RFU REGULATION 15 – AGE GRADE RUGBY

Regulation 15 is supplemented by the following documents:

(a) Competition Menu and Competitive Playing Calendar, available at https://www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby/playing-calendar

(b) Age Grade Codes of Practice, available at www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby/codes-of-practice

(c) Half Game Rule FAQs, available at www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby/half-game

(d) RFU Regulation 21 (Safeguarding), available at www.englandrugby.com/governance/rules-and-regulations/regulations

(e) RFU Safeguarding Policy, available at www.englandrugby.com/governance/safeguarding

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 1st August each Season.

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 within 45 days of: (a) for new Age Grade Players at a Club, them first joining the Club; and (b) for existing Age Grade Players at a Club, 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 or Match Officials 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.

15.2 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 19s which shall be permitted in respect of the 2023/24 Season only.

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's principal or the club's Constituent Body provides written approval (such approval to be valid for up to one season only);
(c) no more than half the players on the pitch at any time can be from the older age grade;
(d) the team plays to the rules of the younger age grade; and
(e) the provisions of Regulation 15.5 are followed in relation to U11 girls and the girls U12, 14, 16 and 18 age bands.

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 Code www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby/codes-of-practice;
(b) in respect of club rugby, approval is obtained from an individual who has parental responsibility for the player and from the club's Constituent Body;
(c) in respect of college rugby, approval is obtained from an individual who has parental responsibility for the player (who may be the principal in loco parentis) and from England Colleges RFU;
(d) in respect of school rugby, approval is obtained from an individual who has parental responsibility for the player (who may be the principal in loco parentis); and
(e) 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 in loco parentis) 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.

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 behavioural issue; or

(c) for intra and inter-college matches only, the player is an Under 19 (Year 14) and must

be studying in the second year of a full time, two-year level 3 course, as long as they have not previously completed a full level 3 qualification.

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

(a) in each case an assessment is carried out by the club/college/school. Best practice as to how to carry out an assessment is set out in the Code available at www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby/codes-of-practice;
(b) in respect of club rugby, the approval of an individual who has parental responsibility for the player and the Age Grade Chair, and for all ages, the approval of club's Constituent Body is obtained;
(c) in respect of college rugby, the approval of an individual who has parental responsibility for the player (who may be the principal in loco parentis) and the approval of England Colleges RFU is obtained;
(d) in respect of school rugby, the approval of an individual who has parental responsibility for the player (who may be the principal in loco parentis) is obtained;
(e) if approval is given, the club/college/school must notify the opposing teams and match officials at least 24 hours in advance of the game although an opposition's objection may not prevent the player from playing;
(f) 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
(g) if playing down two age grades, the written approval of the RFU is required.

15.5 Playing Out of Age Grade Table

AGE GRADE (SCHOOL YEAR)	COMBINING	PLAYING UP	PLAYING DOWN
MALE AND FEMALE PLAYERS			
U6s (Yr1)	U6s are not permitted to play matches, competitions, tournaments or festivals with any older age grades.		
U7s (Yr2)	U7s and U8s can play and train together	Yes, with U8s only	U7s and U8s can play and train together
U8s (Yr3)		No playing up permitted	
U9s (Yr4)	U9s are permitted to be combined with U10s in accordance with 15.2.2	No playing up is permitted	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U10s (Yr5)	U10s are permitted to be combined with U9s or with U11s in accordance with 15.2.2	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	U11 girls are permitted to play with U12 girls in accordance with 15.3.2.	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4

		U11s boys are not permitted to play up	
From U12s and above, mixed rugby is no longer permitted and different regulations apply to male and female players as below			
FEMALE PLAYERS			
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	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U18s (Yr13)	U18s are permitted to play with U17s	Yes, see Regulation 15.6	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U19s	No combining permitted	Yes, see Regulation 15.6	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
MALE PLAYERS			
U12s (Yr7)	U12s are permitted to be	Yes, playing up one	Playing down is

	combined with U11s or with U13s in accordance with 15.2.2	grade is permitted in accordance with 15.3.2	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	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)	No combining permitted	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)	No combining permitted	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)	No combining permitted	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	U17s are permitted to play with U18s	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4
U18s (Yr13)	U18s are permitted to play with U17s	Yes, see Regulation 15.6	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	Yes, see Regulation 15.6	Playing down is permitted in limited circumstances in accordance with 15.4

