assess any session to ensure that it is safe for all those involved. It allows children to enhance their rugby skills of ball handling, creativity, evasion, decision making and support play. It should, however, be risk assessed in the usual way in accordance with RFU Regulation 15.7; whilst adults and children may play touch together it is always important to consider whether there are any safeguarding aspects or other safety issues before starting a session.

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<sup>25</sup>[www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/Governance/Regulations/01/30/35/05/Summer\\_activities\\_Neutral.pdf](http://www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/Governance/Regulations/01/30/35/05/Summer_activities_Neutral.pdf)

<sup>26</sup>[www.englandrugby.com/mm/document/governance/regulations/01/30/35/04/guidance\\_noncontact\\_invasion\\_games\\_neutral.pdf](http://www.englandrugby.com/mm/document/governance/regulations/01/30/35/04/guidance_noncontact_invasion_games_neutral.pdf)

## 7. Competitive Menu & Competition Playing Calendar<sup>27</sup>

The **Menu** provides by age group the available competitive playing formats that can be played. The intensity of these develops in line with player motivations as follows:

Competition Format	Under 7 to 11	Under 12 Male	Under 13 Male	Under 14 Male	Under 15 Male	Under 16 Male	Under 17 Male	Under 18 Male	Under 13 Female	Under 15 Female	Under 18 Female
Friendly Fixture	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Triangular	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Festival	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Waterfall Tournament		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Knock Out/Tournament				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
League					✓	✓	✓	✓			✓

Below is a list of the competitive format descriptors:

**Friendly Fixture:** Competitive style playing opportunity for two teams, often as part of a club or school/college block fixture, where focus is on maximising all your player’s involvement, development and enjoyment.

**Triangular:** Competitive style playing opportunity for three teams where equal player participation is the emphasis. Focus is on maximising all your player’s involvement, development and enjoyment rather than the score.

**Festival:** Competitive round-robin playing opportunity where equal team and player participation is the emphasis. Scores may be recorded but winning doesn’t affect your ongoing participation as every team plays the same appropriate number of matches.

**Waterfall Tournament:** Competitive playing programme where equal participation/progression is the emphasis. The outcome of your pool games are recorded to enable every team to advance to later rounds for an equal number of matches against similar level teams.

**Knock Out/Tournament:** Competitive playing programme where the outcome of the game is recorded and dictates your progression to later knock-out rounds or decides your final standing. Usually includes a winner’s trophy.

<sup>27</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/my-rugby/players/age-grade-rugby/competition-menu-calendar/](http://www.englandrugby.com/my-rugby/players/age-grade-rugby/competition-menu-calendar/)



**League:** Competitive playing programme where the outcome of the game is recorded and points are applied to dictate your position and final standing in the league table. Usually includes a winner's trophy. May lead to a play-off system to establish final champions.

***Festivals and tournaments need planning in liaison with your Constituent Body so that events in the Constituent Body are properly managed and new events do not cut across existing established activity.***

Hence permission from your Constituent Body, or County Schools Union as appropriate, to run a festival or tournament is a regulation (see RFU Regulation 15.9).

**The Competition Playing Calendar** replaces the former Youth Structured Season. The structure of the Calendar will be governed by RFU regulations and organisers will be expected to operate their competitions and representative rugby activities within the parameters of Regulation 15. This entails organising competitions and representative rugby programmes within the defined windows.

***There will be nationally consistent windows when competitions will be arranged. There are three sets of windows – for club competitions, for school/college competitions and for representative rugby; clubs, schools and colleges can still play in all the weeks throughout the entire season. The windows will help children and young people, and those who support their development, to prioritise and plan their season with fewer conflicts and duplications.***

Competitions themselves will need to be more focussed/shorter and the number of high intensity matches where the competitive outcome becomes the focus will reduce; driving greater inclusivity of all children getting on the pitch and a return to more block fixtures by clubs and schools rather than fragmented team fixture lists.

What it does not mean is that clubs cannot play rugby in schools' windows. However, they will know that their club players who also play school rugby will, potentially, have their more intensive school matches, that matter most to them, in particular weeks. They can adjust their selections to fit with the priority in conversation with the school. This same principle exists, of course, for schools during the clubs' windows.

The "windows" concept will be rolled out across all ages in the female Age Grade game in 2016-17 and up to and including Under 16 in male Age Grade Rugby. This will be reviewed to establish the best approach for 2017-18 across all age groups.



