

**T I E R S 4 - 6 (COMMUNITY GAME)**

# **OPERATIONAL RULES**

**2026**

---



# ***INDEX***

## ***DEFINITIONS***

**SECTION A** – LEAGUE AND CLUB OBLIGATIONS

**SECTION B** – COMPETITIONS

**SECTION C** – PERSONNEL

**SECTION D** – MISCONDUCT

**SECTION E** – ARBITRATION

## ***APPENDICES***

**SECTION F1** – SAFEGUARDING POLICY

**SECTION F2** – ADULTS AT RISK POLICY

**SECTION F3** – RESPECT

**SECTION F4** – TACKLE IT

**SECTION F5** – ANTI-DOPING RULES

**SECTION F6** – FIRST AID STANDARDS

**SECTION F7** – BLOOD BORNE DISEASES REGULATIONS

**SECTION F8** – BETTING AND RELATED ACTIVITY CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE COMMUNITY GAME

**SECTION F9** – ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES

**SECTION F10** – PRIMARY RUGBY LEAGUE RULES

**SECTION F11** – RFL SCHOLARSHIP AND COMMUNITY GAME TRAINING AND PLAYING POLICY

**SECTION F12** – OVERSEAS TOURING POLICY

**SECTION F13** – AGE RANGES

**SECTION F14** – PLAYER DISPENSATION POLICY



**SECTION A**

**LEAGUE AND CLUB  
OBLIGATIONS**

**SECTION A / LEAGUE AND CLUB OBLIGATIONS**



## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **SECTION A – LEAGUE AND CLUB OBLIGATIONS**

#### **A1 LEAGUES ACCEPTANCE OF OPERATIONAL RULES**

- A1:1 Each League is bound by these Operational Rules and the Laws of the Game and accepts the jurisdiction of the RFL and agrees to operate the Competitions it organises in accordance with these Operational Rules and the Laws of the Game and any Terms of Reference. To the extent that there is any conflict between these Operational Rules and any Competition Rules, each League agrees that these Operational Rules shall take precedence.
- A1:2 For the avoidance of doubt, this includes an agreement to be bound by the Arbitration provisions contained within these Operational Rules and RFL Policies, and all decisions made by any tribunal, panel or body constituted pursuant to these Operational Rules, or RFL Policies (including Sports Resolutions (UK) tribunals), shall be final and binding.
- A1:3 As soon as reasonably practical, after each AGM (or at any other time when changes are made to such Competition Rules), each League shall submit a copy of their Competition Rules to the RFL.
- A1:4 For the avoidance of doubt each League may determine any matters not covered by these Operational Rules and include these within their Competition Rules.
- A1:5 Each League agrees to observe the RFL's Anti-Doping Regulations, the Welfare Policy, Safeguarding Policy, First Aid Standards, Betting and Related Activity Code of Conduct for the Community Game, Equity Statement, Respect Policy and any other rules and policies that may from time to time be adopted by the RFL through the RFL Board.
- A1:6 All Leagues are required to act in accordance with all applicable laws. Each League agrees that the Community Board shall be entitled to take any action and/or make such orders as it considers appropriate, where to do otherwise would knowingly allow a League to breach any applicable laws, even where such behaviour is not prohibited through a strict interpretation of these Operational Rules.
- A1:7 Each League shall delegate the day to day running of the competition to a Management Group. The Management Group will have the power to make decisions consistent with these Operational Rules. In the event of an issue falling outside of these rules the decision will be referred to the RFL Community Board. The League shall ensure that each of its Management Groups complies with all obligations imposed on Leagues and Management Groups under these Operational Rules.
- A1:8 Each League agrees to implement and support disciplinary procedures in accordance with Section D of these Operational Rules. This includes the establishment of an appropriate Competition Disciplinary Tribunal and adherence to the misconduct procedures as outlined therein.
- A1:9 Each Management Group shall hold a minimum of two meetings a year to which all Clubs under its jurisdiction shall be invited.
- A1:10 A Club shall be entitled to call a meeting of all the Clubs who are members of the relevant Competition as long as they have written support of at least one third of the Clubs within the relevant Competition. Such a meeting shall be called by the Management Group within 28 days of the request.
- A1:11 A League will not accept any club into its Competition until that Club has discharged all financial liabilities to its former League in accordance with A4:1.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **A2 CLUBS ACCEPTANCE OF THE OPERATIONAL RULES**

- A2:1 Each Club which participates in any Competition is deemed, by acceptance of the invitation, to be bound by these Operational Rules, the applicable Competition Rules, the rules and regulations of any body of which the relevant Competition is a member or affiliated with, the terms of any agreement entered into by the applicable Management Group or the RFL and the Laws of the Game and accepts the jurisdiction of the RFL. To the extent that there is any conflict between any of the above and these Operational Rules, each Club agrees that these Operational Rules shall take precedence.
- A2:2 For the avoidance of doubt, this includes an agreement to be bound by the Arbitration provisions contained within these Operational Rules and RFL Policies, and all decisions made by any tribunal, panel or body constituted pursuant to these Operational Rules, or RFL Policies (including Sports Resolutions (UK) tribunals), shall be final and binding.
- A2:3 A copy of the Laws of the Game and these Operational Rules, shall be made available to each of the intended participating Clubs by the relevant Management Group prior to that Club's entry in such Competition being accepted.
- A2:4 Each Club, agrees to observe the RFL's Anti-Doping Rules, Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Rules, Safeguarding Policy, First Aid Standards, Betting and Related Activity Code of Conduct for the Community Game, Diversity and Anti-Racism Policies, Respect Policy and any other rules and policies that may from time to time be adopted by the RFL through the RFL Board.
- A2:5 All Clubs which participate in any relevant Competition or any Game under the jurisdiction of the RFL, as organised by a Management Group, are required to act in accordance with all applicable laws. Each Club agrees that the Community Board shall be entitled to take any action and/or make such orders as it considers appropriate where to do otherwise would knowingly allow a Club to breach any applicable laws, even where such behaviour is not prohibited through a strict interpretation of these Operational Rules.
- A2:6 Each Club agrees that all its Players, members, employees, Officials, Volunteers and spectators are only allowed to take part in or attend Matches or be involved in the business of or the conduct of playing matters at any Club on condition that they observe the Operational Rules. Each Club agrees to ensure that these Operational Rules are enforced and observed by its Players, members, employees, Officials, Volunteers and spectators.
- A2:7 Each Club agrees to comply with and support the disciplinary procedures as set out in Section D of these Operational Rules. This includes ensuring that all its Players, Officials, and Volunteers are aware of and adhere to the misconduct process, decisions of Disciplinary Panels, and any resulting sanctions.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **A3 MINIMUM STANDARDS**

#### **A3:1 GROUNDS/GROUND SAFETY**

- A3:1:1 Each Club shall ensure that at all times its ground complies with any minimum requirements or entry criteria specified to play in a relevant Competition.
- A:3:1:2 Where a solid barrier is within 3 metres of the playing field the Club must undertake a risk assessment to mitigate any potential issues and ensure that it has put in place suitable safety measures to mitigate any risks identified.
- A3:1:3 Notwithstanding the provisions set out above, the RFL shall have the power to specify additional rules and regulations relating to the standard of grounds, (which can vary according to the Tier of competition of the Club at a particular time) which Clubs shall comply with.
- A3:1:4 Artificial grass pitches may be utilised in all Competitions subject to the pitch complying with the standards and policies as directed from time to time by the RFL.
- A3:1:5 Without prejudice to any other provision of these Operational Rules, the Club shall ensure that its ground and facilities comply with all regulations, statutes or any other rules which have the force of law in the country in which the Club plays its home Matches.

#### **A3:2 OTHER STANDARDS**

- A3:2:1 Every Club shall meet any other standards specified under the terms of their relevant Competition.
- A3:2:2 Each Club, when entering a Competition shall ensure that they have in place an appropriate constitution. Upon request Clubs must provide a copy to the Management Group.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **A4 FINANCIAL MATTERS**

- A4:1 Clubs shall promptly pay any Competition fees, fines or any other monies imposed upon them in accordance with these Operational Rules or Competition Rules.
- A4:2 All Clubs are provided with public liability and personal accident insurance through a group insurance policy arranged by the RFL. This insurance is included as part of Our League Active and is funded by the RFL. The policy provides cover for the Club, including its Players, Volunteers, and Coaches. For further information on the policy cover, please visit the RFL website
- A4:3 Upon request by the RFL, the Management Groups shall provide accounts or suitable financial records to the RFL in an agreed format.
- A4:4 Management Groups may request accounts or suitable financial records from Clubs who will provide them promptly upon such request. The Management Groups shall have the right to share such information with the RFL.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **A5 RIGHTS, BROADCASTING & SPONSORSHIP**

- A5.1 Each Management Group shall have the right and power to enter into all forms of sponsorship, advertising, broadcasting and other commercial contracts that relate to Matches in their Competition, provided that before entering into any arrangement with a third party the Management Group first notify the RFL of the terms of the agreement.
- A5.2 The Clubs and Management Group are not entitled to sell any rights relating to the RFL including but not limited to RFL logos, designations that refer to the RFL, tickets and rights to RFL Matches or rights which expressly or implicitly relate to the whole of the community game.
- A5.3 The Clubs and Management Group agree to grant to the RFL such inventory at Matches at a relevant Competition as is required from time to time as agreed by the Community Board.
- A5.4 The Clubs and Management Group agree to grant to the RFL and its partners reasonable access to their facilities in order to exercise any rights.

**SECTION B**

**COMPETITIONS**

**SECTION B | COMPETITIONS**



## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **SECTION B - COMPETITIONS**

#### **B1 GENERAL**

##### **B1:1 ADMINISTRATION**

B1:1:1 The Management Groups shall be governed by the RFL under the terms of these Operational Rules and the Terms of Reference.

B1:1:2 Each Management Group, when setting dates for Matches, shall ensure that the dates for their fixtures comply with the RFL calendar of Matches as specified from time to time.

B1:1:3 Subject to B1:1:2, each Management Group will determine the programme of fixtures and fix the dates upon which Matches are to be played and deal with all matters connected with or arising out of the Matches in its Competition.

B1:1:4 Primary Rugby League is a developmental, non-competitive format and is not classified as a Competition for the purposes of these Operational Rules. It is governed exclusively by Section F10 (Primary Rugby League Rules) unless an age group is specifically referenced within these Operational Rules.

##### **B1:2 START AND END OF SEASON**

B1:2:1 The RFL will, with each Management Group, agree the date of commencement of their season and the date on which the Season shall finish to best serve the needs of the Competition as well as the best interests of all the Competitions. Any application to play outside of the agreed dates must be approved by the RFL.

##### **B1:3 PLAYER WELFARE – OFF-SEASON AND CONTACT-FREE PERIODS**

B1:3:1 The RFL sets out the following off-season and contact-free periods to support player welfare, recovery, and long-term health across the community game. These periods apply to all Competitions and are intended to provide clarity for planning while recognising the practical realities of the community environment.

##### **B1:3:2 Off-Season and Contact Periods**

The following periods apply:

- Competition Season: 1 March to mid-November
- Non-Contact Period: Mid-November to 31 December
- Phased Return to Contact Training: From 1 January
- Friendlies and Representative Activity Resume: From 1 February

During the non-contact period, training and activity should focus on non-contact elements such as skills, fitness, rehabilitation, and social engagement.

##### **Non-Contact Period Expectations**

No organised contact activity should take place during the non-contact period. Any proposed exception must be based on exceptional circumstances and require prior approval from the RFL.

B1:3:3 The RFL recognises that players may participate in rugby league across multiple environments. Clubs, competitions, team officials, parents, and players share responsibility for planning activity in line with these periods and for making welfare-led decisions where overlapping commitments exist.

B1:3:4 The RFL encourages all players, particularly those participating in both summer and winter competitions, to take a minimum six-week break from contact activity during the year to support physical and mental recovery.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **B1:4 PLAYER WELFARE – PLAYER LOAD MANAGEMENT**

B1:4.1 The purpose of this rule is to support long-term player welfare, including brain health and overall well-being, by managing match exposure and contact load within the community game.

B1:4.2 Players may engage in rugby league across a range of environments, including:

- Community club fixtures
- School or college competitions
- Representative programmes
- Other sporting or training commitments

While the RFL regulates rugby league activity within its Competitions, overall player load is a shared responsibility between clubs, parents, players, schools, and other providers.

B1:4.3 Players should not participate in more than one rugby league match per weekend (Friday to Sunday).

Where players are involved in multiple programmes, clubs and parents must take reasonable steps to ensure that this expectation is met. Any exception should be based on clear welfare considerations and kept to an absolute minimum.

As a general welfare principle, players should not be required to play more than one rugby league match within a seven-day period. This is particularly important where school or college commitments exist or where fixtures have been rearranged.

B1:4.4 Exceptions to these expectations may be considered in limited circumstances, such as:

- Rearranged or abandoned fixtures
- Representative commitments
- Unavoidable scheduling conflicts

Where an exception is required, clubs should ensure the player's welfare is the overriding consideration. RFL approval is required only where representative and club fixtures would otherwise clash.

B1:4.5 To protect player welfare, the following are not permitted within the community game:

- Playing in both mixed junior rugby league and girls' fixtures during the same weekend
- Playing in both youth and Open Age matches during the same weekend
- Playing for a Community Lions, England, Scotland, Wales, or Ireland representative team and a community club during the same weekend
- Playing in a professional academy or reserve fixture and a community rugby league match during the same weekend

Where a club operates an appropriate youth team, U17–U18 players should prioritise playing in their correct age group. Open Age rugby league is available as a progression opportunity for eligible players, but it is not intended to replace youth competition or reduce participation within age-appropriate programmes.

B1:4.6 Clubs and team officials are responsible for managing player participation in line with this regulation. Where breaches occur, the RFL or relevant league may take action against the club and/or team officials, taking into account the welfare impact, intent, and circumstances of the case.

## RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)

### B2 MATCH DAY RULES

#### B2:1 MATCHES

B2:1:1 All Matches will be played under the Laws of the Game unless otherwise stated within these Operational Rules

#### B2:1:2 Match Durations

Matches shall be played for the following durations, with a minimum interval of five minutes between halves:

Age Group	Duration	Halves
Adult	80 minutes	Two equal halves
Under 19	70 minutes	Two equal halves
Under 18 (Year 13)	70 minutes	Two equal halves
Under 17 (Year 12)	70 minutes	Two equal halves
Under 16 (Year 11)	60 minutes	Two equal halves
Under 15 (Year 10)	60 minutes	Two equal halves
Under 14 (Year 9)	50 minutes	Two equal halves
Under 13 (Year 8)	50 minutes	Two equal halves
Under 12 (Year 7)	40 minutes	Two equal halves
Under 11 and below	As per Primary Rugby League rules, see (F10)	

#### B2:1:3 Variations to the Laws of the Game

The International Rugby League Laws shall apply unless varied by these Operational Rules. The RFL may approve variations for age-grade or modified formats, including but not limited to:

- Match duration
- Tackle height
- Team composition
- Ball size
- Disciplinary procedures (e.g., Sin Bin duration)
- Substitution rules
- Extra time and Golden Point procedures

Approved variations are summarised in the RFL Rules Overview Table, which is the authoritative reference for match conditions.

B2:1:4 Each Management Group shall liaise with their regional Match Officials' Appointment Officer in order to appoint Match Officials.

#### B2:2 BALLS

B2:2:1 The balls to be used in Matches shall be submitted to and approved by the Match Official before the commencement of the Match and must be of the type and size specified by and comply with the RFL's directions and as per the Laws of the Game as in place from time to time.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

B2:2:2 For the avoidance of doubt, the current approved ball sizes for each age group are as follows:

<b>Mixed Rugby League</b>	
Size 3	Under 7 to Under 11 (Year 1-6)
<b>Male</b>	
Size 4	Under 12 to Under 13 (Year 7-8)
Size 5	Under 14 and above (Year 9 and above)
<b>Female</b>	
Size 4	Under 12 to Under 18 (Year 7-13)
Size 5	Under-19 and Open Age
<b>PDRL/LDRL/Wheelchair</b>	
Size 4	
Size 5	when playing international rugby league.

### **B2:3 DISPUTES**

B2:3:1 All disputes relating to the venue, time and date of any Match or any other disputes relating to a Match shall be determined by a Management Group in its absolute discretion, unless otherwise provided for in these Operational Rules.

### **B2:4 GROUNDS UNFIT FOR PLAY**

#### **B2:4:1 Procedure for Suspected Unfit Grounds**

If the home Club suspects its ground is unfit for play due to adverse weather or other causes, it must immediately notify:

- The visiting Club
- The appointed Match Official
- The relevant Competition Officer
- If it is clear the match cannot be played, this decision must be communicated without delay.

#### **B2:4:2 Hard Ground – Protocol for Calling Off Games**

A common-sense approach must always be applied.

- If the pitch is considered unplayable in advance by a Club Groundsman, Local Authority Groundsman, or another appropriately qualified person at the club, every effort should be made to source an alternative pitch.
- On the day of the game, the Match Official (aged 18 or over) has the responsibility and authority to postpone the match if the pitch is deemed unplayable.
- A pitch inspection can also be carried out up to 24 hours before the away team travelling.
- The Match Official should:
  - Decide in accordance with the Grass Pitch Inspection Form
  - Consult with the Groundsman or appropriate club representative (if available)
  - Discuss with both coaches before confirming the final decision

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

- The completed Grass Pitch Inspection Form must be submitted by the Match Official to the relevant Competition Officer.
- For matches without an appointed Match Official (e.g., Primary Rugby League), coaches should make an informed, joint decision based on player welfare. The Pitch Inspection Form may still be used in this context.
- Where a full-size pitch is not required, clubs are encouraged to consider alternative venues such as local schools, parks, or other grassed areas.

