

REGULATION CHANGES BRIEFING NOTE – REGULATION CHANGES FOR 26-27 SEASON

1. The RFU Governance Standing Committee (the “Committee”) put in place a new regulation review strategy in the 25-26 season which runs until the end of the 27-28 season (the “Strategy”). The objective of the Strategy is to develop and implement regulations which:
 - a. are necessary, proportionate and pragmatic;
 - b. achieve the agreed objectives of the relevant regulation and which acknowledge the audience to whom they apply;
 - c. adopt a structured, targeted and periodic review of regulations where necessary and in response to feedback from the Game; and
 - d. support the RFU’s overall ambition to encourage more rugby to be played in a safe, fair and enjoyable way.
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 are available on the website effective from 1 August 2026: <https://www.englandrugby.com/governance/rules-and-regulations>

Regulations 6 (Adult Competitions)	The Adult Competitions Management Sub-Committee (and the Organising Committee Sub-Committee) have proposed minor changes to Regulation 6 this season, the majority of which are to ensure clarity, aid competition management and league administration. These include: (a) the implementation of regulations covering the trial to take place in Season 2026/27 which will permit up to 5 replacements in Regional 1; (b) the introduction of a structured delegation to league organisers/bodies able to make decisions on pitch sizes (in accordance with the Laws of the Game) at each level of the men’s and women’s game, with a right of review to the Committee where necessary; (c) the introduction of a visual aid to outline the “player-off” rule / uncontested scrums; and (d) 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. Additionally, after a successful first season utilising the play-off structure in the men’s game in National and Regional leagues set out in Appendix 6 to Regulation 6, the changes to the play-off structure in Season 2026/27 will be as follows: (a) in place of the Adult Male (Counties) Cup (in respect of which, see below), a series of play-offs between the runners up in each Counties 1 league to determine additional promotion to Regional 2 (which was previously conducted based on Best Playing Record);
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	(b) the shortening of the play-offs in the Regional 2 Promotion play-offs. Last season this covered Clubs placed 2nd to 5th, but due to take-up of games, this will now only cover Clubs based 2nd to 3rd; and (c) clarification on the priority of seeding based on league standing and the use of Best Playing Record to determine home ties in the Regional 1 and Regional 2 Play-Off Finals, as well as some clarificatory wording on consequential impacts to the play-offs if a Club 1st and 2nd XV end up in (or could end up in) the same league as a result of the play-offs. Appendix 2 (Men's Competition Structure) will continue to deal with automatic promotion and relegation in the RFU Leagues, whereas Appendix 6 will cater for any additional promotion and relegation by virtue of participation in the play-offs.
Regulation 7 (Player Approaches, Contracts, Payments and Player Movement)	The changes to Regulation 7 are principally to differentiate between the Men's and the Women's game in terms of Payment Thresholds and to clarify elements around loss of benefits to minimise impact on teams. The first change is to permit a "soft" cap of £10,000 for a Women's first XV (previously any costs or payments associated with the Women's side would be included in the overall total of the Men's side) and the second is to carve out the loss of travel funding from the Women's side if the Men's side loses RFU Benefits, and vice versa.
Regulation 9 (Player Safety)	To support compliance with key player safety principles, an escalating sanction table has now been developed (and enhanced following feedback from Governance and the Community Game Board during last season) to strengthen the ability to sanction for failing to meet key safety requirements and to increase deterrence. Particular attention is drawn to the sanction table which now sits at Appendix 1 to Regulation 9.
Regulation 14 (RFU Registration)	The changes to RFU Regulation 14 include clarity around Student / Services Passes after the Transfer Deadline and a discretion for the Head of Discipline to suspend player registrations in the professional game for failure to complete mandatory education topics as prescribed by the RFU. The permitted number of loan players / EAPs in a match day squad in Champ Rugby has also been updated in line with the Champ Rugby Regulations.
Regulation 15 (Age Grade Rugby)	Regulation 15 has been through a comprehensive review and re-write ahead of Season 2026/27. The key changes and principles are being communicated centrally to the Game, however for the purposes of this note, the main changes include: (a) a standard risk assessment for all Playing Out Of Age Grade, plus a 10-day approval window to reduce pressure on our volunteers; (b) the introduction of a dual girls' Under 11/12 age band, enabling players to play girls-only rugby at these ages if they want to. Mixed U11 rugby remains, so there's more choice and flexibility; (c) clearer guidance for clubs, schools and colleges around playing opportunities for PDG and Academy players, specifically around who makes those decisions.

