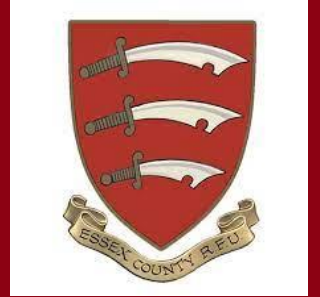


ESSEX RFU



Age Grade Conference

31st August 2025

Welcome – What is today about ?



To ensure that club volunteers are aware of the responsibilities they have and what is bound by regulation

To train and educate those new to role - thank you for volunteering

To refresh and remind those that continue in the role - thank you for still volunteering

And try and answer any questions you may have

Topics will cover

Age Grade Regulations

Safeguarding

Discipline

Rugby Safe

And time to you all to network of course

Welcome – What is today about ?



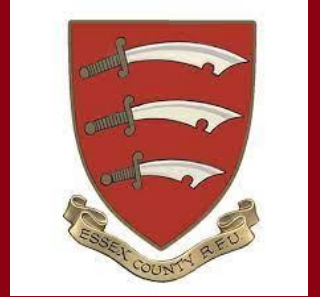
Quite a lot of information but all of it is important and in most cases mandatory given its regulations.

We want to EDUCATE NOT POLICE OR PUNISH

We ask that you set up meetings at your club with coaches, team managers, safeguarding officers, rugby safe leads and discipline secretaries to share what you have heard as early as possible.

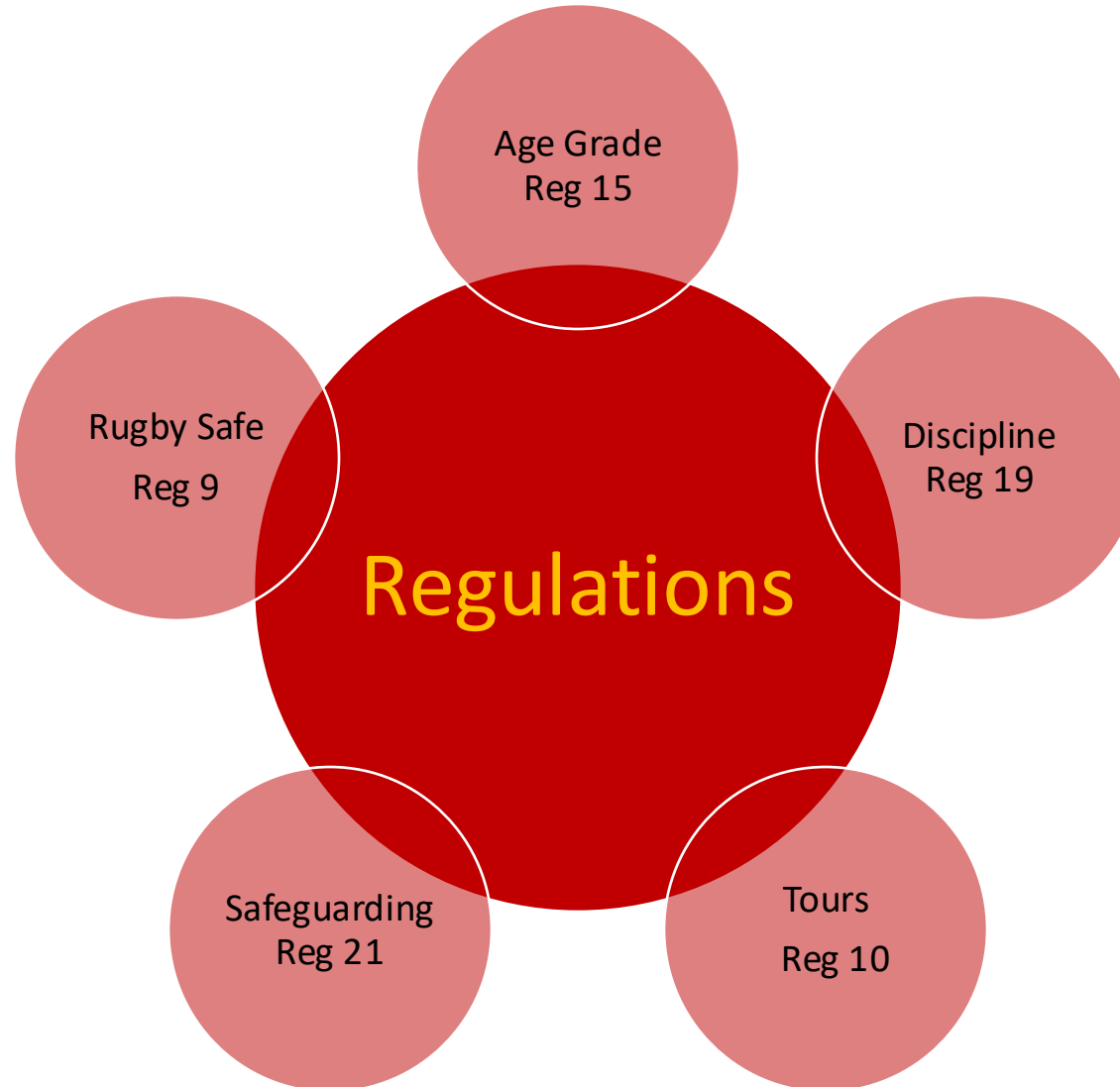
We would be happy to attend any of those meetings to offer support if required.