### **B2:5 OTHER REASONS**

B2:5:1 If for any other reason a Game is due to be postponed, Clubs must contact the relevant Competition Officer as soon as possible.

### **B2:6 CONTACTING OPPONENTS**

B2:6:1 It is the responsibility of the home Club, during the week preceding a Game, to contact both its opponents and the relevant Match Official regarding team colours and ground directions.

### **B2:7 SAFETY AND/OR MISCONDUCT AT GROUNDS**

B2:7:1 Each Club is responsible for managing its ground safely and is required to comply with its legal obligations in this regard.

B2:7:2 In addition, each Club is required to take all steps necessary (including those that incur costs) to take all precautions necessary to ensure that all Persons Subject to the Operational Rules who are members of their Club and persons purporting to be the supporters of that Club do not:

- (a) Act unlawfully;
- (b) Threaten, abuse or assault any person from the opposition Club, person attending the ground or Match Official;
- (c) Invade the pitch or pitch surrounds;
- (d) Throw missiles on the pitch;
- (e) Act in a disorderly or improper manner;
- (f) Behave in an unruly or unlawful manner;
- (g) Behave in a manner which is prejudicial to the game of Rugby Football League or amounts to improper conduct either before, during or after the conclusion of any Match whether the Club is playing at home, away or at a neutral venue; or
- (h) Engage in Unacceptable Language and Behaviour .

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **B2:8 BRAWLS AND HARRASSMENT OF MATCH OFFICIALS**

B2:8:1 Each Club shall ensure that none of its Players or Officials engages in a brawl. A brawl is defined as a total of three or more Players or Officials from either Team being involved in an incident of fighting or aggressive physical contact on the pitch and surrounding areas before, during or after a Match.

B2:8:2 Each Club shall ensure that none of its Players or Officials engage in behavior which constitutes harassment or attempted physical intimidation of a Match Official whether by language, confrontational manner or other means whether before, during or after a Match or at any other time.

B2:8:3 For the avoidance of doubt a charge under Operational Rule B2:7:1 or B2:7:2 shall not exclude action being taken against individual Players and/or Officials under section D of these Operational Rules.

### **B2:9 ABANDONMENT OF MATCHES**

B2:9:1 It shall be up to the Match Officials to determine whether or not a Match should be abandoned. However, if a Match is abandoned, the Management Group will determine whether the game is awarded to either team or the result shall stand. If it does not stand the Match will be re-scheduled as directed by the Management Group. The decision of the Management Group in relation to such matters shall be final.

### **B2:10 OBJECTIONS TO RESULTS**

B2:10:1 A Club wishing to object to the result of a Match shall:

- a) Send an email to the relevant Competition Officer and to the opposing Club within two working days of the termination of the Match stating the full grounds on which the objection is made.
- b) Send within two working days a payment for £40.00, by way of an appeals deposit, to the relevant Competition Officer.

B2:10:2 The Management Group will hear the objection and may decline to consider any matter not stated in respect of the above, and can if the objection is not sustained, order the forfeit of the whole or any part of the deposit. For the avoidance of doubt, a Club shall not be entitled to object to a result on the grounds of a Match Official's decision(s), and the imposition of a fine or other penalty on a Club pursuant to these Operational Rules and shall not preclude a Club from objecting to a result of a Match under this Operational Rule.

### **B2:11 MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS**

B2:11:1 Each home Club shall ensure that a registered and practising qualified first aider shall be present at each Match. However, this rule B2:11:1 shall be amended under the jurisdiction of Primary RL rules where each Club shall ensure that a registered and practicing qualified first aider shall be present at each area where primary activity is taking place. For the avoidance of doubt, such first aider is required to hold such qualification as the RFL may direct from time to time.

B2:11:2 It is best practice that a registered and practising qualified first aider is in attendance at training sessions.

B2:11:3 Each Club shall comply with the Community Game First Aid standards implemented and approved by the RFL from time to time.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

- B2:11:4 Such first aider shall make themselves known to the Match Official before the start of any Match and shall remain for a minimum of 15 minutes after the end of the Game and shall speak directly with a designated Official from both Clubs, if necessary, to ensure that the correct reporting paperwork is completed. For the avoidance of doubt the Match shall not be allowed to start until such time as the first aider is known to the Match Official.
- B2:11:5 In the event of any serious injuries or accidents on the field of play, it is the injured Player's Club's responsibility to complete and return any accident/injury report form to the RFL within 72 hours of the said incident, with a copy to the relevant Competition Officer.
- B2:11.6 Each Club must register any emergency first aiders, required under the terms of its annual entry criteria, at the beginning of each Season. If there are any additions made during the Season the club must inform the RFL of the names, addresses and qualifications as requested on the registration form. In addition, each Club must record the names of the first aid officials who attend each Match in such format as the RFL/Management Group shall require from time to time.
- B2:11:7 **Technical Areas**
- All personnel within the technical areas, including licensed coaches, medical staff, and interchange players, must wear a high-visibility vest at all times during a match. This ensures they can be clearly identified by match officials and other stakeholders.
- Failure to comply may result in removal from the technical area and/or disciplinary action. Personnel must remain within the technical area at all times, except for the Game Day Manager as specified in B2:12:2.
- B2:12 **GAME DAY MANAGER**
- B2:12:1 Each Club shall comply with all rules specified by the RFL from time to time regarding the appointment and duties of Game Day Managers.
- B2:12:2 Game Day Managers must be positioned within the "physical barrier" at all times during matches. This ensures they can proactively manage spectators, technical areas, and officials, while remaining easily accessible to the match official. For these reasons, Game Day Managers are the only individuals permitted outside the technical areas.
- B2:13 **SUBMISSION OF FORMS**
- B2:13:1 It shall be the duty of the Referee to complete and forward to the relevant Competition Officer the dismissal reports and reports of any incidents that occur on the Match day, (on or off the pitch), by such means as the RFL shall direct from time to time and by no later than 72 hours after the Match.
- B2:13:2 It shall be the duty of the home team to complete the online score. Both Clubs must complete the team sheet online as set out in the relevant Competition Rules. .
- B2:14 **KIT & EQUIPMENT INSPECTIONS**
- B2:14:1 Each Club shall make all of its Players available for kit and equipment checks before the Match and at any other time on Match day as reasonably required by an appointed Match Official.
- B2:14:2 No Player shall wear any protective equipment, footwear or other garment in any Match, unless it has been approved in advance by the RFL.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **B2:15 LATE START**

B2:15:1 Each Club shall ensure that its team is ready to take to the field before the designated kick off time as and when directed by the Match Officials. The Club at fault for the late start of any Match may be guilty of Misconduct.

### **B2:16 POST-MATCH REPORTS TO BE SENT TO THE RFL**

B2:16:1 In addition to any reports due pursuant to other provisions of these Operational Rules, each Match Official shall ensure that they provide within 72 hours to the relevant Competition Officer a full and comprehensive report of any incident which occurs before, during or after any Match including, (but not by way of limitation):

- a) a breach of any of the Operational Rules;
- b) crowd misbehaviour;
- c) misbehaviour of Club Officials;
- d) any other matter which may bring the Game into disrepute and/or which may be prejudicial to the interests of the Game.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **B3 COMPETITION RULES**

#### **B3:1 PROMOTION/RELEGATION**

B3:1:1 Promotion and relegation issues throughout the Competitions in Tiers Three and Four will be determined annually by the relevant Management Groups and ratified by the RFL Community Board and will be subject to the terms of the relevant annual entry criteria needed to play at the relevant Tier.

#### **B3:2 CUP COMPETITIONS**

B3:2:1 League Matches will take precedence over cup ties at Tier Three with the exception of the Rugby League Challenge Cup Competition.

B3:2:2 Cup ties will take precedence over League Matches at Tier Four.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **B4 INTERNATIONALS/REPRESENTATIVE MATCHES**

- B4:1 All Clubs, Leagues and Organisations agree that:
- B4:1:1 Representative Matches must be approved by the RFL and may only take place from Under-16 age groups (School Year 11 and above)
- B4:1:2 The RFL shall have the sole and exclusive responsibility for the administration and operation of home international teams representing England.
- B4:1:3 Players will give priority to such Representative Matches over any other Match, including, but not limited to league and cup Matches.
- B4:1:4 Only those Representative Teams and Matches set out in Section B4 of these Operational Rules are recognised by the RFL. No other team, programme, or organisation shall be considered representative of the RFL or the community game unless explicitly approved in writing by the RFL. Participation in unapproved or unofficial representative activity may be regarded as Misconduct.

### **B4:2 MATCHES**

- B4:2:1 All Players who are eligible to play in Tier Three and Four, are eligible for selection to any RFL Representative Team subject to fulfilling the RLIF eligibility criteria where applicable.
- B4:2:2 A Player selected to play in a Representative Match constituted from Tier Three and Four must be released by their Club for all training and match activities reasonably required by the Representative squad, provided there is no direct conflict with the Club's fixtures. A Player who refuses to participate without valid reason shall not be permitted to play for their Club during the period they would have been required for representative duty and may be deemed guilty of Misconduct under RFL Regulations.
- B4:2:3 The RFL recognised Representative Matches include those from the England Community Lions Programme, BARLA Open Age, GB Police, GB Teachers and Great Britain Armed Forces. Matches organised by other NGB's affiliated to the RLIF are also recognised, provided they are appropriately sanctioned.
- B4:2:4 Players selected in the final squad for a Representative Match, up to a maximum of 20 players for matches played in England and 23 players for matches played overseas, shall not participate in any Club fixtures 7 days before and the 72 hours following the scheduled Representative Match. This restriction applies only where the final squad is announced at least seven days before the Representative Match. Any exceptions to this requirement must be formally approved by the RFL in advance.
- B4:2:5 A Club which has two or more Players required for a Representative Match or Representative Matches which is/are recognised by the RFL, to be played over the same weekend (i.e. Friday to Sunday inclusive) as a League Match, may apply to the relevant Management Group to postpone their league Match provided at least seven days' written notice is given to its opponents. For the avoidance of doubt, a Club can only request a postponement of a competition Match at the age group level for which the representative Match will take place.
- B4:3 **SCHOLARSHIP RULES**
- B4:3:1 All Leagues, Clubs and Players must comply with the RFL Scholarship and Community Game Training and Playing Policy.
- B4:3:2 Any Club or League that nominates or selects a Player to take part in matches or training outside of the RFL Scholarship and Community Game Training and Playing Policy, or otherwise sanctioned by the RFL, shall be guilty of misconduct.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **B4:4 LIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (LDP) U12-U16**

B4:4:1 The Lions Development Programme shall provide Open Access, holistic development sessions to support and enhance player and coach development. Games must be small sided with modified rules to challenge players and coaches provided by the RFL Performance Department.

As part of the LDP, Accredited Partners must run coach development sessions, which are agreed with the RFL as part of the accreditation criteria.

B4:4:2 Lions Development Days shall be delivered by Accredited Professional Clubs/Foundations, which must be formally recognised by the RFL as Lions Development Accredited Partners. All sessions must be Open Access; players must not be selected or excluded based on ability. Where attendance limits are necessary (e.g. pitch or staffing capacity), written approval must be obtained from the RFL in advance.

B4:4:3 Development Days should be delivered to mixed players from multiple clubs, schools or other sports. Sessions may be held during daytime, evenings, or weekends, but must not conflict with Community Club training.

The maximum number of days for any age group is **16** Development Days.

All sessions must be registered with the RFL and advertised on both the Club's/Foundations website no later than 14 days before delivery.

B4:4:4 LDP Delivery Partners are encouraged to promote the activity on social media; however, this should not report scores or winning. The purpose of the activity is to develop players in different game formats, not winning or representing a team.

B4:4:5 The LDP will include game-play opportunities; however, these will only be sanctioned against other accredited LDP centres. LDP Delivery partners will not be sanctioned to play games against any other representative or touring teams. LDP is not a representative playing programme.

#### **Playing windows to be set by the RFL.**

<b>Age Group</b>	<b>Playing Opportunity</b>
<b>U12</b>	2 Internal Playing Opportunities
<b>U13</b>	2 Internal Playing Opportunities
<b>U14</b>	2 Internal Playing Opportunities
<b>U15/16</b>	4 External Playing Opportunities

B4:4:6 Players do not need to be registered with a Community Club to attend. All players must be registered on the system designated by the RFL before participation, and attendance records must be submitted to the RFL within 72 hours of the session.

B4:4:7 Fees may be charged for attendance on programmes; however, LDP partners must have a policy in place to support players who are economically challenged to be able to attend. Pricing Policy must be shared with the RFL.

B4:4:8 Permitted activities within Development Days include rugby league skill development, athletic development, fitness testing, small-sided games, and education for players and their parents or guardians. All deliveries must align with RFL development principles and uphold the standards of the Lions Development Programme.

**SECTION C**

**PERSONNEL**

**SECTION C | PERSONNEL**



## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **SECTION C - PERSONNEL**

#### **C1 PERSONS SUBJECT TO THE OPERATIONAL RULES**

- C1:1 Each Person Subject to the Operational Rules agrees (and is deemed by participation in the Game and/or acceptance of their position and/or completion of an RFL Registration Form) to be bound by the Operational Rules, the Rules and Regulations of any body of which the RFL is a member, the terms of any agreement entered into by the RFL and the Laws of the Game and accept the jurisdiction of the RFL and agrees to be bound and observe all codes of conducts, regulations, rules and policies published by the RFL from time including, but not limited to;
- (a) the Anti-Doping Regulations;
  - (b) the Welfare Policy;
  - (c) the Safeguarding Policy;
  - (d) the Adults at Risk Policy;
  - (e) the Betting and Related Activity Code of Conduct for the Community Game;
  - (f) the Respect Policy;
  - (g) the Equity Statement;
  - (h) the Social and Non-Prescribed Prescription Drug Policy;
  - (i) the First Aid Standards
  - (j) the Blood Borne Diseases Regulations and
  - (k) the Overseas Touring Policy.
- C1:2 For the avoidance of doubt, this includes an agreement to be bound by the Arbitration provisions contained within these Operational Rules and RFL Policies. All decisions made by any tribunal, panel or body constituted pursuant to these Operational Rules, or RFL Policies (including Sports Resolutions (UK) tribunals), shall be final and binding.
- C1:3 The Laws of Game and the Operational Rules will be published on the RFL website. Each Person Subject to the Operational Rules is deemed to have read and accepted the Operational Rules as a condition of their participation in the game. For the avoidance of doubt, where applicable, all provisions contained in C1 apply equally to Clubs.
- C1:4 In the event a Player does not register for the following Season they are still bound by the Operational Rules for a further twelve months from the last game they played. In the case of all other Persons Subject to the Operational Rules, twelve months after he/she ceases to hold any role that would make them a Person Subject to the Operational Rules, he/she shall no longer be bound by the Operational Rules. The foregoing shall not act as a bar to any proceedings in relation to acts or omissions occurring before the date that the relevant individual ceased to be bound by the Operational Rules.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **C2 PLAYERS**

C2:1 For the avoidance of doubt, Players governed by these rules are Players registered with Clubs who participate in Competitions at Tiers Three and Four.

### **C2:2 PURPOSE**

C2:2:1 The purpose of these rules is:

- a) To ensure the welfare and proper treatment of Players within the appropriate boundaries of applicable laws;
- b) To ensure the integrity and fairness of competitions;
- c) To encourage Clubs to develop, train and educate young Players without unreasonably restraining Players from moving freely between Clubs;
- d) To ensure that Clubs have security of squad available to them and to ensure that the relevant Competitions can take place in an orderly manner;

C2:2:2 These regulations are to be interpreted and applied by reference to and in a manner that advances their purpose, as set out above, and when an issue arises that is not expressly provided for in these Operational Rules, the interpretation and application shall be consistent with the purpose of these rules.

### **C2:3 REGISTRATIONS - GENERAL**

C2:3:1 A Player shall be registered to the Club by completing the registration procedure as implemented by the RFL from time to time. Upon registration a player must sign up and become a member of Our League Active.

C2:3:2 At the time of registration it is the responsibility of the Club to inform the Player of any financial obligations they must commit to (and to keep players updated of any changes to the same).

C2:3:3 Clubs are responsible for ensuring that all player registrations are processed in accordance with the relevant Competition Rules. The RFL shall maintain the official register of all Players.

C2:3:4 It shall be the responsibility of the Club to ensure that all players that register for the Club are eligible to play in that Competition

C2:3:5 Annually Clubs will be required to register their players to the relevant Age Group and Competition.

C2:3:6 If a Player is registered with a Club that has both Adult and Youth Teams, then that Player is only eligible to play for Teams at that Club and can only move Clubs by completing a transfer.

C2:3:7 Where a Club does not have an Adult team, Youth players wishing to also play at Adult level may register to another Club for that purpose but will only be eligible to play for the Adult teams at the second Club.

C2:3:8 Where a Club does not have any Youth teams, registered players at that Club that are eligible to play at Youth level may register to another Club for that purpose but will only be eligible to play for the Youth teams at the second Club.