	(d) the addition of a non-contact section to recognise and grow non-contact and T1 rugby as a key part of the age grade game. Regulation 15 has also been substantially re-written in line with the principles of the Strategy to make it easier to understand and to better reflect the audience to whom it applies. The regulation is supplemented with visual aids, charts and diagrams to outline key regulatory processes.
Regulation 19 (Discipline)	These changes include: (a) the re-inclusion of wording regarding the Arbitration Act in the governing of RFU Disciplinary Panel and Appeal hearings; (b) the discretion to mandate education and/or training by the Head of Discipline regardless of any other disciplinary action; and (c) the ability for the RFU Head of Discipline to refer matters back to their original decision-makers (e.g. Disputes Committees) in the event it is considered that a potential appeal from such forums has a very high prospect of success.
Regulation 20 (Anti-Doping)	The Anti-Doping Regulations apply to all players and player support personnel and are fully aligned with the World Anti-Doping Code (the Code). The World Anti-Doping Code will be updated with effect from January 2027 (the 2027 Code). Regulation 20 has undergone a wholesale review ahead of Season 2026/27 to reflect the changes to be introduced as part of the 2027 Code, and has been fully approved by UK Anti-Doping.
Regulation 21 (Safeguarding)	RFU Regulation 21 (Safeguarding) and the Safeguarding Children Policy have both undergone a substantive review ahead of Season 2026/27, which together deliver a clearer, more preventative and more transparent safeguarding framework. Regulation 21 has been comprehensively redrafted to improve understanding and consistency across the game, including the explicit introduction of suitability to work with children as a core safeguarding test, clearer safeguarding measures, and improved alignment with existing disciplinary processes under RFU Regulation 19. Both documents have been shaped by extensive consultation with safeguarding stakeholders across the game, with feedback strongly supporting the direction of travel, improved accessibility and values-led approach. The updated Policy sets out clear safeguarding intent and principles aligned to Rugby's Core Values, supported by separate procedures and guidance to provide practical direction for clubs and volunteers. Collectively, the changes are intended to strengthen governance, accountability and confidence in safeguarding delivery across rugby. For specific queries, please contact safeguarding@rfu.com.
Girls U16s and U18s National Cup	Including within this competition is the ability for "Cluster" teams to enter, provided they comply with relevant competition requirements and Regulation 15.

Adult Male (Counties) Cup	This competition has been removed from the Men's competition structure and therefore will not take place in Season 2026/27. At Counties 1 level, the competition has been replaced by a short play-off structure to determine promotion of Counties 1 runners-up to Regional 2 (see Regulation 6 box above).
Premiership Women's Rugby Regulations	Changes of note include: (a) reference to the addition of a PWR Club Loan Agreement for use in the context of overseas loans / transfers / international clearances (e.g. for Celtic Challenge); (b) the introduction of "Maternity Credits" within the EQP Protocol to support Clubs and their players; and (c) the requirement to declare any Travelling Reserves to support a data gathering exercise on the use of travelling reserves in the professional game. Similar provisions are included in the Champ and Prem Rugby regulations.
Champ Rugby Regulations	Changes of note include: (a) the bonus point system (one bonus point will be awarded to a team on each occasion it scores three or more tries more than the opposition. No bonus points will be awarded for just scoring four tries. League points for winning and drawing, and losing bonus points, remain unchanged); (b) clarification regarding eligibility of Loan Players and EAPs in all Champ Rugby play-offs (whereas previously this had only applied to the Champ Rugby Accession Final), including both how many such players are permitted and what they need to do in order to be eligible to participate in the play-offs; and (c) the removal of all previous commercial regulations which will now be housed in a separate Champ Rugby Commercial Handbook.