AGE GRADE RUGBY



- Player Centered
- Development Driven
- Competition Supported

Connected Regulations



Key Age Grade Regulations - Registration



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

Sat 6th Sept is season start so **21st Oct** is 45 days from start of season

Key Age Grade Regulations – Combining Age Grades



15.2. Allows **combining** under the following conditions

1. Insufficient players to make up an age grade team
2. Online application is made
3. CB Approval is given
4. Max numbers of players of each team on the pitch at any time can be from the older age grade (3 U10/U12 -4 U13/14 -5 U15/U17)
5. The team plays to the rules of the younger age grade
6. The club must notify the opposing team at least 24 hours in advance of the game although an opposition's objection shall not prevent the player(s) from playing

Key Age Grade Regulations – Playing Up



15.3 Allows **Playing Up** under the following conditions

1. An appropriate assessment of the player is made
2. Parent and Age Grade Chair must approve
3. Online application is made
4. CB Approval is given
5. The club must notify the opposing team at least 24 hours in advance of the game although an opposition's objection shall not prevent the player(s) from playing

Note that player may also play in correct age grade as well

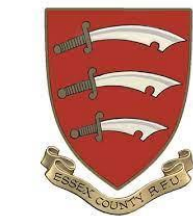
Key Age Grade Regulations – Playing Down



15.4 Allows **Playing Down** under the following conditions

1. The player is in a lower academic year than birth year OR their safety is compromised due to size/stature or developmental issues
2. Suitable Assessment is carried out
3. Parent and Age Grade Chair must approve
4. Online application is made
5. CB Approval is given
6. The club must notify the opposing team at least 24 hours in advance of the game although an opposition's objection shall not prevent the player(s) from playing
7. The player remains in the lower age grade for the season

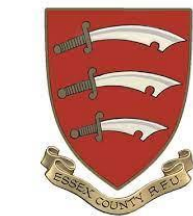
What age grades can do what Reg 15.5



| AGE GRADE (SCHOOL YEAR) | COMBINING AGE GRADES | 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 (max 3 U10s on the pitch) | 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 (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 |

| 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 & 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 |

What age grades can do what Reg 15.5



| MALE PLAYERS | | | |
|--------------|---|---|---|
| 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 U17s in 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 |

What age grades can do what -Reg 15.5



It is possible in certain situations to have a team that consists of players from 3 Age grades.

Eg an u12 player “playing up” into a combined U13 and U14 age grade team

BUT the assessments and applications need to include that context of them playing across three age groups and be made with player safety first and not to meet the needs of a team

Teams participating in Essex Youth Competitions complaining that its “not fair” that they are playing in a team with an older age grade player in it are demonstrating their focus is Competition rather than Player Centered and Development Driven philosophy.

Key Age Grade Regulations – Playing Adult Rugby



15.6 Allows **17 year old players to play Adult Rugby** under the following conditions

1. They don't play in front row
2. All Safeguarding Policies & Regulations are complied with
3. The club has a Safeguarding Officer and the **Club** has been first approved by the CB to play 17 year olds in Adult Rugby
4. Online application is made for Club Approval – each season
5. Proposal and Assessment of Player is made by 2 different people
6. Online application is made for **Player** Approval

Key Age Grade Regulations – Playing Adult Rugby



What does a CLUB need to have in place to be approved?