C2:3:9 Any Club found guilty of playing an ineligible Player shall be fined and the Match may, subject to the Management Group's discretion, be awarded to their opponents. The offending Player may be liable for suspension.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

- C2:3:10 If a Player decides to retire from the sport, then the Player must notify the RFL in writing to email address [competitions@rfl.co.uk](mailto:competitions@rfl.co.uk)
- C2:4 **DUAL REGISTRATION**
- C2:4:1 All Leagues, Clubs and other Persons Subject to the Operational Rules shall be bound by and comply with any regulations agreed relating to Community Game Dual Registration and Under 18 Dual Registration.
- C2:5 **REGISTRATION OF ADULT PLAYERS**
- C2:5:1 To play Adult RL a player cannot start playing in matches until either the earliest of the following occurrences a) reached their 17th birthday or; b) be recognised as a true age Under 17 player (see the age ranges) and are only permitted to play from the March in a Season.
- C2:5:2 Any Player under the age of 18 requires a parent/guardian signature on their Registration Form confirming that both the Player and the parent/guardian understand that some sections of the RFL Safeguarding Policy do not apply to Adult Rugby League, before they can play for an Adult Team. A player may only play for the Adult Team if their own age group can fulfil fixtures in the applicable week.
- C2:5:3 An Adult player will only remain on the register of a Club for the Season in which they registers. They must re-register every Season, but a Club Official may remove them or the player may transfer to another Club in accordance with Rule 2:6 of these Operational Rules.
- C2:5:4 Clubs may register new adult Players on the day of the Match provided that the online Registration Form is duly completed in accordance with standardised regulations.
- C2:5:5 Any Club found guilty of playing an ineligible Player shall be fined not less than £100.00 and the Match may, subject to the Management Group's discretion, be awarded to their opponents. The offending Player may be liable for suspension.
- C2:5:6 Subject to Regulations relating to age once a player has registered for the club, they are eligible to play for any team at that Club, irrespective of which competition they play in.
- C2:5:7 A player who registers for an Armed Forces or Student Team may also register for another team, however when there is a clash then the player must play for the armed forces or student team.
- C2:6 **TRANSFERS – ADULT PLAYERS**
- C2:6:1 An Adult Player may transfer to another Club upon completing the GameDay online transfer form.
- C2:6:2 The deadline for transfer will be determined annually by the respective Management Group prior to the start of the Season.
- C2:6:3 A Player must confirm that they have fulfilled their financial obligations to their current Club before any transfer to another Club, including a professional Club will be permitted. Any dispute will be determined in accordance with such rules as specified from time to time by the RFL.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **C2:7 REGISTRATION OF JUNIOR PLAYERS**

- C2:7:1 A child can register to play Rugby League, with a team when they enter Year 1 at school.
- C2:7:2 A child can register to participate in cub rugby league activity from the age of 4. This registration will be held by the Rugby Football League and not by the Club.
- C2:7:3 From the academic year one to year six players will register to play Primary Rugby League.
- C2:7:4 Mixed Rugby League shall be played up to and including Under-11's.
- C2:7:5 The age band of each team is determined at the start of each season and remains the same for the whole of that season (for the avoidance of doubt even if matches are played in the following school year). The age bands can be found in appendix F13.

### **C2:7:6 Player Dispensation**

Where a player seeks to participate in an age group other than their prescribed chronological age, such participation must be approved in accordance with the Rugby League Player Dispensation Policy, as issued and maintained by the RFL. Dispensations may be granted under specific circumstances including disability, significant physical development delay, mental health or chronic illness, educational delay, or access/pathway restrictions.

All applications must be submitted via the official RFL Dispensation Application Form and supported by appropriate evidence as outlined in the policy. Decisions will be made by the RFL Dispensation Panel.

- C2:7:7 Once a Player has attained the age of 16 and they are registered to play in the Under 16's Competition, they are also eligible to play for the Club's Under 17's or Under 18's team but can only do so if the age group for which the Player is eligible can fulfil its obligations.
- C2:7:8 For the avoidance of doubt a Player will remain on the register of a Club until such time as the Club Official removes them or the Player transfers to another Club in accordance with the transfer rules below.
- C2:7:9 Players will be required to complete a new registration form and comply with all other procedural requirements in the event of a transfer of their registration to a new Club.

### **C2:8 RFL PHOTO ID CARD**

- C2:8:1 From true age Under-9's to Under 18's, all Players must possess an official identification card, produced with the information from the Registration Form, along with a passport photograph ("ID Card"). Photos are to be updated every even age group.
- C2:8:2 To facilitate the process, all new Players must, to validate their age, provide proof of ID at the point of completing a Registration Form. (e.g. copy of Birth Certificate or passport which will be verified and then removed from the system).
- C2:8:3 At Junior Matches ID Cards must be produced for all Players. Should any Players not produce their ID Cards, then that Player cannot play. If the lack of ID cards results in the team not being able to play the Match, then the Match will be awarded to the non-offending team who will also be entitled to claim for any expenses incurred.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **C2:9 TRANSFERS – YOUTH AND JUNIOR - GENERAL**

- C2:9:1 Youth and Junior Teams may apply to transfer up to three Players only per Season.
- C2:9:2 Subject to the prior approval of the RFL, Management Groups may relax Operational Rule C2:9:1 at their discretion, as deemed appropriate to meet the needs of their Competition.
- C2:9:3 The deadline for transfers will be determined annually by the respective Management Group prior to the start of the Season.
- C2:9:4 Where twins transfer Clubs, they shall be counted as only 1 transfer. (Gemini Rule).
- C2:9:5 Transfers will be dealt with in accordance with the processes and procedures determined by the RFL from time to time. However, for the avoidance of doubt it shall be for a Management Group to implement these Rules and there shall be no appeal to the RFL regarding the validity or not of a transfer request.
- C2:9:6 Players who have attained the age of 18 will not be subject to the transfer rules if their involvement is with adult rugby league only. The transfer rules will apply whilst they are registered and play with a youth team.
- C2:9:7 All Players at youth and junior age levels must fulfil all financial obligations to their current Club or Team before any transfer to another Club, including a professional club will be permitted. This also applies to a Player wishing to sign for a different Club in future Seasons. Any dispute will be determined in accordance with such rules as agreed from time to time by the RFL.
- C2:9:8 Players from a disbanded team at youth and junior age groups will be deemed to be free agents, subject to the remaining provisions of this clause. No Club or Club Official shall incite or encourage a team to disband. Where a Management Group reasonably believes that a team has been incited or encouraged to disband it may place such restrictions on the transfer of the Players to the Club, or the Club or Club Official, that has incited or encouraged the disbandment as it sees fit (in addition to having the right to take action against the relevant Club and/or Club Official for Misconduct).
- C2:9:9 Should Club personnel from the leaving Club refuse to sign the transfer form, the appropriate Competition Officer should communicate with the leaving Club's Secretary in order to ascertain accurate details.
- C2:9:10 If a transfer is submitted evidencing that there are genuine safeguarding issues pursuant to the RFL's Safeguarding Policy, then this will be dealt with by the League's Welfare Officer who will seek guidance from the RFL Safeguarding Team. The transfer will be held in abeyance until all investigations have been concluded. Any malicious or false allegation of a breach of the Safeguarding Policy shall be considered Misconduct.

### **C2:10 TRANSFERS UNDER 12 TO UNDER 18**

- C2:10:1 Where a player seeks to transfer and is seeking discretion of the Management Group, in accordance with C2:9:2 the Management Group will decide based on whether to approve such a transfer based on all the factual circumstances and evidence placed before it. The onus is on the Club to provide all evidence required and there shall be no right of appeal.

Factors that the panel may take into consideration in choosing to apply discretion or not include:

- Has the Player transferred previously in that Season?
- How many Players has the new Team got registered?
- What affect does allowing the transfer have on the Team the Player is leaving?

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

- The number of Scholarship Players at both Teams involved in the transfer.
  - How many transfers have the Team had in that Season? And how many from the Team the Player is transferring from?
  - Any other individual factors that make the transfer necessary or not.
- C2:10:2 Any player who signed a Professional contract, for the following Season, must finish their current Season with their existing Team and may not transfer to a new Team.
- C2:11 **COMMUNITY GAME COMPENSATION**
- C2:11:1 This rule provides mandatory compensation to community clubs that have contributed to the development of players who progress to professional rugby league.
- C2:11:2 A player is eligible for community game compensation if:
- The player was registered with the community club for at least two full seasons.
  - The player's final registration with the club was at Under-14 level or below.
  - Registrations after Under-14 level are not eligible.
  - The RFL will review the player's playing history to identify the club with the most significant developmental impact.
  - In exceptional circumstances, the RFL may issue discretionary awards to clubs that fall outside the standard criteria.
- C2:11:3 Compensation is awarded based on the player achieving the following professional milestones:
- (a) By Clubs in Super League, or by Championship Clubs that operate a Licensed Academy Programme:
- i) £500 per Player on signing a first Professional Contract; and
  - ii) £500 per Player on making a first-team debut (including as a playing substitute); and
  - iii) £500 per Player on completing ten Super League first-team appearances (including as a playing substitute).
- (b) By Championship Clubs that do not operate a Licensed Academy Programme:
- i) £100 per Player on first signing registration documents.
- C2:11:4 Professional clubs must pay all compensation to community clubs through the RFL, which is responsible for administering and distributing all payments under these rules.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **C3 CLUB OFFICIALS**

#### **C3:1 OFFICIALS**

C3:1:1 Each Club shall ensure that before the start of each Season, its key personnel (e.g., Chair, Welfare Officer, Coaches, First Aiders, Game Day Manager) are registered on GameDay.

C3:1:2 If appropriate personnel are not registered, the Management Group may not accept the Club or Team into a Competition.

C3:1:3 New personnel joining during the season must register on GameDay prior to undertaking their roles.

C3:1:4 Should a registered individual leave their role during the season, the Club must notify the relevant Competition Officer in writing.

#### **C3:2 QUALIFICATIONS**

C3:2:1 Clubs shall ensure that relevant staff hold the required qualifications for their roles as specified annually by the RFL, including:

- Club Welfare Officer: Safeguarding courses, valid DBS
- First Aider: HSE-compliant Emergency First Aid, valid DBS, Grassroots Concussion in Sports Guidance (online module).
- Game Day Manager: Online learning modules
- Chair: Recommended UKAD Introduction to Clean Sport course
- Coaches: See refer to C4

C3:2:2 Clubs are responsible for maintaining up-to-date qualifications and valid DBS checks for all relevant personnel.

#### **C3:3 OFFICIAL REGISTER**

C3:3:1 The RFL shall maintain a register of Club Officials and may refuse or terminate registration if any official:

- a) Brings the Game into disrepute or affects Competition integrity;
- b) Is under suspension or ban from any governing body;
- c) Lacks appropriate qualifications
- d) Poses a danger to children or vulnerable adults.

C3:3:2 The RFL will allow written representations before refusal or termination and grants the right to appeal to the Operational Rules Tribunal.

#### **C3:4 DBS CHECKS**

C3:4:1 Each Club shall ensure an enhanced RFL DBS check is completed for all relevant persons.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **SECTION C4: COACHES**

#### **C4:1 REGISTRATION AND ELIGIBILITY**

- C4:1:1 Each Club shall ensure that all Coaches are registered on GameDay prior to undertaking any coaching duties.
- C4:1:2 Clubs shall only register Coaches who hold a current RFL Coaching Licence appropriate to the level and age group coached.
- C4:1:3 If appropriate coaching personnel are not registered, the respective Management Group may refuse to accept the Club or Team into a Competition.
- C4:1:4 Any new coaching personnel joining during the season must register on GameDay before performing coaching duties.
- C4:1:5 Should a registered Coach leave their role during the season; the Club must provide written notice to the relevant Competition Officer.

#### **C4:2 QUALIFICATIONS AND LICENSING**

- C4:2:1 All Coaches must hold the appropriate RFL-recognised qualification based on the age group they are coaching, as follows:
- Coaches of Primary Rugby League (PRL) age groups (typically ages 6–11) must hold a minimum Level 1 Coaching Qualification.
  - Coaches of age groups Under 12 and above, including open age, must hold a minimum Level 2 Coaching Qualification.
- C4:2:2 In addition to the appropriate coaching qualification, all Coaches must:
- Hold a valid DBS issued through the RFL.
  - Complete a Safeguarding and Protecting Children course.
  - Complete Coach Confident modules relevant to the age group they coach.
  - Grassroots Concussion in Sports Guidance (online module).
  - Undertake any such CPD as determined by the RFL.
- C4:2:3 As part of the registration process, all Coaches must agree to and comply with the RFL Coaches' Code of Conduct. Breaches of the Code may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or deregistration.
- C4:2:4 Coaches are encouraged to complete recommended education modules, including UKAD Introduction to Clean Sport (online).
- C4:2:5 Introduction to Coaching Course (Tag Rugby League)
- The Introduction to Coaching Course is designed for parents and volunteers supporting Tag Rugby League at the entry level. It offers fundamental guidance to help individuals deliver safe, inclusive, and age-appropriate activities.
- The focus at this stage is on creating positive experiences and encouraging participation, rather than technical coaching. The course supports activity facilitation, not formal coaching.
- Note: Completion of this course does not qualify an individual as a licensed coach but allows Primary Rugby League activity to take place while working towards a Level 1 Coaching Qualification.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

C4:2:6 Any individual undertaking a coaching support role, including those who complete the Introduction to Coaching course, must:

- Hold a valid DBS issued through the RFL;
- Be registered on GameDay;
- Comply with all relevant safeguarding and conduct requirements set by the RFL.

C4:2:7 Coaches must maintain all required qualifications, training, and licenses as current and valid. The RFL reserves the right to refuse or withdraw registration from any Coach whose qualifications have expired or are insufficient for the role they are performing.

### **C4:3 RESPONSIBILITIES**

C4:3:1 Coaches are responsible for the welfare, development, and safety of players during training and matches.

C4:3:2 Coaches shall adhere to the RFL Code of Conduct for Coaches, Respect Code of Conduct and operate in line with safeguarding policies.

C4:3:3 Coaches must liaise effectively with Club Welfare Officers, Match Officials, and Club Officials.

### **C4:4 CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES**

C4:4:1 Coaches are subject to the RFL disciplinary framework and may be sanctioned for breaches of the Operational Rules, code of conducts, including misconduct, failure to maintain qualifications, or safeguarding breaches.

C4:4:2 The RFL may refuse or revoke registration of any Coach who fails to meet the necessary standards or who brings the Game into disrepute.

C4:4:3 Coaches have the right to make written representations before registration refusal or deregistration and may appeal decisions to the RFL Appeal Tribunal.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **C5 MATCH OFFICIALS**

#### **C5:1 GENERAL**

- C5:1:1 Prior to each Season, the League, in conjunction with the Match Official Society, shall compile a list of qualified Match Officials for each Competition Tier.
- C5:1:2 The RFL Community Board shall annually determine fees, expenses, and allowances for Match Officials.
- C5:1:3 Match Officials shall officiate in accordance with the Laws of the Game and the Operational Rules.
- C5:1:4 Match Officials shall be examined for suitability and fitness as per RFL standards.
- C5:1:5 The RFL has discretion to determine if a Match Official can officiate any Match.
- C5:1:6 Match Officials may be provided with a referee camera by the RFL or the Competition. If provided, the camera must be activated and used for the entire duration of the Match. Footage may be used for misconduct investigations. Failure to comply without a valid and approved reason may result in disciplinary action, including suspension or removal from the list of Match Officials.

#### **C5:2 SPONSORSHIP AND KIT**

- C5:2:1 The RFL holds exclusive rights over sponsorship and commercial contracts related to Match Officials' kit and equipment.

#### **C5:3 MATCH OFFICIALS' INTERESTS**

- C5:3:1 Match Officials must declare any personal or commercial interest in Clubs to their local Match Official Society. Removal from the list is at the RFL's discretion without appeal rights.

#### **C5:4 ILLEGAL PAYMENTS**

- C5:4:1 Match Officials must not receive any illegal payments, gifts, or inducements related to officiating.

**SECTION D**

**MISCONDUCT**

**SECTION D / MISCONDUCT**



## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **SECTION D – MISCONDUCT**

#### **D1 PURPOSE**

- D1:1 The overriding objective of this Section D is to maintain and promote fair play and to protect the welfare of Players, and other Persons Subject to the Operational Rules, who are involved in the game, and to ensure that acts of on-field and off-field Misconduct are dealt with expeditiously, fairly and by consistent and uniform means.
- D1:2 The purpose of this Section D of the Operational Rules is to specify:
- (a) which person or body has jurisdiction to investigate and determine allegations of Misconduct; and
  - (b) The rules, procedures and guidelines that apply to the investigation and determination of allegations of Misconduct (both on and off field).
- D1:3 Section D3 sets out which body has jurisdiction to investigate and/or hear and determine allegations of Misconduct.
- D1:4 Section D4 sets out the powers of each Management Group in relation to investigations.
- D1:5 Section D5 sets out the procedure that will apply to hearings of allegations of both On and Off Field Misconduct, with Section D6 setting out additional rules which apply to On Field Misconduct.

