

REGULATION CHANGES BRIEFING NOTE – REGULATION CHANGES FOR 25-26 SEASON

1. In the 22-23 season the RFU put in place a regulation review strategy (the “**Strategy**”), the objective of which is to develop and implement regulations which: (a) are necessary, proportionate and pragmatic; (b) achieve the agreed upon objectives of the relevant regulation; (c) by adopting a structured, targeted and periodic review of regulations. The Strategy is in the process of being updated to cover the next three seasons (from Season 25/26 onwards).
2. The table below sets out an executive summary of the key changes which have the more material impact on the Game and on volunteer burden. The below provides a summary but for more detail, please also refer to the full regulations which have been available on the website from 1 August 2025: <https://www.englandrugby.com/governance/rules-and-regulations>

Regulations 6 (Adult Competitions)	<p>Minor changes to Regulation 6 have been proposed this season, the majority of which are to ensure clarity, aid competition management and league administration, and to further the alignment between the Men’s and Women’s game.</p> <p>These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) changes to the kick-off time regulations to allow Clubs greater flexibility in choosing kick-off times which suit them; (b) the introduction of a “Walkover Protocol” in the Women’s game (this currently exists in the Men’s game but forms part of ROC Administrative Instructions); and (c) clarifying that at Women’s Level 5 and below, games may start with less than 15 but with no fewer than 10 players, in order to minimise the number of walkovers in games where teams arrive with less than 15 players (this has always been permitted but is now clearer in the regulations). <p>Additionally, a new Appendix 6 to Regulation 6 will be introduced to regulate the play-off structure in the National Leagues and the Regional Leagues, which will take place for the first time at the end of Season 2025/26. Whilst Appendix 2 (Men’s Competition Structure) will deal with automatic promotion and relegation in the RFU Leagues, Appendix 6 will cater for any additional promotion and relegation by virtue of participation in the play-offs.</p>
Regulation 7 (Player Approaches, Contracts, Payments and Player Movement)	<p>It has previously been a requirement for Clubs at Counties 1 (Level 7) to complete a payment of players declaration, regardless of whether material benefits are provided. The proposal is to end the mandatory requirement at Regional 2 (Level 6), therefore removing Counties 1 clubs from the scope of mandatory submission unless they provide Material Benefit to players. The reason for this is there has traditionally been strong compliance at Counties 1, with a low level of Material Benefit paid to players, and equally a desire to reduce volunteer burden.</p>

Regulation 9 (Player Safety)	A Regulation 9 Review Group has met to review compliance with RFU Regulation 9 and the policy which sits behind the regulation. The regulatory changes which have arisen from the Working Group focus on aligning regulatory obligations with Government and DCMS UK Concussion Guidelines, and equally to introduce the concept of “Recognise and Remove” to all adult and age grade matches or training sessions (save where a specific concussion protocol applies in the Elite game).
Regulation 15 (Age Grade Rugby)	<p>As was the case last season, Regulation 15 was released to the game earlier than the other RFU Regulations, and the present version was effective from May 2025. The key changes are summarised below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Continuation of the current teenage boys system of allowing combining between U14s and U18s, but making this regulation instead of an exception for the season (this has been an agreed exception on a season-by-season basis since Covid). There is a need for the game to support retention and the checks/balances around playing out of age grade ensure it only happens when required. (b) Extend the opportunity of playing up to boys and girls at U9 to U11 who are permanently educated in the year above. They can apply to play rugby up a year to align with their academic year group. (c) An U19 playing down for the season should apply across all playing environments. Therefore, a player approved to play down in college rugby has to play down at U18 in all rugby for the season. There will be an ability to withdraw “playing out of age grade” approval if this is not complied with. (d) Cluster Registration to become an approval process. The current pilot system (for which a Smartsheet form to record Clusters is already in operation) will become a requirement in order for Clubs to cluster, to address issues of safeguarding and discipline that have arisen as a result of Clusters.
Regulation 19 (Discipline)	<p>The changes to Regulation 19 (excluding the appendices, in respect of which please see below) include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) permitting the ability to issue an interim or provisional suspension order in respect of an individual team (in addition to the whole Club) for initiation-type investigations or failure to conduct appropriate investigations themselves; (b) the ability to recognise sanctions issued within our own game set by Member Clubs (whereas we could only previously recognise sanctions from other sporting bodies); and (c) to clarify obligations around whistleblowing.
Regulation 19 (Discipline) Appendices	Following the successful re-write of RFU Regulation 19 in the 2023/24 season, the 7 appendices that accompany that regulation have been reviewed during the 2024/25 season.

	<p>Due to the functional nature or mandatory adoption of World Rugby regulations within appendices 1, 2, 3 and 7, there have been no changes to these appendices.</p> <p>The adult citing regulations (Appendix 4), RFU practise notes and guidance (Appendix 5) and Age-grade discipline regulations (Appendix 6) have been re-written following appropriate consultation. Changes include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Appendix 4: The citing regulations have been restructured to separate the different processes that apply to the top levels in the game, where a Citing Commissioner is appointed, to that of the community game, where a Club is responsible for the citing process. There have been minimal changes to the regulations themselves with the exception of the introduction of the ability for a Club citing to be referred to an RFU independent Citing Commissioner (CC) to determine if there is a case to answer. Should the CC determine that there is no realistic chance of the citing being proven then the citing will be dismissed and the fee returned to the citing club. This regulation amendment has been made to help reduce volunteer burden for the CB discipline teams when presented with cases that are clearly below a Red Card threshold by removing the need to convene a hearing panel for a case. (b) <u>Appendix 5</u>: The guidance in this appendix applies to the concept of ‘recklessness’ and also to application of appropriate sanctions for cases that have a Top End Entry Point. The subject of this appendix has not been amended, however, it has been re-written in a consistent manner that is easier to understand for both Clubs involved in the process and for the disciplinary panels applying the regulations. (c) <u>Appendix 6</u>: The regulation has then been split into separate sections that apply to the different areas of the Age-grade game (Clubs & Academies, and Schools & Colleges). Whilst the focus of the re-write has been to make the appendix more readable and accessible, there have been a number of regulation changes. These include; (a) The mandatory requirement to report all discriminatory behaviour direct to the RFU. (b) Stipulation that Age-grade judgments will not be published in any unredacted form. (c) Ability for the NAGDS to determine if a player can resume playing after a minimum period of 6 months provisional suspension, should the case not be resolved at that point. This is likely to be considered in cases that are subject to Police investigation and can continue for periods of more than 2 years. (d) Ability to refer a Citing for an independent review to determine if there is a case to answer and if not the Citing can be dismissed. (e) Mandated time periods for hearing citings.
Regulation 21 (Safeguarding)	The only change made this season was to reflect the updated deadline for the Club Safeguarding Audit which is 24 October 2025 .
County Championship Regulations	Any changes to these regulations will be presented to Governance and Council in the Autumn and will be communicated thereafter.