- CSO completed In Touch
- RFU Safeguarding Policy adopted and visible in Clubhouse
- Players registered on GMS – Emergency contact details known
- **Safeguarding Audit Complete for that season**
- **Key Adult roles “Positions of trust” engaging with the player** to undergo DBS check...Coaches, Captain, Team Manager, First Aider etc
- Opposition and Referee made aware
- Consent to travel from Parents
- Separate Shower facilities available if requested

Key Age Grade Regulations – Assessments



Where player assessments are required the detail of the assessment and findings must be provided on the application form. Detail is important or they will be rejected.

“He’s a big lad”.

“She wants to play with her mate or she may leave rugby”

How long has he/she played, any representative rugby, what the reason to play with Adults/Out of Age Grade.

What is skill level, physical development, maturity

How have they been assessed ?

Proposal made by ERCA coach and endorsed by second ERCA coach

Key Age Grade Regulations – Camps, Festivals, Tours



15.9 Allows **camps, festivals and tours** to take place under the following conditions

1. Regulation 15 is complied with
2. They align to the Age Grade Calendar and competition format of the age grade
3. Approval is given by Essex RFU for
 - In season and out of season competitions
 - Rugby Camps (excluding Saracens Camps)
 - Outgoing/Incoming Tours - i.e cross union

Clubs are already advertising festivals but none have been approved yet

Festival Approval requires details of

- Number of teams participating and Age Grades
- Number of matches played per team and playing time per team
- Provision for Safeguarding and First Aid arrangements at the event.
- Risk Assessment for the event

Key Age Grade Regulations – Camps, Festivals, Tours



Incoming tour:

a match or series of matches (including 15-a-side, 10-a-side, 7-a-side, beach rugby, touch and tag, and such other variations of non-contact and contact rugby) **played in England at any level involving a team from outside England** including adult matches, age grade matches and/or matches involving scratch/composite teams (as defined by WorldRugby), which may or may not involve an overnight stay

Outgoing tour:

a match or series of matches (including 15-a-side, 10-a-side, 7-a-side, beach rugby, touch and tag, and such other variations of non-contact and contact rugby) **played outside of union (England)** at any level including adult matches, age grade matches or matches involving scratch/ composite teams (as defined by World Rugby), which may or may not involve an overnight stay

Therefore a tour to Wales or Scotland is considered an Outgoing Tour or hosting a club from Wales or Scotland is considered an Incoming Tour

Key Age Grade Regulations – Camps, Festivals, Tours



Regarding Tours - Regulation 10

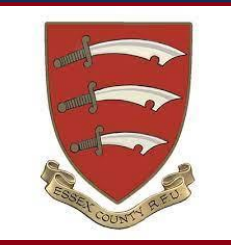
10.4.1 This Regulation 10.4 applies to the following:

- a)** adult men's Incoming Tours and Outgoing Tours at National League Rugby and below;
- b)** adult women's Incoming Tours and Outgoing Tours at Level 2 and below;
- c)** Incoming Tours and Outgoing Tours in respect of **Age Grade Rugby**; and
- d)** Incoming Tours and Outgoing Tours in respect of teams representing a Constituent Body.

10.4.4 In respect of 10.4.1(c), the RFU recognise any rugby activity which involves an overnight stay as a tour, be that in, or out of Union. **Clubs must seek advice from their Constituent Body regarding local approval arrangements.**

10.4.5 The RFU has prepared additional resources pertaining to Tours which are available at [Tours Resources](#), including the Trips, Tours and Overnight Stays Guidance, and Clubs are reminded of the need to have appropriate insurance in place prior to travelling abroad.

Key Age Grade Regulations – Camps, Festivals, Tours



Regarding Tours - Regulation 10

Approval Arrangements

Clubs will need to seek Essex RFU approval for Incoming or Outgoing Tours **at least 1 month before the tour date.**

Clubs will need to declare and confirm they have read, understood and complied with the Tour guidance and this declaration may be subject to audit. The appropriate form must be submitted.