**D2 MISCONDUCT DEFINITION AND OFFENCES**

A Person subject to the Operational Rules shall be guilty of Misconduct if he/she/it:

- (a) commits a breach of any of the Operational Rules, the Laws of the Game or any RFL policy or code of conduct; or
- (b) commits a breach of any of the RFL's Anti-Doping Regulations, Equity Statement, Safeguarding Policy or Betting and Related Activity Code of Conduct for the Community Game; or
- (c) engages in conduct which is prejudicial to the interests of the Game or which is improper conduct; or
- (d) engages in the use of Unacceptable Language and/or Behaviour
- (e) fails, within any time allowed by these Operational Rules or otherwise allowed, to comply with any decision of a Management Group, the RFL or any Disciplinary Panel; or
- (f) fails within any time allowed (or fails at all) to assist an investigation by a Management Group or the RFL; or
- (g) fails to satisfy or otherwise comply with any arbitral award or decision made pursuant to the Operational Rules.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **D3 JURISDICTION**

#### **D3:1 CASES RESERVED FOR THE RFL**

D3:1:1 Save where otherwise directed by the RFL, the RFL will have jurisdiction to deal with allegations of Misconduct arising from:

- (a) Any conduct which involves the use of Unacceptable Language or Behaviour
- (b) Breaches of the RFL Equity Statement issued from time to time;
- (c) Breaches of the RFL's Anti-Doping Regulations; or
- (d) Breaches of the RFL Safeguarding Policy, Adults at Risk Policy or Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Rules,
- (e) Breaches of the RFL's Betting and Related Activity Code of Conduct for the Community Game,
- (f) On Field Misconduct within women's super league and in the men's and women's Challenge Cup from the point that the Clubs that compete in the women's super league/professional Clubs enter the Competition.

D3:1:2 In addition, the RFL has jurisdiction to deal with any allegations of Misconduct by a League and/or a Management Group.

D3:1:3 Save as otherwise provided in this Section D, Reserved Cases and all other cases that fall under the jurisdiction of the RFL will be dealt with in each case in accordance with the procedure and principles laid down at section D1, D3 and/or D4 (as applicable) of the Tier 1 to 2 Operational Rules (copies of which are available from the RFL upon request). For the avoidance of doubt, the RFL shall have jurisdiction in such cases irrespective of the Competition or Match in relation to which the allegation arises.

D3:1:4 In addition to the above, a League may refer a case to the RFL where, in the reasonable opinion of the League, the nature, seriousness, complexity, or potential wider impact of the alleged Misconduct warrants determination at national level. Such referrals must include a supporting rationale and will be subject to the RFL's discretion to accept or decline the referral.

#### **D3:2 COMPETITION OFFICER**

D3:2:1 The Competition Officer will impose fines for administrative breaches by Players or Clubs of the Competition Rules of the applicable Competition (or these Operational Rules).

D3:2:2 The Competition Officer shall notify the Management Group of any fines levied by the Competition Officer. In addition, the Competition Officer shall follow any guidelines notified to him/her by the Management Group in relation to the levying of fines.

#### **D3:3 MANAGEMENT GROUPS / COMPETITION DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNALS**

D3:3:1 Save as otherwise provided in these Operational Rules, the Management Group of each Competition shall have the power to investigate any allegation of Misconduct. It may refer a Person Subject to the Operational Rules or a Club to the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal if it reasonably believes Misconduct has occurred.

D3:3:2 Each Competition Disciplinary Tribunal shall have jurisdiction to determine Misconduct where there is a challenge to a Penalty Notice, or the matter is referred directly to the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal and all other allegations of Misconduct referred to it in accordance with these Operational Rules.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

D3:3:3 Save as otherwise provided by these Operational Rules (including and not limited to Operational Rule D5:5:1), any Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club found guilty of Misconduct by a Competition Disciplinary Tribunal shall have the right to appeal to an RFL Appeals Tribunal.

### **D4 REPORTING AND INVESTIGATION BY MANAGEMENT GROUP**

D4:1 Subject to Operational Rule D4:4, if any Person Subject to the Operational Rules reasonably believes that any other Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club(s) is guilty of Misconduct, he or she must immediately inform the relevant Competition Officer in writing, setting out all relevant details of the alleged Misconduct, who in turn shall notify the Management Group.

D4:2 Subject to Operational Rule D4:4, upon receipt of a written allegation of Misconduct and/or upon its own decision, the Management Group (or a person it appoints on behalf of the Management Group) may inquire immediately into the facts and circumstances alleged or believed to constitute Misconduct.

D4:3 All Persons Subject to the Operational Rules shall cooperate fully with any investigation into alleged Misconduct. Each Person Subject to the Operational Rules shall produce records, accounts, contracts, receipts and bills as requested, but shall not be obliged to disclose any fact or document which would be privileged from production or disclosure in any civil proceedings in a court in England and Wales. No person shall provide false or misleading evidence. Each Person Subject to the Operational Rules shall be obliged to attend any hearing of the Disciplinary Panel as a witness if reasonably required to do so (the Chairman of the Disciplinary Panel shall have the power to hear and decide on submissions from any witness as to why it is unreasonable for them to attend).

D4:4 Any allegation of Misconduct in relation to the Reserved Cases or other matters reserved to the RFL (pursuant to Operational Rule D3:1) shall be referred to the RFL in accordance with the procedures specified by the RFL from time to time.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **D5 ON FIELD MISCONDUCT**

#### **D5:1 POWERS, MAKE UP AND PROCEDURE**

D5:1:1 The Misconduct procedures and Sentencing Guidelines (the "**Sentencing Guidelines**") set out the process that will be followed and the sanctions that should be imposed in relation to any Misconduct. In the event of a conflict between the Sentencing Guidelines and this Section D of the Operational Rules, the provisions of the Operational Rules shall take precedence

#### **D5:2 ROLE & POWERS OF COMPETITION OFFICER**

D5:2:1 In all Competitions, the Competition Officer shall collate all reported On Field dismissals by referees and/or touch judges; and/or complaints or allegations received in line with the provisions set out from time to time

D5:2:2 If a Match Official's report is not brought to the attention of the Competition Officer before the appropriate deadlines set out in the Sentencing Guidelines, this will not prevent the matter from being dealt with.

D5:2:3 The Competition Officer shall, in line with the Sentencing Guidelines, have the power to; (a) charge a Person or Club with Misconduct and issue a Penalty Notice in line with the Operational Rules; (b) refer the matter to the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal and (c) refer the matter to the Compliance Manager for further investigation pursuant to Section D1. The detailed processes in relation to each are set out in the Sentencing Guidelines.

#### **Clubs bringing matters to the Competition Officer's attention**

D5:2:4 Clubs or other Persons Subject to the Operational Rules wishing to bring incidents from a game in which they were involved to the attention of the Competition Officer must do so in writing in line with the deadlines laid out in Sentencing Guidelines, save as otherwise directed by the RFL.

D5:2:5 The Competition Officer send any correspondence which, pursuant to the Operational Rules or Sentencing Guidelines, they are required to send, to a Charged Person or Club at the address of his/her Club, unless the Charged Person or Club has notified the Competition Officer, in writing, to the contrary and provided an alternative address for service. A Charged Person or Club shall be deemed to receive any such notification or other correspondence on the date and at the time it is received by the Club.

D5:2:6 In circumstances in which a Person or Club Subject to the Operational Rules is, or is likely to be, subject to civil or criminal proceedings arising from the same or similar circumstances which are the subject of the investigation or the proceedings the Competition Officer may determine whether or not the proceedings should proceed, or whether they should be stayed pending the outcome of the concurrent civil or criminal proceedings. In the event of the Competition Officer making the decision, if the relevant Person Subject to the Operational Rules disagrees with the decision of the Competition Officer, they may refer the matter to the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal for review.

D5:2:7 If the matter is stayed, the Competition Officer may seek from the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal an interim suspension order in relation to the Person Subject to the Operational Rules. The relevant Person Subject to the Operational Rules shall have the opportunity to make representations to the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal. There is no right of appeal with respect to the decision of the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal to impose an interim suspension order in these circumstances.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **D5:3 ROLE & POWERS OF COMPETITION DISCIPLINARY TRIBUNAL**

D5:3:1 All Disciplinary Panels will have the power to:

- (a) Determine whether a Misconduct offence has been committed;
- (b) If a Misconduct offence has been committed, determine the appropriate sanction in accordance with the Sentencing Guidelines; or
- (c) Where it deems appropriate, refer the matter to any appropriate body. In making these decisions, the Disciplinary Panel must ensure fairness by following the rules of natural justice and these Operational Rules and must adhere to the procedure set out from time to time by the RFL.

D5:3:2 Each Person or Club Subject to the Operational Rules or Club charged must:

- (a) Understand the nature of the charge;
- (b) Be given an opportunity to state their case at a Hearing (either personally or through a representative) subject to D5:1:4;
- (c) Be given adequate notice of the Hearing, ensuring that such notice is at least the minimum prescribed period of notice set out within the Sentencing Guidelines.
- (d) Be given the right to be assisted at the Hearing by someone of his/her choosing.

A Person Subject to the Operational Rules will be deemed to have been given notice of a charge if notice is sent to the Person Subject to the Operational Rules' Club by either letter or email.

D5:3:3 If a Player/Club wishes to state their case at a Hearing in person then they must comply with the Sentencing Guidelines.

D5:3:4 At the Hearing all parties should:

- (a) Have the procedures and directions clearly explained at the beginning of the Hearing;
- (b) Be given an opportunity to hear and deal with any evidence.

D5:3:5 There shall be 3 people on any Disciplinary Panel Disciplinary Panel may proceed with two tribunal members. In relation to the latter, the chairperson of the Disciplinary Panel shall have the casting vote.

### **D5:4 BURDEN AND STANDARD OF PROOF**

D5:4:1 To find a Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club guilty of Misconduct the Disciplinary Panel must be reasonably satisfied that the Misconduct has occurred bearing in mind the seriousness of the allegation. This standard of proof in all cases is greater than a mere balance of probability but less than proof beyond a reasonable doubt. Where a Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club wishes to rebut an allegation or charge of Misconduct or establish specified facts or circumstances, the standard of proof shall be by a balance of probability.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **D5:5 EVIDENCE**

D5:5:1 A Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club charged or his/her/its representative has the right to:

- (a) Be given access to all evidence available to the Disciplinary Panel;
- (b) Respond to the evidence;
- (c) Unless the Disciplinary Panel decides otherwise, know the source of the evidence;
- (d) Challenge the evidence;
- (e) Expect that evidence will be presented systematically and thoroughly.

D5:5:2 All members of Disciplinary Panels must:

- (a) Act in good faith;
- (b) Be unbiased and impartial;
- (c) Declare any personal interest they may have in proceedings;
- (d) Deal with cases consistently and fairly in accordance with standard procedures and in the interests of natural justice;
- (e) Make the decision on evidence relevant to the issue;
- (f) Not allow irrelevant considerations to affect the decision; and
- (g) Must act in a non-discriminatory manner.

D5:5:3 Disciplinary Panels must consider all evidence put before them and cannot vote without considering the evidence. Before making its decision, a Disciplinary Panel must spend a reasonable amount of time considering the evidence and arguments presented.

### **D5:6 DECISIONS OF DISCIPLINARY PANELS**

D5:6:1 A Person Subject to the Operational Rules or a Club will have no right of access to the deliberations of the Disciplinary Panel. They will be entitled to specific reasons as to why a decision has been reached, and the decision should be communicated in writing to the Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club within a reasonable time after the Hearing and at all times in a form and within the time limits as set out by guidelines from the RFL provided from time to time.

D5:6:2 Disciplinary Panels can find a Person or Club Subject to the Operational Rules guilty of a more or less serious offence than that which he/she has been charged. Such decisions must be based upon the evidence and submissions, if any, presented at the Hearing.

### **D5:7 RIGHT OF APPEAL**

D5:7:1 A Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club found guilty of Misconduct by a Competition Disciplinary Tribunal shall have the right, by notice in writing to appeal that decision (a notice of Appeal) provided that the Person Subject to the Operational Rules and/or the Club has attended, or made submissions in writing in relation to, the original Competition Disciplinary Tribunal Hearing or if the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal otherwise considers, in its discretion, that it is appropriate for an appeal to be allowed.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

- D5:7:2 The RFL may, at its absolute discretion, appeal itself and/or grant an appeal irrespective of whether a personal hearing has taken place.
- D5:7:3 The Competition Disciplinary Tribunal decision should state the period of time during which the Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club may appeal that initial decision, which shall not be less than 7 days from the date of the initial decision and at all times shall be in accordance with any guidelines set out by the RFL from time to time.
- D5:7:4 A Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club must submit in writing the grounds for any appeal and must pay a deposit of £40.00 to the Competition Officer at the time the appeal is lodged. The deposit will only be returned if the appeal is successful.
- D5:7:5 A Charged Person who is suspended by the Disciplinary Panel shall not be permitted to play in any Match (or otherwise act contrary to the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal decision) until their appeal has been disposed of.
- D5:7:6 Any appeal will be heard by an RFL Appeal Tribunal. No person who sat on the original Hearing will be a member of the RFL Appeal Tribunal.
- D5:7:7 The only grounds for appeal are that the original Disciplinary Panel:
- i) came to a decision to which no reasonable body could have come; or
  - ii) failed to act fairly in a procedural sense; or
  - iii) the sanction imposed was so excessive or lenient as to be unreasonable.
- D5:7:8 The Notice of Appeal must also enclose any fresh evidence that the Appellant seeks to introduce, together with reasons as to why this evidence is relevant, credible and was unavailable in the first instance.
- D5:7:9 Both the Appellant and the Respondent may be accompanied by a legal or other representative who shall be entitled to address the Disciplinary Appeals Panel on behalf of the Appellant or Respondent.
- D5:7:10 An appeal shall be heard by way of review and shall not be a de novo hearing.
- D5:7:11 The Disciplinary Appeals Panel shall have all the same powers as the Disciplinary Panel in relation to evidence, experts, witnesses and conduct of proceedings, as well as the power to:
- (a) dismiss the appeal;
  - (b) quash a sanction or finding;
  - (c) remit the matter for rehearing;
  - (d) substitute an alternative finding or sanction;
  - (e) reduce or increase the original sanction; or
  - (f) make such orders as it considers appropriate

Fresh evidence shall be only presented to the Disciplinary Appeals Panel with its leave. Leave shall only be given if the evidence is both relevant and credible, and if it was not available at the time of the original hearing. Ordinarily leave will only be given for fresh evidence if it is set out and attached to the Notice of Appeal.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

D5:7:12 The decision of the RFL Appeal Tribunal will be final and binding on the parties, save where an appeal is not commenced, or there are no grounds for an appeal, in which case the decision of the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal shall be final and binding.

D5:7:13 The parties agree to waive irrevocably their right to any form of further appeal, review, or recourse to any state court or other judicial authority.

### **D5:8 CONDUCT OF PROCEEDINGS**

D5:8:1 The Competition Disciplinary Tribunal shall conduct the proceedings in such manner as it considers fit and may follow any procedure agreed by the parties if it is in the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal's opinion reasonably practicable so to do.

D5:8:2 The Competition Disciplinary Tribunal shall act in accordance with this Section D2, the On Field Sentencing Guidelines and any other applicable regulations.

D5:8:3 The Competition Disciplinary Tribunal may proceed in an expedited manner for which it shall issue appropriate directions.

D5:8:4 Any decision of the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal in relation to the conduct of the proceedings shall be consistent with its duties at all times to act fairly and impartially, to allow the parties reasonable opportunity to put their respective cases, and to deal with that of their opponent, and to avoid unnecessary delay or expense, so as to provide a fair and efficient means for resolving the dispute.

### **D5:9 HEARINGS INVOLVING INDIVIDUALS UNDER 18S**

D5:9:1 At all Hearings involving people under 18, the person under 18 should be accompanied by an appropriate adult (such as a parent, guardian, or coach). In relation to travelling to the Hearing, the RFL Guidance on Transporting Children must be complied with, including that coaches and volunteers should not take children on journeys alone.

### **D5:10 SANCTIONS**

D5:10:1 In addition to being entitled to fine any Person Subject to the Operational Rules or Club found guilty of Misconduct, the Disciplinary Panel shall be entitled to:

- (a) Require a Club to close its ground (or part of its ground) either permanently or for a stated period;
- (b) Require a Club to play its Matches behind closed doors;
- (c) Order the payment of compensation to any Club or to any other person or body;
- (d) Ban or suspend a person from involvement in Matches or from grounds during the conduct of Matches or from involvement in the business of or the conduct of playing matters at any member; or
- (e) In the case of Misconduct which impinges on the integrity of the Competition, to deduct Competition points.

### **D5:11 PAYMENT OF FINES**

D5:11:1 Unless otherwise directed, any fines or costs must be paid to the Competition Officer within 28 days of the Hearing. Such fines and/or costs may be deducted by way of set off from any monies held by the Competition on behalf of a Club or Person Subject to the Operational Rules.

D5:11:2 Any fine imposed in accordance with these rules will be the responsibility of the Club to ensure payment.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **D5:12 WRITTEN DECISION**

D5:12:1 Disciplinary Panels shall, within 7 days of the Hearing, provide the parties involved in the dispute with a written decision.

### **D5:13 ARBITRATION**

D5:13:1 The seat of the arbitrations under these Operational Rules (in the case of this section D, the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal) shall be determined by the RFL Board.

D5:13:2 Procedurally, arbitrations under these Operational Rules shall be governed by the Arbitration Act 1996 (the "Act") unless otherwise determined by the relevant Competition Disciplinary Tribunal and shall incorporate all provisions of the Act and shall amount to a binding arbitration agreement (save that sections 44, 45 and 69 of the Act shall not apply).

D5:13:3 The decision of the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal shall be final and binding, save where an appeal has not commenced, or there are no grounds for an appeal, in which case the decision of the relevant Competition Tribunal shall be final and binding.

D5:13:4 Each party to arbitration under these Operational Rules and Persons Subject to these Operational Rules agrees that they waive irrevocably their right to any form of challenge, claim, complaint, appeal, review or recourse to any state court or other judicial authority subject to any applicable statutory or other rights.