15.6 Playing Adult Rugby

15.6.1 Subject to 15.7 a male and female player can play and train in adult contact rugby when they reach their seventeenth birthday provided the following conditions are met:

(a) the player does not train or play in the front row of the contested scrum. Once a player has reached the age of 18, the player may play in any position;
(b) the RFU Safeguarding Policy and RFU Regulation 21 are complied with;
(c) the Club has an appointed Safeguarding Officer and is approved by its Constituent Body to play 17 year old males and/or females in adult rugby for the season by completing the Playing Adult Rugby – Club Approval Form and process; https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/08311987b26f4e7dbdd3c5a55ac8bb91
(d) the player has been assessed, as capable of playing with adults and the assessment has been countersigned and approved by the Constituent Body to play adult rugby until their 18th birthday by completing the Playing Adult Rugby – Player Approval Form and process; https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/0dfda3b353b74227aecc0774b3081287
(e) approval is required as follows:

England Academy Players, Centre of Excellence players, and EPS players	Approval in accordance with 15.7
All other players	Approval by geographic or national Constituent Body (as applicable)

(f) subject to 15.7, no player in the U18 age grade or below is permitted to play in the following competitions:

i. Men's Premiership League
ii. Men's Premiership Cup
iii. Men's Premiership Shield
iv. Men's Championship League
v. Men's Championship Cup
vi. Women's Premier 15s League
vii. Women's Premier 15s Cup

unless, in exceptional circumstances for Premiership Rugby Club Players, approved by the Club, the RFU and PRL, and for Centre of Excellence Players, approved by the Club and the RFU;

(g) U16 age grade players, regardless of whether they are an England Academy Player or Centre of Excellence Player or England U18 Player, can only play in the U18 Academy and Centre of Excellence Competitions with the prior written approval of the RFU Head of Regional Academies.

15.6.2 Players of all ages and both sexes may train and play together in non-competitive, non-contact rugby provided the following conditions are met:

(a) Regulation 15.8 is applied;
(b) the organiser and/or coach has assessed the session and/or match to be safe for all players; and
(c) under no circumstances is any element of contact rugby permitted and the training session and/or match should be conducted in accordance with the best practice principles set out in the Code.

15.7 England Academy, Centre of Excellence and England U18 Players and Representative Rugby

15.7.1 With the prior written approval of the RFU Head of Regional Academies, England Academy (as defined in RFU Regulation 1), Centre of Excellence and England U18 Players can:

(a) in the U16 age grade, play up in the U17 and U18 age grades including in the front row of the scrum;
(b) at 16 years old, play and train with adults, except in the front row; and
(c) in the U17 and U18 age grades, play and train with adults, including in the front row.

15.7.2 Subject to competition regulations, a player may qualify to represent an Age Grade representative team in a Constituent Body for that Season if the player meets one of the following criteria:

(a) they attend a school affiliated to that Constituent Body Schools Union;
(b) they reside in that Constituent Body for any part of that Season;
(c) they were born in that Constituent Body;
(d) they are a registered playing member of a club affiliated to that Constituent Body;
(e) they played for that Constituent Body in a representative fixture the previous season.

15.7.3 Membership of a Constituent Body's Developing Player Programme (DPP)/Elite Player Development Group (EPDG), Premier 15s Squad, Centre of Excellence or an Academy does not entitle a Player to play for that Constituent Body if the Player does not satisfy one of the criteria set out in 15.7.2.

15.7.4 Where a player has not been selected for a Constituent Body the Divisional Chair of Selectors may allow the Player to play for another Constituent Body for which the Player is not qualified if it is in the interests of the Player's development.

15.8 Season and Out of Season Activity

15.8.1 In Age Grade Rugby the Season shall be as set out below:

Season 2023-24 will run from Saturday 2 September 2023 until Monday 6 May 2024.

Season 2024-25 will run from Saturday 7 September 2024 until Monday 5 May 2025.