Essex RFU do not currently approve overnight stays, eg tours to 3rd party organised rugby festivals in England but strongly recommend that Tour guidance is followed.

Common sense should prevail - if tours have parents attending with children the risk level is lower than a tour with Adults (eg Coaches, Team Managers) responsible for other people's children. In these cases clubs are encouraged to consult with Essex RFU to ensure Safeguarding best practice is followed and risks are understood.

Key Age Grade Regulations – Scores



15.11.3 Matches **must be brought to an end** if:

- (a) At U7 –u13 the try difference rises to more than 6: or
- (b) At U14 to U18 the points difference is more than 50.

15.11.4 if the game is brought to an end an alternative format of play can be implemented to manage the mismatch and allow the players to continue playing but that score will not be recorded

NB: Essex RFU Youth competitions limit the points difference to 39

Clubs should not be posting higher scores anywhere

Key Age Grade Regulations – Clustering

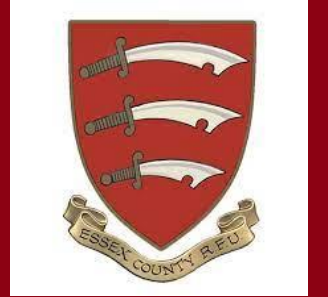


Clubs that Cluster on more than 3 occasions in a season must now register with the RFU and Essex RFU via the Cluster Registration Form within Regulation 15

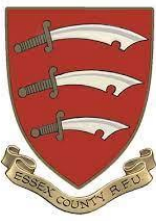
Cluster must identify lead roles

- Coaches
- Manager
- First Aider (Rugby Safe)
- Safeguarding Officer
- Discipline Officer

SAFEGUARDING



Courses for all CSO & ASCO



The Rugby Football Union (RFU) offers various safeguarding courses, including the mandatory, online Introduction to Safeguarding for basic understanding and DBS checks, the in-person Play it Safe for coaches and volunteers, and the virtual In Touch for Club Safeguarding Officers. These courses cover essential topics like managing safeguarding concerns, safer recruitment, and ensuring a safe environment for all participants in rugby. You can book these courses through the RFU GMS system.

In Touch is a mandatory course for all Club Safeguarding Officers. It is a two-and-a-half-hour workshop that is delivered remotely (via Microsoft Teams) by the RFU Safeguarding Team.

The course will guide you through topics such as Safer Cultures, Safer Recruitment and how to report concerns.

You will have an opportunity to ask questions of the RFU Safeguarding Team and learn from Club Safeguarding Officers around the country.

You can find and book the free In Touch course using the "book a course" link as you would with the other "in person" courses using the [RFU Coursefinder](#). Please select **both** "Safeguarding" options from the drop down list on the left side of the page and **ensure the postcode field is left blank**.

Courses for all CSO & ASCO



Play it Safe - Jo Rasor

In Touch – Nicky Worthington

Safeguarding officer details

These posters should be on your notice board with the CSO details.



Before the season starts

- All self audit to be completed by 24th October.
- Club visits will be done from September to December
- All safeguarding policy on website & notice board up -dated before the season starts.
- All volunteers to be DBS checked this includes the first Aiders.
- To remove all roles that are NOT volunteering anymore.
- Changing room poster to be up -dated and put up on changing room doors.

Sharing a concern

- The RFU Safeguarding Referral Form has been developed so it can be completed and submitted regarding any concerns you have or have been disclosed to you, relating to the welfare or behaviour of any child or adult. These may include general concerns about a child or adult's welfare, concerns about bullying or poor practice, suspicions or allegations of harm both within and outside rugby union. If you experience any difficulties filling out the form, please email safeguarding@rfu.com.
- If someone is in immediate danger call 999 as soon as possible and then submit the RFU Safeguarding Referral Form.
- If you're a parent, you can share your concerns with your Club Safeguarding Officer or complete the RFU Safeguarding Referral Form.
- If you're ever unsure, contact the RFU Safeguarding Team either via safeguarding@rfu.com or the unmanned RFU Safeguarding line on 0208 831 6655 and a member of the Safeguarding Team will respond to you within 24 working hours. Alternatively, seek advice from your CB Safeguarding Manager or Club Safeguarding Officer.