D5:13:5 Substantively, arbitrations under these Operational Rules shall be decided in accordance with the Laws of England and Wales unless otherwise agreed in writing by the parties or unless otherwise directed by the Competition Tribunal.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **D6 ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES AND SUSPENSION POLICY**

#### **D6:1 SENTENCING GUIDELINES**

D6:1:1 All sanctions for On-Field Misconduct shall be determined in accordance with the On-Field Sentencing Guidelines (Section F9). The On Field Sentencing Guidelines set out the Laws of the Game, the offences to which they relate, the recommended tariff ranges, age-banded sanctions, and the aggravating and mitigating factors to be applied.

D6:1:2 The On Field Sentencing Guidelines form part of the Operational Rules and shall be applied by the Disciplinary Panel when determining sanctions for On-Field Misconduct. Where this Section D sets out procedural requirements and the On Field Sentencing Guidelines set out sentencing requirements, both shall be read together and applied in accordance with their respective purposes.

D6:1:3 A Disciplinary Panel (as defined in the Operational Rules) retains discretion to move within or outside the guideline ranges where permitted under the On-Field Sentencing Guidelines.

#### **D6:2 SENTENCING PRINCIPLES**

D6:2:1 In determining any sanction for Onfield Misconduct, the Disciplinary Panel shall apply the On Field Sentencing Guidelines (Section F9), including all relevant principles, tariff ranges, aggravating and mitigating factors, and procedural requirements.

D6:2:2 The Disciplinary Panel must also apply the general principles of fairness and consistency set out in Section D, including:  
(a) ensuring that decisions are made in accordance with the Operational Rules and the On-Field Sentencing Guidelines; (b) ensuring that all relevant evidence and circumstances are considered; and (c) ensuring that sanctions are proportionate and consistent with comparable cases.

D6:2:3 All references in this Section D to sentencing, tariffs, aggravating or mitigating factors, age band considerations, suspended sentences, fines, or other sanctioning principles shall be interpreted in accordance with the On-Field Sentencing Guidelines, and shall not be read as creating any separate or additional sentencing framework.

#### **D6:3 SUSPENSION POLICY**

D6:3:1 Each Competition Officer will keep records of each case heard by its Competition Disciplinary Tribunal, including the date of the Hearing (if any), the name of the Player and/or Club charged, the attendees at the Hearing (if any), the nature of the offence of Misconduct, the decision reached and brief reasons for the decision.

D6:3:2 All decisions of Competition Disciplinary Tribunals must be forwarded to the RFL within 48 hours of the Hearing, including all the information set out in D6.3.1 of these Operational Rules.

D6:3:3 A Player will serve his/her ban with any Club that they are registered to play for. Only one game in any week will apply, unless that player has a second fixture arranged and confirmed by a Competition, before the date of the dismissal, where one further game in that week can count towards a suspension. The following should also be considered:

- (a) School games will not count towards a Player's ban. For the avoidance of doubt, during such suspension, a Player may still play in a school game.
- (b) In the event a game is conceded by the opposition, and the Player would have been eligible to play, then that game will count towards any ban.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

For the avoidance of doubt, whilst serving a ban, a Player cannot play in any competitions (other than set out in D6:3:3 (i)) or any other competitive activity, and only one Match in a weekend will count, irrespective of whether a player is registered in different competitions, i.e., OA and Youth.

- D6:3:4 If a Player transfers to another Club in a different Competition to that in which the Player was banned, then he must serve his ban at the new Club and will not be allowed to play for that new Club until the suspension has been served. In such circumstances, the ban will only be deemed served if, at the conclusion of the suspension, the Player remains at the new Club and plays in as many Matches as he was deemed to have missed due to suspension. For example, should player X be banned for 2 games with Club B but then transfer to Club C in another Competition, he will serve his ban for Club C but only if, after the ban is up, he plays 2 games for C in their Competition.
- D6:3:5 The RFL and Leagues may recognise the sanctions or suspensions of any other sporting body, including, but not limited to, competent RFL member bodies, the Rugby League European Federation, International Federation (IRL), the Rugby League International Federation or the Governing Body of any other sport (a "Recognised Sanction"). A Recognised Sanction shall be enforced by the RFL and Leagues until that suspension has been served, unless the Operational Rules Tribunal determines the matter and consents to the Recognised Sanction being lifted.
- D6:3:6 A suspension will commence with immediate effect. The player will not be permitted to resume playing in the event they wish to appeal against the original decision.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **SECTION E: ARBITRATION**

#### **GENERAL**

- E1:1 It is the RFL's policy, and the policy of all Leagues and Competitions, that all disputes; challenges; appeals; and challenges to Operational Rules or RFL Policies, of whatever nature, shall be dealt with by way of binding arbitration, and the RFL takes the view that it is in the interests of the Game for matters to be determined in this way. These Operational Rules and RFL Policies already contain various arbitration provisions, all of which are designed to resolve matters specific to the Operational Rule, or RFL Policy, in question.
- E1:2 As set out in Section C1, and indeed throughout these Operational Rules and RFL Policies, all Persons Subject to the Operational Rules agree to be bound by the arbitration provisions contained within these Operational Rules and RFL Policies (and by virtue enter into an arbitration agreement for the purposes of Section 6 of the Arbitration Act 1996 (the "Act")).
- E1:3 All decisions made by an arbitral tribunal, panel, disciplinary panel, or body constituted pursuant to these Operational Rules or RFL Policies (including by a tribunal appointed by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member) shall therefore be final and binding, and each Person Subject to the Operational Rules agrees that they waive irrevocably their right to any form of challenge, claim, complaint, appeal, review or recourse (including in relation to any dispute arising out of, or in connection with, the validity of any Operational Rule(s)) to any state court, or other judicial authority, subject to any applicable statutory or other rights.
- E1:4 This arbitration agreement shall continue in perpetuity, including following termination of membership, or the conclusion of any Competition or League organised by, or under the jurisdiction of the RFL in relation to disputes or matters arising during the course of membership, or of any Competition or League organised by, or under the jurisdiction of, the RFL.
- E1:5 Subject to the remainder of this section E, the RFL, at its ultimate discretion may refer a claim to Sports Resolutions (UK) should the RFL believe that the subject of the claim or dispute requires specific expertise that is outside the remit of the Operational Rules Tribunal members. In such case, the Arbitration shall be held in accordance with the rules of Sports Resolutions (UK).
- E1:6 For the avoidance of doubt, to the extent that the arbitration commenced by a party relates to a decision made by a tribunal, the Board, the Community Board, or any decision making body pursuant to, and in the context of, these Operational Rules, or any RFL Policy, this Section E shall not operate as an appeal of such decision, and shall operate only as a forum and procedure for a challenge to the validity of such decision under English law on the grounds of ultra vires (including error of law); irrationality; or procedural unfairness, with the tribunal appointed by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member exercising supervisory jurisdiction only.

## RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)

### **APPEAL ARBITRATION PROCEDURE**

E2:1 The Appeal Arbitration Procedure provides a forum for a party to appeal a decision of the RFL Board, or any sub-committee of the RFL Board, subject to that party submitting a deposit with the RFL Operations Department of £500.00 (the "Deposit"). Such Deposit is to cover the administrative costs of the Arbitration and shall be non-refundable unless the Appellant's claim is successful in its entirety against the RFL or is dismissed in accordance with E2:8.

#### E2:2 Notice of Appeal

- a) The Appellant shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a notice of appeal containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Notice of Appeal") the following:
- (i) the names and addresses and the relevant contact details of all the parties and notification if any are under the age of eighteen (with their date of birth (if known));
  - (ii) details, and where available a copy, of the decision appealed from;
  - (iii) the Appellant's request for relief or remedy; and
  - (iv) if applicable an application to stay the execution of the decision appealed from together with the reasons.

#### E2:3 Time-limit

- a) The time-limit for the receipt by the Operations Department and for the service by the Appellant on the Respondent of the Notice of Appeal shall be twenty-one (21) days from the date of the decision from which the appeal is made or to be made.

#### E2:4 Statement of Appeal

Within ten (10) days of the expiry of the time-limit as set out in E2:3 above, the Appellant shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a Statement of Appeal (failing which the appeal shall be deemed to be withdrawn) containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Statement of Appeal"):

- a) a statement of the facts and any law giving rise to the appeal and upon which the Claimant is relying;
- b) copies of all documents upon which the Appellant is relying;
- c) a statement of any procedural matters upon which the parties have already agreed or proposals in relation to such procedure, including but not limited to apportioning costs, the location of the arbitration, any variations from this Section E relating to any timetable, decision-making powers, confidentiality, the number and qualification of the arbitrator(s) or any other matters.

#### E2:5 Reply

Within fourteen (14) days of receipt by the Respondent of the Statement of Appeal, the Respondent shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Appellant a reply containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Reply"):

- a) confirmation or denial of all or part of the Appellant's Statement of Appeal, setting out as fully as possible the facts and any law in the claim which the Respondent admits or denies, on what grounds and any other facts and law upon which the Respondent relies;
- b) copies of all documents on which the Respondent is relying unless the document has been previously submitted by the Appellant;
- c) any proposals in relation to the appeal procedure.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

**E2:6**      Further written submissions

Unless the Arbitration Tribunal permits or directs otherwise, the parties shall not submit further written argument(s) after the time limit for the submission of the Statement of Appeal or the Reply as the case may be.

**E2:7**      If the Respondent fails to submit its Reply within the time-limit set, the Arbitration Tribunal may nevertheless proceed with the arbitration and deliver its award.

**E2:8**      Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member right to Summarily Dismiss Claim

The Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall at his absolute discretion, be entitled to review the Applicant's Statement of Claim and dismiss the claim should he be of the opinion that the claim has no real prospect of success. Such a review may take place either before or after the Respondent files or serves its Reply. If the claim is dismissed pursuant to this clause E2:8 then the Applicant shall be entitled to receive half of its Deposit back from the RFL.

**E2:9**      Communication of the decision

The written decision and its reasons shall be communicated by the Arbitration Tribunal to the parties and a copy sent to the parties as soon as possible and ordinarily within two (2) months after the receipt by the Operations Department of the Notice of Appeal, unless the parties otherwise agree.

### **FULL ARBITRATION PROCEDURE**

**E3:1**      The Full Arbitration Procedure is a forum to resolve disputes or matters not otherwise covered under other procedures contained within these Operational Rules. For example, the decisions relating to matters falling under Section D1 or Section D2 of the RFL Tiers 3-4 Operational Rules or Section D5 of these Operational Rules will be determined, on a full and binding basis, in accordance with the procedures contained within that section. Similarly, any decision made which is not otherwise capable of binding determination within other sections of these Operational Rules shall be capable of appeal to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure rather than this Full Arbitration Procedure.

**E3:2**      To the extent that a party is able, and wishes to bring a matter to arbitration under this Full Arbitration Procedure that party or parties ("the Applicant") shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a written notice to arbitrate under this Full Arbitration Procedure containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Notice"):

- a)      the names and addresses and the relevant contact details of all the parties to the arbitration and notification if any are under the age of eighteen (with their date of birth (if known)); and
- b)      a statement describing the nature and circumstances of the dispute, and specifying the Applicant's claim(s) against the other party/parties to the arbitration (the "Respondent") and the relief claimed or the remedy sought.

**E3:3**      Further, the Applicant shall submit a deposit of £500.00 to the RFL Operations Department (the "Deposit"). Such Deposit is to cover the administrative costs of the Arbitration and shall be non-refundable unless the Applicant's claim is successful in its entirety in a claim against the RFL or dismissed in accordance with clause E3:10 in which case the provisions of clause E3:10 apply.

**E3:4**      The date of receipt by the Operations Department of the Notice shall be the date the arbitration commenced ("the Commencement Date").

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **E3:5 Statement of Claim**

Within twenty-one (21) days of the Commencement Date the Applicant shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a Statement of Claim (failing which the arbitration shall be deemed to be withdrawn) containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Statement of Claim"):

- a) a statement of the facts and any law giving rise to the arbitration and upon which the Applicant is relying;
- b) copies of all documents upon which the Applicant is relying;
- c) a statement of any procedural matters upon which the parties have already agreed or proposals in relation to such procedure, including but not limited to apportioning costs, the location of the arbitration, any variations from this Section E relating to any timetable, decision-making powers, confidentiality, the number and qualification of the arbitrator(s) or any other matters.

### **E3:6 Reply of the Respondent**

Within twenty-one (21) days of the receipt by the Respondent of the Statement of Claim the Respondent shall send to the Operational Department and serve on the Applicant a reply containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Reply"):

- a) confirmation or denial of all or part of the Applicant's Statement of Claim, setting out as fully as possible the facts and any law in the claim which the Respondent admits or denies, on what grounds and any other facts and law upon which the Respondent relies;
- b) a statement of the nature and circumstances of any counterclaims specifying the Respondent's counterclaim(s) against the Applicant, the relief claimed or the remedy sought and the facts and law upon which the Respondent is relying ("the Counterclaim");
- c) copies of all documents on which the Respondent is relying unless the document has been previously submitted by the Applicant;
- d) any proposals in relation to the arbitration procedure.

### **E3:7 Further written submissions**

The Applicant may within twenty-one (21) days of the receipt by it of any Counterclaim, submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a defence to such Counterclaim (the "Defence to Counterclaim"). Unless the Arbitration Tribunal permits or directs otherwise, the parties shall not submit further written argument(s) after the submission of the Statement of Appeal, the Reply, the Counterclaim or the Defence to Counterclaim as the case may be.

**E3:8** If the Respondent fails to submit or serve its Reply or any Counterclaim or the Applicant any Defence to Counterclaim within the time-limit set, the Arbitration Tribunal may nevertheless proceed with the arbitration and deliver its award.

### **E3:9 Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member right to Summarily Dismiss Claim**

The Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall at his absolute discretion be entitled to review the Applicant's Statement of Claim and dismiss the claim should he be of the opinion that the claim has no real prospect of success. Such a review may take place before the Respondent files or serves its Reply. If the claim is dismissed pursuant to this clause E3:10 then the Applicant shall be entitled to receive half of its Deposit back from the RFL.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **E3:10     Communication of the decision**

The written decision and its reasons shall be communicated by the Arbitration Tribunal to the parties and a copy sent to the Parties as soon as possible and ordinarily within four (4) months after the receipt by the Operations Department of the Notice unless the parties otherwise agree.

### **COMMUNICATIONS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

E4:1     The parties and the Arbitration Tribunal shall communicate through the Operations Department on procedural matters (save for documents required under this Section E to be served on another party). The Chairman of the Arbitral Tribunal may direct that communication shall take place directly between the Arbitration Tribunal and the parties with copies of all correspondence and documents to be sent at the same time to the Operations Department.

E4:2     Any communication from one party to the Operations Department or to the Arbitration Tribunal must be accompanied by a copy for the Arbitration Tribunal or the Operations Department (as the case may be), and a copy sent to the other party.

E4:3     All communications shall be delivered or sent by first class post, or email to the parties at the addresses set out for each in the Notice of Appeal or Notice, or at such address as any party may have previously notified the Operations Department, the Arbitration Tribunal and the other parties.

### **CONCILIATION (this provision also applies to the Appeals Arbitration Procedure)**

E5:1     The Arbitration Tribunal, may encourage the parties to seek to resolve the dispute by conciliation.

### **FORMATION OF THE TRIBUNAL (this provision also applies to the Appeals Arbitration Procedure)**

E6:1     Any dispute or matter submitted to arbitration shall be decided by a one or three-member tribunal ("the Arbitration Tribunal") appointed by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member. The Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall decide whether to appoint a one or three-member tribunal as he/she considers appropriate in all the circumstances.

E6:2     The Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall notify the parties of the name(s) of the Arbitrator(s) who are to constitute the Arbitration Tribunal and in the case of a three-member Tribunal, which Arbitrator has been appointed Chairperson.

E6:3     A party may challenge the appointment of an Arbitrator where there are justifiable doubts as to the Arbitrator's impartiality or independence or where the party raises any material objection(s). If a party intends to challenge any appointment that party shall, within seven days of notification by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member of the appointment, submit in writing to the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member (with a copy to the Arbitration Tribunal and the Operations Department) the reasons why that party is challenging the Arbitrator. Unless the challenged Arbitrator withdraws or the other party agrees to the challenge, the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall decide on the challenge.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

- E6:4 If any Arbitrator gives written notice of the desire to resign, is removed, refuses to act, or in the opinion of the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member becomes unable or unfit to act, the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall appoint another Arbitrator to the Arbitration Tribunal in his/her place (to act as Chairperson if the circumstances require) and shall so inform the parties and any remaining members of the Arbitration Tribunal. Alternatively, if the parties so agree, the remaining members of any three-member Tribunal may proceed in the Arbitrator's absence.
- E6:5 If in the opinion of the majority of the Arbitration Tribunal, any Arbitrator has refused or failed to comply with this Section E or any applicable law relating to the making of the decision and/or award, having been given a reasonable opportunity to do so, the other Arbitrator(s) (if any) may remove him/her and the remaining Arbitrator(s) shall proceed in his/her absence.
- E6:6 Any appointment or removal required to be made by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member under this Section E shall be made after giving full consideration to the nature and circumstances of the matter, the location of the parties and any other relevant factor(s). Every Arbitrator conducting an arbitration under this Section E shall be independent, impartial, suitably qualified and capable and shall not act as advocate for any party.
- E6:7 In the case of any former member of the Arbitration Tribunal, the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall decide on the amount of the former Arbitrator's fees and expenses (if any). The remaining member(s) and any replacement member(s) of the Arbitration Tribunal (or if the Arbitration Tribunal is unable to decide the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall decide upon the status of any prior decisions or existing proceedings of the Arbitration Tribunal.