15.8.2 Rugby activity is permitted during the Season as set out below (and summarised in the table at regulation 15.8.3).

15.8.3 In the U13s and below age grades (but excluding the girls dual U14/13 age band), all rugby activity is permitted during the Season except as specifically set out in the table below:

AGE GRADE /BAND	IN SEASON ACTIVITY				
	NON-CONTACT		CONTACT		OUTGOING & INCOMING TOURS
	Training	Matches & Competitions	Training	Matches & Competitions	
U5s & U6s	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES
U7s & U8s	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES
U9s, U10s & U11s	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
U12s & U13s	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
U14s, U15s & U16s	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
U17s & U18s	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

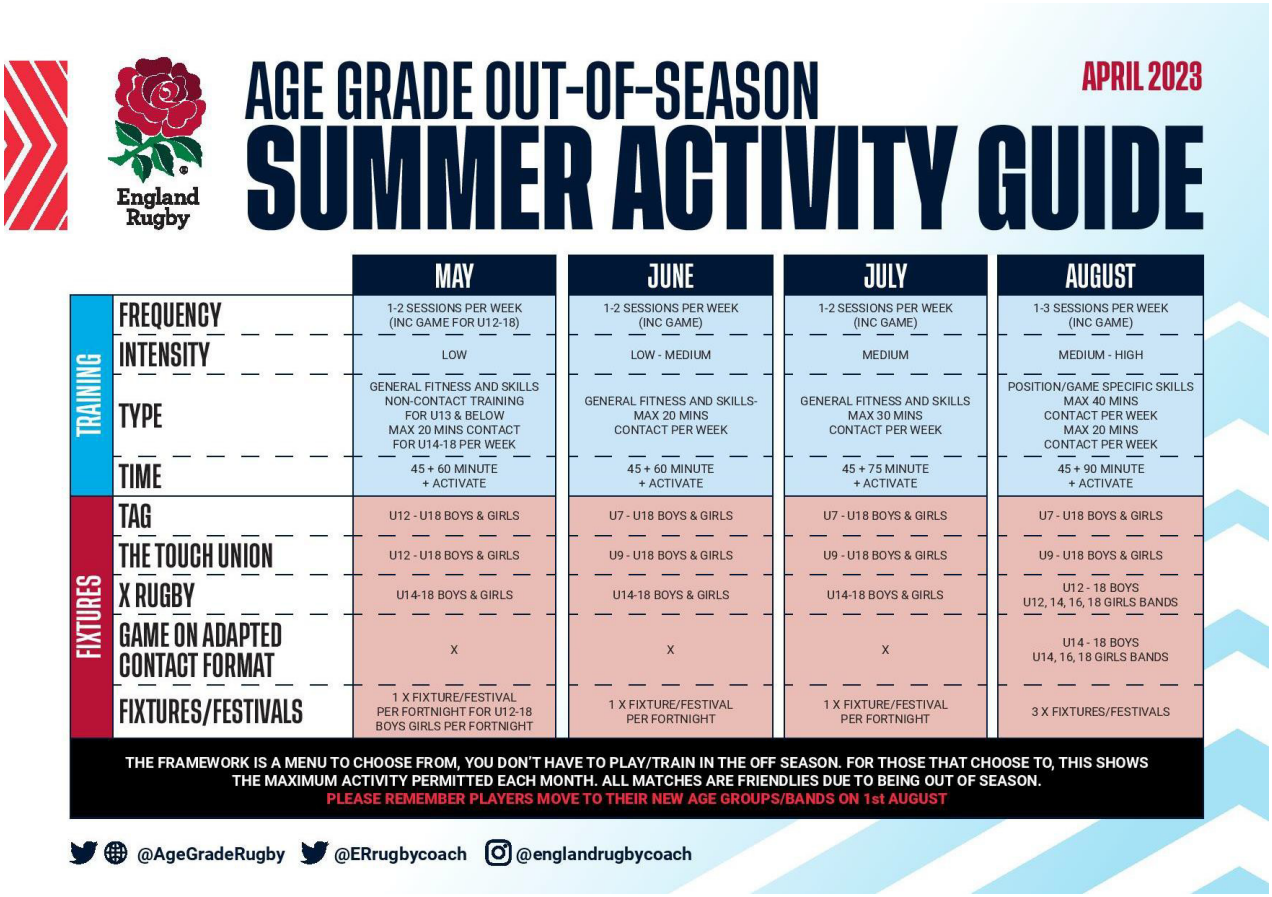
15.8.4 Rugby training and playing activity is permitted out of Season as specified in the RFU Summer Activity Framework as summarised in the table at regulation 15.8.8