Safer Recruitment Best Practices

1. Provide details on roles you're recruiting for

- If your club is recruiting volunteers, make sure key aspects of their role such as any possible involvement with children, any checks the applicant may need to undergo, and what your club values are, are known from the outset and are made clear during the application process.

2. Make sure your club is clear about the skills and knowledge required for the role, and that this is included in the role description

- By identifying these at the start, your club can be sure to get a better pool of suitable applicants. It is also a good chance for the club to highlight any safeguarding needs for the applicant, such as the need to have a child-centred approach or the ability to handle confidential information.
- The RFU have made a [Club Safeguarding Officer Role Description Template](#) for your use.

3. Interview volunteers

- Clubs should take the opportunity to interview volunteers and get a better understanding of why they're applying for the role and if they have prior experience in a similar field.

Safer recruitment best practices

4. References

- Always collect character references for volunteers, regardless of the role they're applying for and especially if they're applying for a role with children or adults at risk. Clubs should do all they can to build the most informed picture of new volunteers.

5. Certificates and qualifications

- Always ask to see copies of any certificates or qualifications that are required for the role.

6. Mentoring period

- Clubs should consider the suitability of a 'mentoring/shadowing' period for new volunteers, to ensure they get an appropriate level of support in the early days of their role. For example, if hiring a new coach, it may be suitable that they have a more senior coach support them in sessions during their first week.

7. Ongoing development

- Ensure that the individual carries out any training or training refresher/renewal courses they're required to do. For example, coaches and CSOs are required to refresh their safeguarding training every three years.

RFU Regulation 21

21.1.1 The RFU has jurisdiction to deal with any allegation of abuse of a Child, any breach of the Policy and/or any breach of these Regulations.

21.1.2 Any allegations of abuse of a Child shall be dealt with in accordance with these Regulations and the Policy. All those whose activities are covered by these Regulations and the Policy must comply with the requirements set out in each.

21.1.3 Any person involved in Rugby Union must report all safeguarding concerns of which they become aware to the RFU Safeguarding Team.

21.1.4 Any adult who works with children or could reasonably be deemed to be seen as a person in a position of trust in Rugby Union in England must read and comply with the RFU Safeguarding Policy and the Safeguarding Policy of any club or society that they are associated with.

21.1.5 Each Club with an age grade section, or which has 17 year olds playing adult rugby must have a Club Safeguarding Officer. A Club Safeguarding Officer must attend an In Touch course within 6 months of their appointment.

21.1.6 Each Club with an age grade section, or which has 17 year olds playing adult rugby must complete an annual RFU safeguarding audit through GMS by 24 October 2025 (or such other date as notified by the RFU). A Safeguarding Audit may also be requested by the RFU Head of Safeguarding or the Club's primary Constituent Body, to be completed within 14 days of such request.

RFU Regulation 21

21.1.7 Each Constituent Body must have a CB Safeguarding Manager. A CB Safeguarding Manager must attend the RFU Annual Training Conference.

21.1.8 In order to investigate a referral in relation to child or adult safeguarding matters, and before deciding whether or not there is a case to answer, the RFU Safeguarding Team may require a person, Player or Club to provide information or attend a meeting.

21.1.9 Information collated in the course of an investigation under these Regulations and any documentation relating to any decision reached shall be recorded and retained by the RFU for such period as is necessary and proportionate for the purposes of enabling the RFU to safeguard children and in accordance with the Data Protection legislation.

21.1.10 Safeguarding investigations and DBS Disclosures will be dealt with by the RFU Safeguarding Team and, where necessary, will be referred to the RMG or a sub-group of the RMG for consideration. A case may be referred from the RMG (or sub-group thereof) to the RFU Discipline department for investigation and proceedings under RFU Regulation 19 and/or may commission an independent practitioner, or the services of Sports Resolution to assist in investigations, case management and/or disciplinary hearings, where necessary.

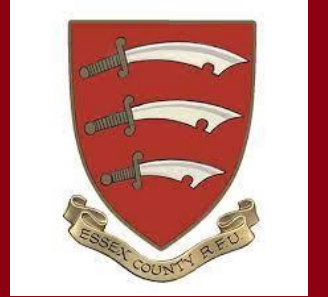
21.1.11 Where the RFU receives a referral or information regarding inappropriate safeguarding practices and/or the RFU Head of Safeguarding determines that an individual or entity would benefit from training, they may, irrespective of whether additional safeguarding measures are taken, direct that to occur.