## **8. Non-Contact Rugby (Touch and Tag rugby)**

Regulation 15.7 allows mixed gender and mixed age touch and tag provided it is non-competitive (ie not in leagues), risk assessed by the organiser to be safe for all involved, adults alter their play accordingly and Safeguarding Regulation 21 is complied with. Touch is worth considering as a suitable variant for inter-house mixed age rugby.

## 9. Summer Camps

RFU Regulation 15.8 covers Rugby Summer Camps; these are an opportunity to promote the game to new players and give a focus for children to experience general sports activity, or team-building and bonding. As previously stated, the RFU recommends that Age Grade Players take a break from rugby using the “off-season” to recover and recharge and try other physical activities.

***Summer Camps are not an excuse to run weekly training or fitness sessions in preparation for the new season. A Summer Camp is a short, multi-activity opportunity for young people to enjoy a sporting experience in the off-season with emphasis on social, recreational enjoyment; the Summer Camp must be run in line with all elements of Regulation 15, including mixed age and out of season activity.***

For more information on how to organise and stage a camp, either in summer or at any other time of year, the RFU can provide a set of templates, checklists and best practice. Contact is by email to [AgeGradeRugby@RFU.com](mailto:AgeGradeRugby@RFU.com) or your RFU Local Rugby Delivery Team.

## 10. Training

Sufficient time in the season should be given to train children 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. For clubs we recommend that there are two Sunday training sessions between each match from U7-U11; from U12-U18 clubs should plan at least one training session between each game, exclusive of any mid-week training. Schools should also ensure that their training sessions are suitably balanced with matches and fixtures.

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/teachers should avoid the temptation to run too much team preparation. Clubs, schools and colleges should be respectful of other community activities as well as children’s academic commitments and not put pressure on mid-week attendance that conflicts with these. It can then contribute 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 children’s many developmental factors, and their level of competition and conditions. Some guidance is shown below:

Recommended Maximum duration of training sessions in a day	
Age Grade	Minutes
U7-U8	60
U9-U11	90
U12-U18	120

### 10.1 Adult Conduct

***It is important for adults to note that ALL children under the age of 17<sup>28</sup> are not allowed to play or train with adults.***

***As a responsible adult you should only use physical contact if its aim is to:***

- ***Develop sports skills or techniques***
- ***Treat an injury***
- ***Prevent an injury or accident from occurring***
- ***Meet the requirements of the sport***

***You should seek to explain the reason for the physical contact to the child i.e. reinforcing the teaching or coaching skill. Unless the situation is an emergency, the adult should ask the child for permission. Physical contact should always be intended to meet the child’s needs NOT the adult’s.***

<sup>28</sup> Provided Regulation 15.3.7 or 15.3.8 relating to Playing Adult Rugby have been complied with.

***This also includes adult coaches who should not:***

- Participate, even when demonstrating, in contact on or with a player who is under 17;***
- Hold a pad for a player to make contact with or make contact with a pad held by a player who is under 17;***
- Participate, even when demonstrating, in scrummage technique against a player who is under 17;***
- Participate, even when demonstrating, in “lifting” of a player in a line-out who is under 17; or***
- Participate, even when demonstrating, in a ruck/maul technique on or with a player who is under 17.***

## 11. Match Playing Time

RFU Regulation 15.14.1 states that coaches, parents, children, schools, colleges and clubs must ensure that no child plays more than 35 matches per season as an absolute maximum and plays no more than the maximum playing times as set out in RFU Regulation 15.

Although a club, school or college can manage this for its own playing programme, it is much more difficult if a child is playing for both a club and a school/college. In these circumstances, neither the club nor the school/college would be able to stipulate how many matches that child could play for the other.

If a child is involved in club, school/college and Constituent Body rugby, it would, therefore be for the parents or guardians of the child to work with both the club and the institution in these circumstances, in a practical and sensible way to plan the child's match schedule and training to ensure that the child has adequate time for rest and recovery between matches.