### **JURISDICTION OF THE TRIBUNAL (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E7:1 The Arbitration Tribunal may decide on its own jurisdiction, including whether the Arbitration Tribunal is properly constituted, what matters have been submitted and any objections with respect to the existence or validity of an arbitration agreement. For that purpose, the arbitration clause which forms or part of the RFL Operational rules shall be treated as an agreement independent of the other terms of the contract or rules and/or procedures. If the Arbitration Tribunal decides that the Operational rules, or any part of the Operational Rules, (and/or its procedures) are invalid or otherwise unenforceable this shall not prejudice the validity of the arbitration clause.

### **CONDUCT OF THE PROCEEDINGS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E8:1 The Arbitration Tribunal shall conduct the proceedings of the arbitration in such manner as it considers fit and may follow any arbitral procedure agreed by the parties if it is in the Arbitration Tribunal's opinion reasonably practicable so to do. The Arbitration Tribunal shall act in accordance with this Section E and any other applicable regulations. With the consent of the parties, the Arbitration Tribunal may proceed in an expedited manner for which it shall issue appropriate directions. Any decision of the Arbitration Tribunal in relation to the conduct of the proceedings shall be consistent with its duties at all times to act fairly and impartially, to allow the parties reasonable opportunity to put their respective cases and to deal with that of their opponent and to avoid unnecessary delay or expense, so as to provide a fair and efficient means for resolving the dispute.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **HEARINGS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E9:1 The Arbitration Tribunal shall subject to any agreement of the parties fix the date, time and place of any hearings in the arbitration and shall give the parties as much notice as practicable either directly or via the Operations Department of the date, time and place of any hearing.
- E9:2 Any party requesting an oral hearing has the right to be heard in front of the Arbitration Tribunal. In the absence of any such request, the Arbitration Tribunal shall endeavour to reach a decision without a hearing on the basis of the written evidence.
- E9:3 Any such hearings shall be in private unless the parties agree otherwise or unless the Arbitration Tribunal directs.

### **WITNESSES (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E10:1 The parties must notify the Arbitration Tribunal and other parties as soon as practicable and within any time limits set by the Arbitration Tribunal of the identity of any witnesses they wish to call and, if the Arbitration Tribunal requires it, each party shall disclose the subject matter and content of the evidence on which each such witness will be relying and how that evidence relates to the points at issue and the Arbitration Tribunal shall have power to decide whether such witness shall be required to attend or be called to give evidence at any hearing.
- E10:2 The Arbitration Tribunal may question a witness at any stage and shall control the questioning of a witness by the other parties.

### **EXPERTS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E11:1 The Arbitration Tribunal may, provided it shall have notified the parties, appoint one or more experts acting independently and impartially of the parties to report to the Arbitration Tribunal on specific issues and may require a party to give such an expert any relevant information or to produce, or to provide access to, any relevant documents, goods or property for inspection by the expert.
- E11:2 The Arbitration Tribunal may (unless the parties shall otherwise agree) direct an expert witness to give evidence either before a hearing in the form of a written report and/or at the hearing in the form of an oral report and may also require an expert witness to attend a hearing so that the Arbitration Tribunal or the parties may question him or her.
- E11:3 The fees and expenses of any expert appointed by the Arbitration Tribunal shall form part of the costs of the arbitration.
- E11:4 The parties must notify the Arbitration Tribunal and other parties as soon as practicable and within any time limits set by the Arbitration Tribunal of the identity of any expert they wish to call and, if the Arbitration Tribunal requires it, each party shall disclose the subject matter and content of the evidence on which each such expert will be relying and how that evidence relates to the points at issue and the Arbitration Tribunal shall have power to decide whether such expert shall be required to attend or be called to give evidence at any hearing.
- E11:5 The Arbitration Tribunal may question any expert at any stage and shall control the questioning of any expert by the other parties.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **DECISIONS AND POWERS OF THE TRIBUNAL (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E12:1 The decision and/or award of the Arbitration Tribunal shall be in writing and shall be dated and signed by the Arbitrator(s) and shall state the reasons on which it is based.
- E12:2 Where there are three arbitrators, the Arbitration Tribunal shall decide on any issue by a majority and if the Arbitration Tribunal fails to reach a majority decision on any issue, the decision of the Chairperson of the Arbitration Tribunal shall be final.
- E12:3 The sole arbitrator or Chairperson of the Arbitration Tribunal shall arrange for the decision and/or award to be delivered to the parties.
- E12:4 All decisions and/or awards of the Arbitration Tribunal shall be final and binding on the parties and on any party claiming through or under them and the parties agree, by submitting to arbitration under this Section E, to waive irrevocably their right to any form of appeal, review or recourse to any state court or other judicial authority, subject to any applicable statutory or other rights.
- E12:5 The Arbitration Tribunal shall have the powers as set out in the Act, including the powers to make a declaration on any matter to be determined in the proceedings, to order the payment of a sum of money by way of damages or otherwise including the award of simple or compound interest on the whole or part of any amount, to order a party to do or refrain from doing anything, to order specific performance of a contract (except one relating to land), and to order the rectification, setting aside or cancellation of a deed.
- E12:6 In addition, the Arbitration Tribunal shall have the power:
- a) to allow any party to amend its written case and/or to submit further evidence;
  - b) to extend or abbreviate any time-limit provided by this Section E or any arbitration agreement;
  - c) to conduct enquiries;
  - d) to order any party to make any property under its control available for inspection by the Arbitration Tribunal;
  - e) to order the production to the Arbitration Tribunal and the other party/parties for inspection, copies of any documents in a party's control which the Arbitration Tribunal considers relevant;
  - f) to decide which rules of evidence on admissibility, relevance and/or weight shall apply;
  - g) to dismiss a claim or to proceed in the absence of one or more of the parties, in the event of a failure to comply with any directions of the Arbitration Tribunal;
  - h) to dismiss a claim summarily should in its opinion the claim be without merit;
  - i) to consolidate proceedings subject to the consent in writing of all the parties concerned;

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

- j) to join any other party to the proceedings on the application of a party, subject to the consent in writing of such third party; and
- k) to order on an interim basis, subject to final determination in a decision and/or award, any relief or remedy which the Arbitration Tribunal would have the power to grant in a final decision and/or award including a provisional order for security for costs, any deposit, the payment of any other money, to order a party to do or refrain from doing anything, and/or in any appeal, staying execution of the decision below. The Arbitration Tribunal may not make any interim order or grant any provisional award unless and until the Notice of Appeal or the Notice as the case may not have been properly submitted and served.

### **COSTS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E13:1 The amount of the costs of the arbitration (i.e. the costs of the Arbitration Tribunal and any experts appointed by the Arbitration Tribunal) shall be £500.00 unless the matter is referred to Sports Resolutions (UK) or an expert is required during the arbitration in such circumstances shall be determined by the RFL Operations Department. Unless the parties otherwise agree or unless the Arbitration Tribunal otherwise directs or unless any applicable regulations otherwise provide each party shall be liable to the RFL Operations Department for an equal share of the costs of the arbitration.
- E13:2 The parties shall be responsible for their own legal and other costs unless the parties otherwise agree or unless the Arbitration Tribunal otherwise directs or unless any applicable regulations otherwise provide. The Arbitration Tribunal shall also have the power unless the parties otherwise agree or any applicable regulations otherwise provide to order that all or part of the legal costs and any other costs incurred by a party be paid by another party.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E14:1 Subject to Section E9.3 above, the proceedings shall be confidential. The parties, the RFL and the Arbitration Tribunal undertake to keep confidential all documents and any other materials produced for the purpose of the arbitration by any party and/or participant in the arbitration – except to the extent that disclosure may be required by a legal duty, to pursue or protect a legal right, to enforce or challenge an award in bona fide legal proceedings or that such documents may already be in the public domain (otherwise than in breach of this undertaking).
- E14:2 The RFL may publish the Arbitration Tribunal's award or decision and its reasons in any full arbitration or any appeal arbitration conducted under this Section E unless the parties expressly agree prior to the Arbitration Tribunal making its award or decision that they should remain confidential. In the case of any arbitration conducted under this Section E, the RFL may publish generic, non-identifying information relating to that arbitration.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

### **APPLICABLE LAW**

- E15:1 The seat of the arbitration shall be determined by the Arbitration Tribunal.
- E15:2 Procedurally, arbitrations under this Section E shall be governed by the Arbitration Act 1996 ("the Act") unless otherwise determined by the Arbitration Tribunal, and shall incorporate all the provisions of the Act (save for non-mandatory provisions expressly excluded or modified by this Section E) and shall incorporate all the provisions of the Act, and shall amount to a binding arbitration agreement (save that sections 44, 45 and 69 of the Act shall not apply).
- E15:3 Substantively, arbitrations under this Section E shall be decided in accordance with the law of England and Wales unless otherwise agreed in writing by the parties or unless otherwise directed by the Arbitration Tribunal.

### **GENERAL RULES**

- E16:1 If a party proceeds with an arbitration notwithstanding the fact that a provision of, or requirement under this Section E has not been complied with without promptly stating its objection that party shall have waived its right to object.
- E16:2 Any party to (or involved in) proceedings in relation to this Tier 3-4 Section E shall be deemed to have consented to publication by the RFL in the media of a decision made by an Arbitral Tribunal whether the same shall, or shall not, reflect on the character or conduct of the parties or their representatives.
- E16:3 Any party to (or involved in) proceedings each agrees to waive any rights it may have to bring a claim, of whatever nature, against the following (non-exhaustive) list of parties: the RFL (and any employee or representative of the RFL); and/or the Board (or individual directors); and/or an Arbitral Tribunal or individual members of any such tribunal.
- E16:4 No arbitration shall be commenced under this Tier 3-4 Section E unless and until the party, or parties, wishing to commence arbitration have exhausted all applicable rights of appeal, pursuant to the Tier 3-4 Operational Rules (and to the extent that any such procedure or appeal is final and binding a party shall not be entitled to commence arbitration under this Tier 3-4 Section E).

**SECTION E**

# **ARBITRATION**

**SECTION E / ARBITRATION**



## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **SECTION E: ARBITRATION**

#### **GENERAL**

- E1:1 It is the RFL's policy, and the policy of all Leagues and Competitions, that all disputes; challenges; appeals; and challenges to Operational Rules or RFL Policies, of whatever nature, shall be dealt with by way of binding arbitration, and the RFL takes the view that it is in the interests of the Game for matters to be determined in this way. These Operational Rules and RFL Policies already contain various arbitration provisions, all of which are designed to resolve matters specific to the Operational Rule, or RFL Policy, in question.
- E1:2 As set out in Section C1, and indeed throughout these Operational Rules and RFL Policies, all Persons Subject to the Operational Rules agree to be bound by the arbitration provisions contained within these Operational Rules and RFL Policies (and by virtue enter into an arbitration agreement for the purposes of Section 6 of the Arbitration Act 1996 (the "Act")).
- E1:3 All decisions made by an arbitral tribunal, panel, disciplinary panel, or body constituted pursuant to these Operational Rules or RFL Policies (including by a tribunal appointed by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member) shall therefore be final and binding, and each Person Subject to the Operational Rules agrees that they waive irrevocably their right to any form of challenge, claim, complaint, appeal, review or recourse (including in relation to any dispute arising out of, or in connection with, the validity of any Operational Rule(s)) to any state court, or other judicial authority, subject to any applicable statutory or other rights.
- E1:4 This arbitration agreement shall continue in perpetuity, including following termination of membership, or the conclusion of any Competition or League organised by, or under the jurisdiction of the RFL in relation to disputes or matters arising during the course of membership, or of any Competition or League organised by, or under the jurisdiction of, the RFL.
- E1:5 Subject to the remainder of this section E, the RFL, at its ultimate discretion may refer a claim to Sports Resolutions (UK) should the RFL believe that the subject of the claim or dispute requires specific expertise that is outside the remit of the Operational Rules Tribunal members. In such case, the Arbitration shall be held in accordance with the rules of Sports Resolutions (UK).
- E1:6 For the avoidance of doubt, to the extent that the arbitration commenced by a party relates to a decision made by a tribunal, the Board, the Community Board, or any decision making body pursuant to, and in the context of, these Operational Rules, or any RFL Policy, this Section E shall not operate as an appeal of such decision, and shall operate only as a forum and procedure for a challenge to the validity of such decision under English law on the grounds of ultra vires (including error of law); irrationality; or procedural unfairness, with the tribunal appointed by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member exercising supervisory jurisdiction only.

## RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)

### **APPEAL ARBITRATION PROCEDURE**

E2:1 The Appeal Arbitration Procedure provides a forum for a party to appeal a decision of the RFL Board, or any sub-committee of the RFL Board, subject to that party submitting a deposit with the RFL Operations Department of £500.00 (the "Deposit"). Such Deposit is to cover the administrative costs of the Arbitration and shall be non-refundable unless the Appellant's claim is successful in its entirety against the RFL or is dismissed in accordance with E2:8.

#### E2:2 Notice of Appeal

- a) The Appellant shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a notice of appeal containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Notice of Appeal") the following:
- (i) the names and addresses and the relevant contact details of all the parties and notification if any are under the age of eighteen (with their date of birth (if known));
  - (ii) details, and where available a copy, of the decision appealed from;
  - (iii) the Appellant's request for relief or remedy; and
  - (iv) if applicable an application to stay the execution of the decision appealed from together with the reasons.

#### E2:3 Time-limit

- a) The time-limit for the receipt by the Operations Department and for the service by the Appellant on the Respondent of the Notice of Appeal shall be twenty-one (21) days from the date of the decision from which the appeal is made or to be made.

#### E2:4 Statement of Appeal

Within ten (10) days of the expiry of the time-limit as set out in E2:3 above, the Appellant shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a Statement of Appeal (failing which the appeal shall be deemed to be withdrawn) containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Statement of Appeal"):

- a) a statement of the facts and any law giving rise to the appeal and upon which the Claimant is relying;
- b) copies of all documents upon which the Appellant is relying;
- c) a statement of any procedural matters upon which the parties have already agreed or proposals in relation to such procedure, including but not limited to apportioning costs, the location of the arbitration, any variations from this Section E relating to any timetable, decision-making powers, confidentiality, the number and qualification of the arbitrator(s) or any other matters.

#### E2:5 Reply

Within fourteen (14) days of receipt by the Respondent of the Statement of Appeal, the Respondent shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Appellant a reply containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Reply"):

- a) confirmation or denial of all or part of the Appellant's Statement of Appeal, setting out as fully as possible the facts and any law in the claim which the Respondent admits or denies, on what grounds and any other facts and law upon which the Respondent relies;
- b) copies of all documents on which the Respondent is relying unless the document has been previously submitted by the Appellant;
- c) any proposals in relation to the appeal procedure.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

**E2:6**      Further written submissions

Unless the Arbitration Tribunal permits or directs otherwise, the parties shall not submit further written argument(s) after the time limit for the submission of the Statement of Appeal or the Reply as the case may be.

**E2:7**      If the Respondent fails to submit its Reply within the time-limit set, the Arbitration Tribunal may nevertheless proceed with the arbitration and deliver its award.

**E2:8**      Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member right to Summarily Dismiss Claim

The Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall at his absolute discretion, be entitled to review the Applicant's Statement of Claim and dismiss the claim should he be of the opinion that the claim has no real prospect of success. Such a review may take place either before or after the Respondent files or serves its Reply. If the claim is dismissed pursuant to this clause E2:8 then the Applicant shall be entitled to receive half of its Deposit back from the RFL.

**E2:9**      Communication of the decision

The written decision and its reasons shall be communicated by the Arbitration Tribunal to the parties and a copy sent to the parties as soon as possible and ordinarily within two (2) months after the receipt by the Operations Department of the Notice of Appeal, unless the parties otherwise agree.

### **FULL ARBITRATION PROCEDURE**

**E3:1**      The Full Arbitration Procedure is a forum to resolve disputes or matters not otherwise covered under other procedures contained within these Operational Rules. For example, the decisions relating to matters falling under Section D1 or Section D2 of the RFL Tiers 3-4 Operational Rules or Section D5 of these Operational Rules will be determined, on a full and binding basis, in accordance with the procedures contained within that section. Similarly, any decision made which is not otherwise capable of binding determination within other sections of these Operational Rules shall be capable of appeal to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure rather than this Full Arbitration Procedure.

**E3:2**      To the extent that a party is able, and wishes to bring a matter to arbitration under this Full Arbitration Procedure that party or parties ("the Applicant") shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a written notice to arbitrate under this Full Arbitration Procedure containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Notice"):

- a)      the names and addresses and the relevant contact details of all the parties to the arbitration and notification if any are under the age of eighteen (with their date of birth (if known)); and
- b)      a statement describing the nature and circumstances of the dispute, and specifying the Applicant's claim(s) against the other party/parties to the arbitration (the "Respondent") and the relief claimed or the remedy sought.

**E3:3**      Further, the Applicant shall submit a deposit of £500.00 to the RFL Operations Department (the "Deposit"). Such Deposit is to cover the administrative costs of the Arbitration and shall be non-refundable unless the Applicant's claim is successful in its entirety in a claim against the RFL or dismissed in accordance with clause E3:10 in which case the provisions of clause E3:10 apply.

**E3:4**      The date of receipt by the Operations Department of the Notice shall be the date the arbitration commenced ("the Commencement Date").

