

NATIONAL RUGBY POLICY #8: AGE TO PLAY SENIOR RUGBY

Updated in February 2022 and replaces the National Rugby Policies 8 (Age to Play Senior Rugby) and 8B (Age to Play Senior Women's Rugby).

BACKGROUND

In some provinces, small towns and rural areas in New Zealand, there is only one team available for players to join. Invariably this means that, in order to participate in rugby, young school leavers have to play senior rugby as soon as they move from a school to club environment.

In some provinces, there is also a need for secondary school teams to play in senior club competition grades in order to access meaningful and balanced competitions.

In such circumstances, given the inherent safety risks of teenagers playing against adults, this National Rugby Policy Age to Play Senior Rugby (Policy) applies. This Policy takes into account the World Rugby Age Grade Rugby Guidelines (Guidelines) and, pursuant to those Guidelines, given this Policy applies to community/participation adult rugby (as opposed to elite adult rugby), has been drafted having regard to safety, player welfare and local conditions to fit within the New Zealand rugby environment.

POLICY

- For the purposes of this Policy, "Senior Rugby" is defined as including all club competitions for U20 grades and above.
- This Policy applies to all forms of Senior Rugby that involve tackle, including but not limited to Sevens, Tens, and Fifteens.
- Players are eligible to apply to play Senior Rugby from the date they turn 16 years of age.
- The ability to play Senior Rugby will be limited to the following combinations of ages and positions:
 - 16- and 17-year-old males and females may play in any position in the backs and forwards (excluding the front row).
 - 16, 17 and 18-year-old females may play in the front row (subject to satisfactory completion of a front row assessment)
 - 16-year-old males may play in the front row in club competitions up to and including U21 grades (subject to satisfactory completion of a front row assessment). 16-year-old males may not play in the front row in club competitions for over U21 grades.
 - 17-year-old males may play in the front row in club competitions up to and including U21 grades (subject to satisfactory completion of a front row assessment).

- 18-year-old males are not required to apply to play Senior Rugby.
- 18-year-old females are not required to apply to play Senior Rugby for any position other than in the front row unless they have already been approved to play in the front row at 16 or 17 years of age. The rationale for requiring this approval is due to the differences in front row competence of females currently and the current variability in women's competitions.
- Players wishing to play Senior Rugby must complete the "player details" on the approval form. The approval form requires the consent of a parent/legal guardian for players under the age of 18 and approval from a medical specialist.
- Players must submit the completed approval form to the relevant Provincial Union (i.e., the governing body of a player's competition organiser).
- The Provincial Union will then arrange for the technical and (if applicable) front row assessments of the player pursuant to the NZR approved process map and approval form. Provincial Unions cannot delegate this responsibility.
- On satisfactory completion of the technical and (if applicable) front row assessments, a Provincial Union CEO is permitted to withhold approval of a player to play Senior Rugby if that player already has a fair and reasonable playing opportunity within their age cohort. This is to avoid any unnecessary risk that presents when underage players play Senior Rugby. The reasons of a Provincial Union CEO for withholding any approval must be included in the approval form (e.g., noting the playing opportunities available to the player).
- Approvals are for one year only. Players must reapply each season until they are 18 (with the exception of 18-year old females playing in the front row if they have already been approved to play in the front row at 16 or 17 years of age in which case the original approval is valid until the player turns 19).

RESPONSIBILITIES

New Zealand Rugby:

- Has provided an approval process map.
- Has provided an approval form.
- Will undertake a biennial review of the Policy.

Provincial Unions:

- Will process, screen, and consider applications to play Senior Rugby.
- Will monitor participation in Senior Rugby competitions to ensure underage players have been screened and approved pursuant to the requirements outlined in this Policy.
- Will withhold approvals where a player already has a fair and reasonable playing opportunity within their age cohort.

- Will monitor, administer, and store applications to play Senior Rugby, including uploading completed applications into the National Rugby Database, in accordance with their obligations under the Privacy Act 2020.

Clubs and Schools:

- Will identify and support eligible underage players that need to apply to play Senior Rugby.
- Will not select underage players for Senior Rugby that have not received approval to play Senior Rugby pursuant to this Policy.