

# **National Rugby Policy**

## **POLICY #09**

### **AGE BANDS FOR AGE GRADE RUGBY**

Updated November 2024 and effective immediately.

### **RELATED NZR POLICY**

This policy should be read and applied in conjunction with National Rugby Policy #04 DISPENSATIONS.

### **POLICY REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed at the conclusion of the 2025 season.

### **BACKGROUND**

As with many sports, rugby involves an element of risk to the physical wellbeing of participants. New Zealand Rugby is committed to making the game as safe as it practically can for participants, ensuring they continue to enjoy playing rugby and have a lifelong love of the game.

Players up to the age of 19 years old need to be supported with policies and processes to ensure their safety and the safety of their opponents without unnecessarily limiting their ability to play. In some provinces, particularly in small schools, small towns and rural areas with smaller populations, the depth of the player base may warrant players playing with older cohorts than their current age, where it is safe for them to do so.

This policy is developed with consideration of the New Zealand context, and takes account of World Rugby guidelines to ensure player safety is the primary focus when considering players being approved to play outside their normal playing cohort. The policy recognises the difference in physical, mental, and emotional maturation of players across age and stage.

The policy also recognises the New Zealand Education cohort system which enables children once they have turned five years of age to join school in groups as determined by the respective Primary School. This group cohort entry system has impact for rugby noting that transition in delivery system that occurs from Junior Rugby Clubs to Secondary School Rugby in many NZ provinces. It is therefore critical that rugby's cohort entry system is aligned with the New Zealand Education System. 1 April has been determined as the most relevant date to align with the New Zealand Education cohort system.

### **POLICY**

This policy applies to all players who are under the age of 19 years old on the 1st of April of the year in question. This policy also applies to all contact forms of the game, including Sevens, Tens, and Fifteens.

The term 'age window' is defined as the year that caters for any particular playing cohort within a competition. This is typically defined by grades by Year Group and/or Age Grade eg Year 4/U9s, and is to be captured in competition regulations for each competition. For the purposes of this policy, focus should remain on the Year Group / Age of the respective playing cohort rather than the grade description. The absence of an age grade at a level within a competition structure does not mean that players can be automatically considered for the next available age grade.

Players may play within the following 'windows' by age and gender within approved competitions:

<b>Age Groups by Gender</b>	<b>Best Practice</b>	<b>Acceptable Practice</b>	<b>Exceptional Circumstances</b>
Males and Females up to 12 years of age at 1 April	Within same age window ie a 10 year old with other 10 year olds.	Within one year age window ie a 10 year old with 11 year olds.	Within two-year age window ie a 10 year old with 12 year olds.
Males aged 13 and up to 18 years of age as at 1 April	Within same age window ie a 13 year old with other 13 year olds.	Within up to a two-year age window ie a 13 year old with 14 or 15 year olds.	Within three-year age window ie 13 year old with 16 year olds.
Females aged 13 and up to 18 years of age as at 1 April	Within same age window ie a 13 year old with other 13 year olds.	Within up to a three-year age window ie a 13 year old with 14, 15 or 16 year olds.	Within four-year age window ie a 13 year old with 17 year olds.

## EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Players wishing to play in age windows that qualify as Exceptional Circumstance Case for their respective age and gender are required to undertake an Exceptional Circumstance Case assessment before being cleared to play in the desired grade or competition.

This assessment will require:

- Parental consent,
- Provision of individualised medical advice to the player and legal guardians,

- a technical assessment by an independent and currently qualified Developing Rugby Coach Level 2, and
- Principal or Club Chair approval. Assessments are to be completed in accordance with NZR Age Band Exceptional Case Assessment form.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

New Zealand Rugby will provide:

- Exceptional Circumstances Case Assessment form, and
- Resources to support the assessment coach in undertaking the technical assessment.

Provincial Unions will:

- Prescribe age grade levels for each competition within its control.
- Provide support to Players, Clubs and Schools in administering the policy,
- Provide support for technical assessment for any player,
- Record and retain approved assessment forms for any player, and
- Administer and enforce the age grade policy properly and fairly within the Provincial Union, with the health and wellbeing of players as the most important consideration.

Coaches/Schools/Clubs will:

- Comply with the policy to identify players requiring assessment,
- Provide support to any player requiring assessment, and
- Comply with policy in selecting players that meet age windows for the grade/competition.

Principals/Club Chairs will:

- Review, assess, approve or decline Exceptional Circumstances Case Assessments in accordance with this policy and their duty of care to all players, and
- Submit approved Exceptional Circumstances Case Assessments to the organising PU for recording and recording.

## **SANCTIONS**

Coaches, Managers, Administrators, Clubs and Schools knowingly playing or allowing players to play outside age band policies and procedures will face Provincial Union disciplinary sanctions. These are to be determined by the Provincial Union.