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **E3:5 Statement of Claim**

Within twenty-one (21) days of the Commencement Date the Applicant shall submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a Statement of Claim (failing which the arbitration shall be deemed to be withdrawn) containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Statement of Claim"):

- a) a statement of the facts and any law giving rise to the arbitration and upon which the Applicant is relying;
- b) copies of all documents upon which the Applicant is relying;
- c) a statement of any procedural matters upon which the parties have already agreed or proposals in relation to such procedure, including but not limited to apportioning costs, the location of the arbitration, any variations from this Section E relating to any timetable, decision-making powers, confidentiality, the number and qualification of the arbitrator(s) or any other matters.

### **E3:6 Reply of the Respondent**

Within twenty-one (21) days of the receipt by the Respondent of the Statement of Claim the Respondent shall send to the Operational Department and serve on the Applicant a reply containing or accompanied by (collectively referred to as the "Reply"):

- a) confirmation or denial of all or part of the Applicant's Statement of Claim, setting out as fully as possible the facts and any law in the claim which the Respondent admits or denies, on what grounds and any other facts and law upon which the Respondent relies;
- b) a statement of the nature and circumstances of any counterclaims specifying the Respondent's counterclaim(s) against the Applicant, the relief claimed or the remedy sought and the facts and law upon which the Respondent is relying ("the Counterclaim");
- c) copies of all documents on which the Respondent is relying unless the document has been previously submitted by the Applicant;
- d) any proposals in relation to the arbitration procedure.

### **E3:7 Further written submissions**

The Applicant may within twenty-one (21) days of the receipt by it of any Counterclaim, submit to the Operations Department and serve on the Respondent a defence to such Counterclaim (the "Defence to Counterclaim"). Unless the Arbitration Tribunal permits or directs otherwise, the parties shall not submit further written argument(s) after the submission of the Statement of Appeal, the Reply, the Counterclaim or the Defence to Counterclaim as the case may be.

**E3:8** If the Respondent fails to submit or serve its Reply or any Counterclaim or the Applicant any Defence to Counterclaim within the time-limit set, the Arbitration Tribunal may nevertheless proceed with the arbitration and deliver its award.

### **E3:9 Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member right to Summarily Dismiss Claim**

The Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall at his absolute discretion be entitled to review the Applicant's Statement of Claim and dismiss the claim should he be of the opinion that the claim has no real prospect of success. Such a review may take place before the Respondent files or serves its Reply. If the claim is dismissed pursuant to this clause E3:10 then the Applicant shall be entitled to receive half of its Deposit back from the RFL.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **E3:10     Communication of the decision**

The written decision and its reasons shall be communicated by the Arbitration Tribunal to the parties and a copy sent to the Parties as soon as possible and ordinarily within four (4) months after the receipt by the Operations Department of the Notice unless the parties otherwise agree.

### **COMMUNICATIONS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

E4:1     The parties and the Arbitration Tribunal shall communicate through the Operations Department on procedural matters (save for documents required under this Section E to be served on another party). The Chairman of the Arbitral Tribunal may direct that communication shall take place directly between the Arbitration Tribunal and the parties with copies of all correspondence and documents to be sent at the same time to the Operations Department.

E4:2     Any communication from one party to the Operations Department or to the Arbitration Tribunal must be accompanied by a copy for the Arbitration Tribunal or the Operations Department (as the case may be), and a copy sent to the other party.

E4:3     All communications shall be delivered or sent by first class post, or email to the parties at the addresses set out for each in the Notice of Appeal or Notice, or at such address as any party may have previously notified the Operations Department, the Arbitration Tribunal and the other parties.

### **CONCILIATION (this provision also applies to the Appeals Arbitration Procedure)**

E5:1     The Arbitration Tribunal, may encourage the parties to seek to resolve the dispute by conciliation.

### **FORMATION OF THE TRIBUNAL (this provision also applies to the Appeals Arbitration Procedure)**

E6:1     Any dispute or matter submitted to arbitration shall be decided by a one or three-member tribunal ("the Arbitration Tribunal") appointed by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member. The Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall decide whether to appoint a one or three-member tribunal as he/she considers appropriate in all the circumstances.

E6:2     The Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall notify the parties of the name(s) of the Arbitrator(s) who are to constitute the Arbitration Tribunal and in the case of a three-member Tribunal, which Arbitrator has been appointed Chairperson.

E6:3     A party may challenge the appointment of an Arbitrator where there are justifiable doubts as to the Arbitrator's impartiality or independence or where the party raises any material objection(s). If a party intends to challenge any appointment that party shall, within seven days of notification by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member of the appointment, submit in writing to the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member (with a copy to the Arbitration Tribunal and the Operations Department) the reasons why that party is challenging the Arbitrator. Unless the challenged Arbitrator withdraws or the other party agrees to the challenge, the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall decide on the challenge.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

- E6:4 If any Arbitrator gives written notice of the desire to resign, is removed, refuses to act, or in the opinion of the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member becomes unable or unfit to act, the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall appoint another Arbitrator to the Arbitration Tribunal in his/her place (to act as Chairperson if the circumstances require) and shall so inform the parties and any remaining members of the Arbitration Tribunal. Alternatively, if the parties so agree, the remaining members of any three-member Tribunal may proceed in the Arbitrator's absence.
- E6:5 If in the opinion of the majority of the Arbitration Tribunal, any Arbitrator has refused or failed to comply with this Section E or any applicable law relating to the making of the decision and/or award, having been given a reasonable opportunity to do so, the other Arbitrator(s) (if any) may remove him/her and the remaining Arbitrator(s) shall proceed in his/her absence.
- E6:6 Any appointment or removal required to be made by the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member under this Section E shall be made after giving full consideration to the nature and circumstances of the matter, the location of the parties and any other relevant factor(s). Every Arbitrator conducting an arbitration under this Section E shall be independent, impartial, suitably qualified and capable and shall not act as advocate for any party.
- E6:7 In the case of any former member of the Arbitration Tribunal, the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall decide on the amount of the former Arbitrator's fees and expenses (if any). The remaining member(s) and any replacement member(s) of the Arbitration Tribunal (or if the Arbitration Tribunal is unable to decide the Senior Operational Rules Tribunal Panel Member shall decide upon the status of any prior decisions or existing proceedings of the Arbitration Tribunal.

### **JURISDICTION OF THE TRIBUNAL (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E7:1 The Arbitration Tribunal may decide on its own jurisdiction, including whether the Arbitration Tribunal is properly constituted, what matters have been submitted and any objections with respect to the existence or validity of an arbitration agreement. For that purpose, the arbitration clause which forms or part of the RFL Operational rules shall be treated as an agreement independent of the other terms of the contract or rules and/or procedures. If the Arbitration Tribunal decides that the Operational rules, or any part of the Operational Rules, (and/or its procedures) are invalid or otherwise unenforceable this shall not prejudice the validity of the arbitration clause.

### **CONDUCT OF THE PROCEEDINGS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E8:1 The Arbitration Tribunal shall conduct the proceedings of the arbitration in such manner as it considers fit and may follow any arbitral procedure agreed by the parties if it is in the Arbitration Tribunal's opinion reasonably practicable so to do. The Arbitration Tribunal shall act in accordance with this Section E and any other applicable regulations. With the consent of the parties, the Arbitration Tribunal may proceed in an expedited manner for which it shall issue appropriate directions. Any decision of the Arbitration Tribunal in relation to the conduct of the proceedings shall be consistent with its duties at all times to act fairly and impartially, to allow the parties reasonable opportunity to put their respective cases and to deal with that of their opponent and to avoid unnecessary delay or expense, so as to provide a fair and efficient means for resolving the dispute.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **HEARINGS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E9:1 The Arbitration Tribunal shall subject to any agreement of the parties fix the date, time and place of any hearings in the arbitration and shall give the parties as much notice as practicable either directly or via the Operations Department of the date, time and place of any hearing.
- E9:2 Any party requesting an oral hearing has the right to be heard in front of the Arbitration Tribunal. In the absence of any such request, the Arbitration Tribunal shall endeavour to reach a decision without a hearing on the basis of the written evidence.
- E9:3 Any such hearings shall be in private unless the parties agree otherwise or unless the Arbitration Tribunal directs.

### **WITNESSES (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E10:1 The parties must notify the Arbitration Tribunal and other parties as soon as practicable and within any time limits set by the Arbitration Tribunal of the identity of any witnesses they wish to call and, if the Arbitration Tribunal requires it, each party shall disclose the subject matter and content of the evidence on which each such witness will be relying and how that evidence relates to the points at issue and the Arbitration Tribunal shall have power to decide whether such witness shall be required to attend or be called to give evidence at any hearing.
- E10:2 The Arbitration Tribunal may question a witness at any stage and shall control the questioning of a witness by the other parties.

### **EXPERTS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E11:1 The Arbitration Tribunal may, provided it shall have notified the parties, appoint one or more experts acting independently and impartially of the parties to report to the Arbitration Tribunal on specific issues and may require a party to give such an expert any relevant information or to produce, or to provide access to, any relevant documents, goods or property for inspection by the expert.
- E11:2 The Arbitration Tribunal may (unless the parties shall otherwise agree) direct an expert witness to give evidence either before a hearing in the form of a written report and/or at the hearing in the form of an oral report and may also require an expert witness to attend a hearing so that the Arbitration Tribunal or the parties may question him or her.
- E11:3 The fees and expenses of any expert appointed by the Arbitration Tribunal shall form part of the costs of the arbitration.
- E11:4 The parties must notify the Arbitration Tribunal and other parties as soon as practicable and within any time limits set by the Arbitration Tribunal of the identity of any expert they wish to call and, if the Arbitration Tribunal requires it, each party shall disclose the subject matter and content of the evidence on which each such expert will be relying and how that evidence relates to the points at issue and the Arbitration Tribunal shall have power to decide whether such expert shall be required to attend or be called to give evidence at any hearing.
- E11:5 The Arbitration Tribunal may question any expert at any stage and shall control the questioning of any expert by the other parties.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **DECISIONS AND POWERS OF THE TRIBUNAL (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E12:1 The decision and/or award of the Arbitration Tribunal shall be in writing and shall be dated and signed by the Arbitrator(s) and shall state the reasons on which it is based.
- E12:2 Where there are three arbitrators, the Arbitration Tribunal shall decide on any issue by a majority and if the Arbitration Tribunal fails to reach a majority decision on any issue, the decision of the Chairperson of the Arbitration Tribunal shall be final.
- E12:3 The sole arbitrator or Chairperson of the Arbitration Tribunal shall arrange for the decision and/or award to be delivered to the parties.
- E12:4 All decisions and/or awards of the Arbitration Tribunal shall be final and binding on the parties and on any party claiming through or under them and the parties agree, by submitting to arbitration under this Section E, to waive irrevocably their right to any form of appeal, review or recourse to any state court or other judicial authority, subject to any applicable statutory or other rights.
- E12:5 The Arbitration Tribunal shall have the powers as set out in the Act, including the powers to make a declaration on any matter to be determined in the proceedings, to order the payment of a sum of money by way of damages or otherwise including the award of simple or compound interest on the whole or part of any amount, to order a party to do or refrain from doing anything, to order specific performance of a contract (except one relating to land), and to order the rectification, setting aside or cancellation of a deed.
- E12:6 In addition, the Arbitration Tribunal shall have the power:
- a) to allow any party to amend its written case and/or to submit further evidence;
  - b) to extend or abbreviate any time-limit provided by this Section E or any arbitration agreement;
  - c) to conduct enquiries;
  - d) to order any party to make any property under its control available for inspection by the Arbitration Tribunal;
  - e) to order the production to the Arbitration Tribunal and the other party/parties for inspection, copies of any documents in a party's control which the Arbitration Tribunal considers relevant;
  - f) to decide which rules of evidence on admissibility, relevance and/or weight shall apply;
  - g) to dismiss a claim or to proceed in the absence of one or more of the parties, in the event of a failure to comply with any directions of the Arbitration Tribunal;
  - h) to dismiss a claim summarily should in its opinion the claim be without merit;
  - i) to consolidate proceedings subject to the consent in writing of all the parties concerned;

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

---

- j) to join any other party to the proceedings on the application of a party, subject to the consent in writing of such third party; and
- k) to order on an interim basis, subject to final determination in a decision and/or award, any relief or remedy which the Arbitration Tribunal would have the power to grant in a final decision and/or award including a provisional order for security for costs, any deposit, the payment of any other money, to order a party to do or refrain from doing anything, and/or in any appeal, staying execution of the decision below. The Arbitration Tribunal may not make any interim order or grant any provisional award unless and until the Notice of Appeal or the Notice as the case may not have been properly submitted and served.

### **COSTS (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E13:1 The amount of the costs of the arbitration (i.e. the costs of the Arbitration Tribunal and any experts appointed by the Arbitration Tribunal) shall be £500.00 unless the matter is referred to Sports Resolutions (UK) or an expert is required during the arbitration in such circumstances shall be determined by the RFL Operations Department. Unless the parties otherwise agree or unless the Arbitration Tribunal otherwise directs or unless any applicable regulations otherwise provide each party shall be liable to the RFL Operations Department for an equal share of the costs of the arbitration.
- E13:2 The parties shall be responsible for their own legal and other costs unless the parties otherwise agree or unless the Arbitration Tribunal otherwise directs or unless any applicable regulations otherwise provide. The Arbitration Tribunal shall also have the power unless the parties otherwise agree or any applicable regulations otherwise provide to order that all or part of the legal costs and any other costs incurred by a party be paid by another party.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY (this provision also applies to the Appeal Arbitration Procedure)**

- E14:1 Subject to Section E9.3 above, the proceedings shall be confidential. The parties, the RFL and the Arbitration Tribunal undertake to keep confidential all documents and any other materials produced for the purpose of the arbitration by any party and/or participant in the arbitration – except to the extent that disclosure may be required by a legal duty, to pursue or protect a legal right, to enforce or challenge an award in bona fide legal proceedings or that such documents may already be in the public domain (otherwise than in breach of this undertaking).
- E14:2 The RFL may publish the Arbitration Tribunal's award or decision and its reasons in any full arbitration or any appeal arbitration conducted under this Section E unless the parties expressly agree prior to the Arbitration Tribunal making its award or decision that they should remain confidential. In the case of any arbitration conducted under this Section E, the RFL may publish generic, non-identifying information relating to that arbitration.

## **RFL OPERATIONAL RULES 2026 FOR TIERS THREE AND FOUR (COMMUNITY GAME)**

### **APPLICABLE LAW**

- E15:1 The seat of the arbitration shall be determined by the Arbitration Tribunal.
- E15:2 Procedurally, arbitrations under this Section E shall be governed by the Arbitration Act 1996 ("the Act") unless otherwise determined by the Arbitration Tribunal, and shall incorporate all the provisions of the Act (save for non-mandatory provisions expressly excluded or modified by this Section E) and shall incorporate all the provisions of the Act, and shall amount to a binding arbitration agreement (save that sections 44, 45 and 69 of the Act shall not apply).
- E15:3 Substantively, arbitrations under this Section E shall be decided in accordance with the law of England and Wales unless otherwise agreed in writing by the parties or unless otherwise directed by the Arbitration Tribunal.

### **GENERAL RULES**

- E16:1 If a party proceeds with an arbitration notwithstanding the fact that a provision of, or requirement under this Section E has not been complied with without promptly stating its objection that party shall have waived its right to object.
- E16:2 Any party to (or involved in) proceedings in relation to this Tier 3-4 Section E shall be deemed to have consented to publication by the RFL in the media of a decision made by an Arbitral Tribunal whether the same shall, or shall not, reflect on the character or conduct of the parties or their representatives.
- E16:3 Any party to (or involved in) proceedings each agrees to waive any rights it may have to bring a claim, of whatever nature, against the following (non-exhaustive) list of parties: the RFL (and any employee or representative of the RFL); and/or the Board (or individual directors); and/or an Arbitral Tribunal or individual members of any such tribunal.
- E16:4 No arbitration shall be commenced under this Tier 3-4 Section E unless and until the party, or parties, wishing to commence arbitration have exhausted all applicable rights of appeal, pursuant to the Tier 3-4 Operational Rules (and to the extent that any such procedure or appeal is final and binding a party shall not be entitled to commence arbitration under this Tier 3-4 Section E).

**SECTION F**

**APPENDICES**

**SECTION F | APPENDICES**



*APPENDICES | SECTION F1*

# *SAFEGUARDING POLICY*

*SECTION F1 | SAFEGUARDING POLICY*



**LAST REVIEW DATE JANUARY 2026**  
**NEXT REVIEW DATE JANUARY 2027**

## **SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

Every effort has been made by the RFL to ensure the accuracy of this information at the time of publication. This Policy is binding and forms part of the RFL Operational Rules. For guidance the reader is advised to contact the RFL Safeguarding team or take further advice if necessary. Where a synopsis of the Operational Rules is given the full Operational Rules as published by the RFL from time to time take precedence.

### **Acknowledgements**

The RFL would like to thank the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) for their support and guidance. Special thanks also to the other sports, whose work in this field has been a valuable source of information and inspiration.