RFU Regulation 21

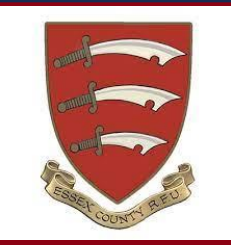
21.5 Safeguarding Adults

- **21.5.1** The provisions of RFU Regulation 21 are applicable to Adults at Risk in Rugby Union and those working with them in the same way as they apply to Children in Rugby Union and those working with them.
- **21.5.2** If an individual is working with Adults at Risk, it may be necessary that they obtain a DBS disclosure in accordance with process and requirements of Regulation 21.2.
- **21.5.3** The RFU Safeguarding Adults at Risk Policy which includes definitions and guidance can be found at: <https://www.englandrugby.com/governance/safeguarding>

AGE GRADE DISCIPLINE



Regulation 19 Appendix 6 - Age Grade Discipline



RED CARDS

A sanction table exists for Age Grade Players - Sanctions are different to that in the Adult game

U12 and below is to be dealt with by the players coach and the sanction is an “education focussed approach”

U13 – U18 incidents are heard by the Clubs Age Grade Disciplinary Panel and a sanction table applies.

In all cases the outcome of the hearing should be notified to the Essex Age Grade Discipline Secretary within 48 hours.

The power to bring a citing complaint only applies to U13 to U18 matches

The outcome of all Age Grade player hearings are confidential.

Complaints raised about the conduct of behaviour including breaches of rule 5.12 of any **Adult** involved with Age Grade Rugby (including spectators) will be dealt with by the Essex RFU Disciplinary Panel.

Regulation 19 Appendix 6 - Age Grade Discipline



Breaches of Regulation 15 are also disciplinary matters

- Breaching The Half Game Rule
- Training or Playing Up or Down out of Age Grade without permission

Are also subject to sanction and potential suspension of the coach

Discipline Track Record - Season 2024/25



U13 –U18 Age Grade Sanctions

- 14 players received a total of 58 weeks suspensions.
- 7 Coaches received a total of 42 weeks suspensions.
- 9 Spectators received a total of 103 weeks suspensions

3 clubs were warned about their parents entering the field of play and not controlling their players and coaches.

We ask you please to return to your clubs and educate your coaches and parents on the values of rugby and expectations of behaviour and disciplinary sanctions being applied.

Discipline or Safeguarding? Both or Neither?



Know the difference in order to deal with issue effectively at your club.

SAFEGUARDING

- Has the RFU Safeguarding Policy been breached?
- Is the conduct of behavior of the individual poor practice?
- What is the impact on the child and their wellbeing, has it been impacted or have they suffered harm ?

IF YES TO ANY OF THE ABOVE IT'S A SAFEGUARDING MATTER

Dealt with by Club Safeguarding Officer, CB Safeguarding Chair or RFU Safeguarding Team

DISCIPLINE

- Has there been on-field foul play (contrary to Law 9)?
- Is the alleged conduct prejudicial to the interests of the game or the Union (contrary to RFU Rule 5.12)?

IF YES THEN THE MATTER IS A DISCIPLINARY ONE

Dealt with by Club Discipline Officer, CB Age Grade Discipline Secretary, CB Discipline Secretary or RFU Discipline Team

Discipline or Safeguarding? Both or Neither?



When the incident could be **BOTH**

- Serious Injury has occurred
- Police Investigation
- Racial Abuse - verbal or physical
- Abuse of a Young Match Official - verbal or physical
- Breach of Regulation 15 that causes harm to a child

- Any of the above where it is committed by a person who holds a position of trust
- If it's identified that a parent or spectator has committed the above and is in a position of trust outside of rugby eg Teacher

- IF IN DOUBT - Notify the RFU and ask for advice.

Wrap Up



Thanks for attending.

Quite a lot of information but all of it is important and in most cases mandatory given its regulations.

We want to EDUCATE NOT POLICE OR PUNISH

We ask that you set up meeting(s) at your club with coaches, team managers, safeguarding officers, rugby safe leads and discipline secretaries to share what you have heard as early as possible.

We would be happy to attend any of those meetings to offer support if required.