15.8.5 In addition to the RFU Summer Activity Framework, the following activity is permitted out of Season:

(a) Outgoing Tours and preparations for such tours in the U14s to U18s age grades (including girls U14/U13 age band) only, as long as Regulation 15.9 is complied with;
(b) at U15 and U17, CB Representative Rugby activity as per the Age Grade Playing Calendar up to and including the last May Bank Holiday Monday;
(c) if a competition match scheduled to be played within the Season is abandoned or postponed due to adverse weather conditions, such match may be replayed up to and including the last May Bank Holiday Monday, at all times in accordance with Regulation 15.9 which requires prior written approval; and
(d) Academy or Centre of Excellence activity is permitted if pre-approved by the RFU.

15.8.6 The RFU has specifically developed best practice principles on out of season activity to ensure players have sufficient rest and recovery over the summer. In particular, children of primary school age are to be encouraged to participate in non-rugby activities that develop fundamental movement and core skills. The RFU expects those involved in age grade rugby to respect these principles in the interest of player welfare. These principles can be found at www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby/codes-of-practice.

15.8.7 An overview of the RFU Summer Activity Framework is set out below:



15.9 Approval of Competitive Activity, Rugby Camps and Tours

15.9 Competitions, Tournaments, Festivals, Rugby Camps and Tours are permitted but the following conditions must be met:

(a) Regulation 15 is complied with in full;
(b) they are in line with the Age Grade Playing Calendar and competition format of the specific age grade; and
(c) written prior approval is obtained as set out in the table below by completing the Approval of Activity form and process to be found under Regulation 15 at https://www.englandrugby.com/governance/rules-and-regulations/regulations;

ACTIVITY	ORGANISED FOR	APPROVED BY
In Season & Out of Season Competitions	Clubs	CB
Locally organised Festivals, Tournaments and Competitions	Schools	CSU
	Colleges	ECRFU
National Festivals, Competitions and Camps If participating teams are from more than just neighbouring CBs and there are more than six entrants	Clubs	CB
	Schools	ERFSU
	Colleges	ECRFU
Rugby Camps - Local/County	All	CB
Rugby Camps - Regional/National	All	RFU
CB & Regional Competitions and Rep Rugby		

Annual activity beyond club and school/college level (incl domestic Unions), to be included and approved in AG Playing Calendars	All	CB Executive
Outgoing and Incoming Tours	See RFU Regulation 10 and Guidance at www.englandrugby.com/governance/gamesupport/rugby-tours	

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. 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 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. Please check the list by inserting the name of the individual optician/optometrist.

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	MAXIMUM MINUTES EACH HALF	MAXIMUM MINUTES PER DAY
U7s & U8s	10	50
U9s & U10s	15	60
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.*

Further guidance as to playing times and durations for single fixtures, festivals, tournaments and coaching and training sessions are set out in the Guidance available at www.englandrugby.com/participation/coaching/age-grade-rugby/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 be 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.

15.13 Competition Regulations

15.13.1 Regulation 15.2, 15.3, 15.4 and 15.5 will be applied to all RFU National Competitions and CBs/Organising Committees/third party organisers are strongly recommended to follow the same approach in anticipation of the introduction of a mandated regulation in the 24-25 season.

15.13.2 There are specific competition regulations relating to the following Age Grade competitions and these are available upon request from the RFU:

(a) U15s and U18s Schools Cup (Boys)
(b) ACE League (Boys)
(c) National U18 Clubs Cup (Boys)
(d) The U18 Academy Competition (Boys)
(e) National U16 Clubs Girls Cup
(f) National U18 Clubs Girls Cup