***Clubs, schools, colleges and representative rugby organisers should take their role in this seriously and be proactive in their support of the player and their parents in facilitating the discussion as early as possible between the environments where they play. This is the only way to ensure that they are being player-centred. Clear communication is essential to ensure a common sense approach to avoid over-playing and ensure that the best interests of the child are met. The Playing Calendar enables this to take place for the first time in the pre-season period.***

When managing large squads it is important that all children 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 children post-injury or illness, including following the Return to Play (RTP) protocols after a suspected concussion<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/my-rugby/players/player-health/concussion-headcase/overview/](http://www.englandrugby.com/my-rugby/players/player-health/concussion-headcase/overview/)

## 12. Tours

***Age Grade tours are for children and young people to enjoy first and foremost in a safe and appropriate environment for them. Whilst it is acknowledged that tours are an excellent way to build team spirit, visit other areas and experience other cultures, Age Grade tours are not an excuse for adults to recreate what many perceive to be the traditions of touring as an adult.***

The behaviour historically associated with some touring parties, whether an adult or Age Grade tour, does not reflect the values of the game or the reputation with which the vast majority of people involved in rugby union would want to be associated. Organising a tour takes a lot of time and commitment and is a big responsibility. All adults involved are expected to take their responsibility seriously. For more information on arranging a tour, please see the Tour Guidance and Checklist, and the RFU “Touring with Children”<sup>30</sup> guide before starting. Reference should also be made to RFU Regulation 10, Regulation 15.6.6 and Regulation 15.10 and the England Rugby Tours page<sup>31</sup>.

On tour the team plays to the Host Union’s Rules and Regulations, and the Union that you intend to visit may have different regulations such as the application of different age banding or the adoption of different law variations. In advance of any tour you should ensure that you are aware of the Rules and Regulations of the Union you are visiting and communicate with the opposition about this, together with your team’s strengths and weaknesses to help engineer a balanced match. You should be aware that this may involve you re-arranging your teams in order to comply with the applicable regulations of where the match is being played. If there is any doubt about playing rules then it is best practice to play to the lowest denominator.

It is essential to follow the regulations for touring set out in RFU Regulation 10 and the guidance in the “Touring with Children” document as referenced above. In particular, note the permission from the Constituent Body required to tour overseas.

There have been numerous safeguarding incidents occurring whilst clubs are on tour both in England and whilst visiting other countries; these are taken very seriously by the RFU Safeguarding and Discipline teams who take action against clubs and individuals. This has led to sanctions being imposed as well as bars<sup>32</sup> being issued preventing individuals taking part in the game.

<sup>30</sup>[www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/General/General/01/31/70/61/SafeguardingUpdates\\_RFU\\_Version\\_3\\_colour\\_English.pdf](http://www.englandrugby.com/mm/Document/General/General/01/31/70/61/SafeguardingUpdates_RFU_Version_3_colour_English.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/governance/game-support/rugby-tours/](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/game-support/rugby-tours/)

<sup>32</sup> [www.englandrugby.com/governance/safeguarding/policy-and-guidance](http://www.englandrugby.com/governance/safeguarding/policy-and-guidance) There is information regarding the barring of individuals under Regulation 21 available in the RFU Safeguarding Policy, Procedures and Guidance.

## Conclusion

The RFU wish to ensure that clubs, schools and colleges receive support to enable them to provide safe and enjoyable environments, in which children and young people may take part in learning and developing their enjoyment of the game.

If you require any assistance with the interpretation of the RFU Regulations then please contact [regulations@rfu.com](mailto:regulations@rfu.com) who will provide you with the advice you require. In addition, if you feel there are areas where more guidance would be useful, please do not hesitate to contact [AgeGradeRugby@rfu.com](mailto:AgeGradeRugby@rfu.com).



**Appendix A – Example of a rugby Risk Assessment**

<b>Hazard</b>	<b>Control Measures</b>
<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 sessions.</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 World Rugby 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>All clothing and equipment should be/is World Rugby compliant</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:</p> <p>e.g. John Taylor is asthmatic George Brown is hyper allergic to wasps 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 level of provision is in line with RFU guidelines, with appropriate first aid training personnel available and a phone is working to contact emergency services.</p> <p>Check first aid equipment is in good order and that medical supplies are adequate.</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>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 and tackles for safety and control team conduct on and off the field. If the game is seriously imbalanced due to physical/skill levels that consideration is made to halting the game or replacing some players.</p> <p>Spectators advised of expected standards of conduct and challenged if necessary to conform.</p> <p>As far as possible ensure that the appointed Referee is of sufficient experience/standard for the match.</p>