Issued by the RFL January 2026

## **CONTENTS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1 SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

- 1.1 Incorporation & Rules
- 1.2 RFL Safeguarding Policy Statement
- 1.3 Key Principles of the Safeguarding Policy
- 1.4 Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Rules
- 1.5 Definitions & Assumptions
- 1.6 Legal Framework

#### **2 RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFEGUARDING IN RUGBY LEAGUE**

- 2.1 Who Has Responsibility for Safeguarding in Rugby League
- 2.2 RFL Safeguarding Manager
- 2.3 League Welfare Officer
- 2.4 Club Welfare Officer
- 2.5 Match Officials Society Welfare Officer

#### **3 BEST SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE IN RUGBY LEAGUE**

- 3.1 Duty of Care
- 3.2 Mandatory Safeguarding Requirements
- 3.3 Recruitment, Employment and Deployment of Staff and Volunteers
- 3.4 General Principles of Good Practice
- 3.5 Equality & Diversity
- 3.6 Education
- 3.7 Managing Challenging Behaviour

#### **4 RECOGNISING ABUSE &/OR POOR PRACTICE**

- 4.1 Recognizing Abuse &/or Poor Practice
- 4.2 Defining Abuse
- 4.3 Indicators of Abuse
- 4.4 Awareness of Increased Vulnerability to Abuse

- 4.5 Reducing the Potential for Vulnerability
- 4.6 Positions of Trust
- 4.7 Grooming
- 4.8 Contextual Safeguarding

## **5 REPORTING & RESPONDING TO POOR PRACTICE & ABUSE**

- 5.1 Background
- 5.2 Whistle Blowing
- 5.3 What to Report
- 5.4 Action to take to report concerns, a disclosure or an allegation
- 5.5 Advice on action to be taken if a child discloses to you
- 5.6 Confidentiality
- 5.7 Recording the Incident or Allegation
- 5.8 The Role of the Statutory Agencies
- 5.9 The RFL Safeguarding Case Management System
- 5.10 Support to Deal with the Aftermath
- 5.11 Support for Alleged Perpetrator
- 5.12 Referral Flow Chart

## **6 POLICIES, PROCEDURES & TEMPLATES** (see RFL Website [Resources \(rugby-league.com\)](https://www.rugby-league.com/resources))

### **CONTACT DETAILS**

#### **RFL SAFEGUARDING TEAM**

[safeguarding@rfl.uk.com](mailto:safeguarding@rfl.uk.com)

[07540636516](tel:07540636516)

#### **CPSU**

0116 366 5590 0116 366 5495

[cpsu@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:cpsu@nspcc.org.uk)  
[www.thecpsu.org.uk](http://www.thecpsu.org.uk)

#### **NSPCC**

Child Protection Helpline - 0808 800 5000

[help@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:help@nspcc.org.uk)

### **INTRODUCTION**

Sport can and does have a very powerful and positive influence on people – especially children. Not only can it provide opportunities for enjoyment and achievement; it can also develop valuable qualities such as self-esteem, leadership and teamwork. These positive effects can only take place if sport is in the right hands – in the hands of those who place the welfare of all children first and adopt practices that support, protect and empower them.

The reality is that abuse, not only sexual abuse but physical and emotional abuse, as well as bullying, does take place in sport; and in some cases, coaches and other trusted adults in sport including Rugby League have been convicted of such offences through the courts or found guilty of Misconduct by the RFL.

The RFL is committed to working in partnership with all agencies to ensure that information and training opportunities are available to ensure and promote best practice when working with children. Adopting best practice will help to safeguard these participants from potential abuse as well as preventing any unfounded allegations of abuse being made against coaches and other adults in positions of responsibility. The RFL Safeguarding Policy allows children to excel in a safe environment and transmit a reassuring signal to parents that positively impacts on participation.

This document is binding for the game as a whole to everyone in Rugby League, whether involved in either a professional or voluntary capacity or as a parent, spectator or participant.

Everyone in Rugby League has a duty of care towards children and other vulnerable players and officials and must help to protect them from abuse.

## **1 SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

### **1.1 INCORPORATION**

The RFL Safeguarding Policy and associated policies and procedures have been adopted by the whole game. All individuals involved in Rugby League in England and those from outside England that participate in a Competition that fall under the jurisdiction of the RFL at every level, including but not limited to players, match officials, coaches, administrators, club officials, parents, agents and spectators are all bound to abide by this Policy, by the RESPECT Code of Conduct, by the Tackle It Policy, by the Rugby League Coaches' Code of Conduct and by any other applicable Code of Conduct published by the RFL. All such individuals by participating or being involved in Rugby League are deemed to have assented to and as such recognise and adhere to the principles and responsibilities embodied in this Policy & the Codes.

### **1.2 RFL SAFEGUARDING POLICY STATEMENT**

**The RFL recognises and embraces its responsibility to safeguard children and sets out this commitment below:**

- 1.2.1 The RFL mandates that it is the responsibility of every adult involved in rugby league to ensure that every child who plays or otherwise participates in Rugby League should be able to take part in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from abuse.
- 1.2.2 The RFL recognises its responsibility to safeguard the welfare of all children involved in the game by protecting them from physical, emotional or sexual harm and from neglect or bullying as far as is possible.
- 1.2.3 The RFL is committed to working to provide a safe environment for all children to participate in the sport to the best of their abilities for as long as they choose to do so.
- 1.2.4 The RFL recognises that all children have a right to be protected from abuse irrespective of their age, gender, culture, disability, race, faith, religious belief, sexual orientation, all other protected characteristics and any other physical or other characteristic.
- 1.2.5 The RFL believes that the child's welfare is paramount and will be put before other considerations such as winning matches or the success and achievement of adults or clubs or representative teams.
- 1.2.6 The RFL recognises that abuse and poor practice do take place in sport and that raising awareness and understanding of the main forms of abuse and poor practice and requiring reporting if abuse or poor practice is suspected, will further safeguard children participating in Rugby League.

### **1.3 KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

**All those bound by this Policy should be conversant with the entirety of this Safeguarding Policy but for easy reference the key principles of the Policy are set out below. A breach of any of the following is a breach of the Safeguarding Policy and therefore Misconduct under Operational Rules Section D4.**

- 1.3.1 Every adult has a moral and statutory duty for the care, custody and safety of any child under the age of 18 under their supervision
- 1.3.2 The child's welfare is paramount and will be put before any other considerations such as winning matches or other competitive success.
- 1.3.3 All children, irrespective of age, disability, faith, gender, race or sexual orientation have the right to be protected from abuse (including but not limited to sexual abuse, grooming, breach of position of trust, physical abuse, neglect, bullying or undue pressure from any source) or poor practice.
- 1.3.4 Children must not be subjected to discrimination and/or abuse from any person, including spectators, based on their age, disability, faith, gender, race or sexual orientation and/or references to ability, height, weight or any other characteristics
- 1.3.5 All participants have a duty to report incidents, allegations or suspicions of poor practice or abuse or other breaches of the Safeguarding Policy and failure to do so is a breach of the Policy.
- 1.3.6 All participants have a duty to co-operate with and tell the truth to any RFL or Statutory Body's safeguarding investigation.
- 1.3.7 All incidents, allegations or suspicions of poor practice or abuse must be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately in confidence where possible
- 1.3.8 All children have a right to play or otherwise participate in the game of Rugby League in a safe and enjoyable environment.
- 1.3.9 All children must be allowed access to the game in a way that is appropriate for their age and ability and must be coached and trained by appropriately qualified coaches who abide by the Coaches' Code of Conduct and set a good example of behaviour, both on and off the pitch.
- 1.3.10 Children must not be required to play in too many games, or to attend training sessions, as to become a threat to their physical or emotional well-being and must not be allowed or encouraged to play when injured and/or concussed or potentially concussed.
- 1.3.11 Children must be allowed and encouraged to participate for fun and enjoyment rather than results on the pitch and must be given a fair share of playing time.
- 1.3.12 Children should be encouraged to achieve their potential and allowed to compete at the level at which they feel comfortable. This may not always be the highest level at which they could play.
- 1.3.13 Children will be provided with appropriate management, support, personal and social development with regard to their involvement in the game of Rugby League, whether they are playing, volunteering or officiating in the community or professional game.
- 1.3.14 All will comply with the Mandatory Safeguarding Requirements.
- 1.3.15 All those involved in Rugby League will ensure that they are adequately trained and understand the appropriate policies to ensure they are able to implement this policy.

Where specialist training sessions are planned, then the coach taking the session and in overall responsibility of the session must be qualified in the type of activity being undertaken.

NB All children in the context of this Policy includes, but is not limited to, players, officials & volunteers, match officials, ball crews, cheerleaders and dancers, pre-match entertainment participants, spectators and/or visitors.

#### 1.4 SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE GROUPS RULES

The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Rules have been adopted by the RFL, its Members and any other relevant body in England and participation, officiating, spectating or any other involvement in the game in England is dependent on acceptance of the Rules and this Policy. To ensure clarity and consistency in the matter of issues relating to Safeguarding, all Members of the RFL have delegated responsibility to the RFL.

#### 1.5 DEFINITIONS & ASSUMPTIONS

This Policy is based on the following principles:

- Child - This policy recognises and builds on the legal and statutory definitions of a child. The distinction between ages of consent, civil and criminal liability are recognised but in the pursuit of good practice in the delivery and management of Safeguarding in Rugby League, a child is recognised as being under the age of 18 years (Children's Act 2004 definition).
- Adult at Risk – “any person aged 18 years and over who is or may be in need of community care services by reason of mental health issues, learning or physical disability, sensory impairment, age or illness and who is or may be unable to take care of him/herself or unable to protect him/herself against significant harm or serious exploitation”. The RFL has an Adults at Risk Policy.
- Confidentiality should be upheld in line with the Data Protection Laws and the Human Rights Act 2000 with the rider that the welfare of the child is paramount.
- The term “parents” used throughout this document is a generic term to represent parents, carers and guardians.
- The term “club” is used throughout this document as a generic term to represent any Rugby League agency in charge of players under the age of 18 years and includes, but is not limited to, Leagues, schools, festivals, tournaments, representative sides and Match Officials Societies.
- “Members” shall mean those organisations which are members of the RFL from time to time.
- The term ‘Club Welfare Officer’ is used throughout this document. A club welfare officer is the person within a sports club with primary responsibility for managing and reporting concerns about children and for putting into place procedures to safeguard children in the club. In the elite game they may also be referred to as Safeguarding Lead.

## **1.6 LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The RFL's approach to Safeguarding is based on the principles recognised within UK and international legislation and Government guidance. The following has been taken into consideration:

- The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (DOH) 2023
- The Children Act 1989
- The Children Act 2004
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Sexual Offences (Amendments) Act 2000
- The Sexual Offences Act 2003
- The Police Act 1997
- The Protection of Children Act 1999
- The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- The General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- The Equalities Act 2010
- Information Sharing Advice for Safeguarding Practitioners 2015
- Children and Social Work Act 2017

## **2 RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFEGUARDING IN RUGBY LEAGUE**

### **2.1 WHO HAS RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFEGUARDING IN RUGBY LEAGUE?**

The RFL and all individuals, clubs, leagues, societies, associations and other agencies involved in Rugby League will:

- Accept the moral and legal responsibility to implement safeguarding procedures and to provide a duty of care for children, safeguard their wellbeing and protect them from abuse and poor practice
- Listen to children and respect and promote their rights, wishes and feelings
- Recruit, train and supervise its employees and volunteers to adopt best practice to safeguard and protect children from abuse
- Require all staff and volunteers to adopt and abide by this Safeguarding Policy, the RESPECT Code of Conduct and the Rugby League Coaches' Code of Conduct
- Respond to any allegations appropriately. Should any urgent statutory referrals or reports be made by a club they must be reported to the RFL Safeguarding Department as soon as possible either by phone or email.
- Report all concerns, allegations or disclosures to the RFL.
- Should a statutory agency such as but not limited to, the police, Social Care or the Local Authority Designated Officer make contact with a club directly, then the club must advise them to make contact with the RFL Safeguarding Department.

- Recognise that it is the responsibility of the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group, experts and agencies to determine whether abuse has taken place but it is everyone's responsibility to report any concerns.
- Recognise that working in partnership with children, their parents and other agencies is essential for the protection of children.
- Co-operate fully and promptly with the statutory bodies and/or the RFL in any investigation.
- Recognise the statutory responsibility of the Designated Officers (also known as Local Authority Designated Officer) to ensure the welfare of children and work with them to comply with procedures.

## **2.2 RFL SAFEGUARDING MANAGER**

The role of the RFL Safeguarding Manager is to:

- Take the lead role in the development and establishment of the RFL's approach to safeguarding children, including reporting to the RFL Board and producing the RFL's Safeguarding Policy
- Manage cases of poor practice and/or abuse reported to the RFL and keep suitable records in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation
- Manage referrals to Designated Officers and/or Children's Social Care and/or Police and/or other agencies as appropriate
- Be a central point of contact for internal and external agencies
- Represent the RFL at external meetings related to Safeguarding
- Co-ordinate dissemination of policy, procedures and resources throughout the organisation
- Provide advice and support to the League and Club and Match Officials' Society Welfare Officers
- Advise on the RFL's Safeguarding training needs and develop a training strategy
- Maintain confidentiality in cases except where to do so would put a child at risk
- Maintain, roll out & review the RFL Safeguarding Plan
- Ensure adherence to CPSU standards
- Attend CPSU National Lead Officers' meetings and training.

## **2.3 LEAGUE WELFARE OFFICER**

Each League should appoint a League Welfare Officer who has been DBS checked at an enhanced level and attends training as required by the RFL from time to time. The League should consult with the RFL Safeguarding Manager who will support them in the recruitment of this position to ensure they have the relevant experience and qualifications to be appointed to the role. The role of the League Welfare Officers is to provide the following service within their League:

- Ensure that all Clubs have met the Mandatory Safeguarding Requirements as set out from time to time
- Encourage and promote best practice
- Promote the RFL's education opportunities
- Act as an initial point of contact should a member of a club have a concern or query

- Refer all concerns or queries to the RFL in line with the reporting procedures below on to the Globocol Case Management System
- Act as a link between the RFL and the League
- Receive confidential information from the RFL SCMG about cases on a need-to-know basis

## 2.4 CLUB WELFARE OFFICER

All clubs must identify a designated person to take the role of Club Welfare Officer (CWO) who will lead on Safeguarding within the club. Before this person takes up their role they must be registered with the RFL, a process which includes undertaking an enhanced DBS check and attending such training as is required from time to time.

The CWO must have a formal role on the club's management committee, play an active part in decision-making and be supported by the management committee. The CWO will require support from the club, and designated training and support will be provided by the RFL. Clubs running a number of teams may need to appoint more than one CWO to ensure sufficient cover.

The role of the Club Welfare Officer is to:

- Ensure that the RFL Safeguarding Policy is adhered to within the Club
- Ensure all roles are assessed for eligibility for DBS checks and ensure checks are carried out
- Ensure safe recruitment procedures are followed
- Attend 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' course and 'Time to Listen' course and keep the qualifications up to date
- Attend the RFL Safeguarding Conference at least every two years or as required and requested by the RFL
- Ensure that Coaches have completed the 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' course
- Act as first point of contact for coaches, parents or children who may have concerns (contact details must be included on the club website and noticeboard)
- Report any concerns to the RFL
- Ensure that information from the RFL is disseminated to relevant club personnel.

The CWO should also be:

- Appointed and supported by Club Committee.
- Able to identify poor practice and abuse – behaviour that is harmful to children.
- Aware of the RFL's role and responsibilities to safeguard the welfare of children.
- Aware of the boundaries of the CWO role, e.g. it is not the CWO's role to investigate allegations; it is the duty of the CWO to report concerns in line with the RFL reporting procedures.
- Able to comply with confidentiality requirements.
- Well versed in working within the RFL Safeguarding Policy and associated procedures
- Aware of Equality and Diversity issues and additional Safeguarding vulnerability.

All the above can be obtained through attending Safeguarding & Protecting Children training, RFL 'Time to Listen' training and via the regular RFL updates and conference.

## **2.5 MATCH OFFICIALS' SOCIETY WELFARE OFFICER**

All Match Officials Societies must identify at least one designated person to take the role of Match Officials Society Welfare Officer (MOSWO) to handle Safeguarding issues. Before this person takes up their role they must be registered with the RFL, a process which includes undertaking an enhanced level DBS check and attending such training as required from time to time.

The MOSWO must have a formal role on the Match Officials Society Committee, play an active part in decision-making and be supported by the Committee. The MOSWO will require support from all members of the Society, designated training and support will be provided by the RFL.

The MOSWO has the same role and requires the same knowledge as a CWO as set out above. Throughout this Policy where the term CWO is used the same applies to a MOSWO where applicable.

## **3 BEST SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE IN RUGBY LEAGUE**

### **3.1 DUTY OF CARE**

Every person, club, league or other organisation in Rugby League has a legal duty of care to ensure the safety and welfare of any child involved in Rugby League or related activities, to safeguard them and protect them from foreseeable forms of harm.

Safeguarding involves all involved in Rugby League acknowledging that this duty of care exists and putting practical measures in place throughout the game to minimise the likelihood of foreseeable harm arising.

In order to ensure that all children are safe there must be sufficient adults present to provide an appropriate level of supervision at all times.

The RFL has adopted the NSPCC guidelines, which are detailed below:

0-2 years – one adult to three children

2-3 years – one adult to four children

4-8 years – one adult to six children

9-12 years – one adult to eight children

13-18 years – one adult to ten children.

For the avoidance of doubt, each adult above must be appropriately DBS-checked by the RFL and must be operating in an official capacity with the team or group in question unless special dispensation is granted by the RFL.

### **3.2 MANDATORY SAFEGUARDING REQUIREMENTS**

It is essential that every club complies with the Mandatory Safeguarding Requirements set out below. Having these policies and procedures in place is essential. The following is a list of the fundamental duties of every Club to demonstrate this duty of care. Other organisations such as Leagues, schools,

festivals, tournaments, representative teams and Match Officials Societies must take the appropriate and relevant steps for their circumstances – the RFL is available to offer advice as required.

**All clubs must:**

- Recruit, appoint, register and arrange for the training of a CWO who is the designated contact for Safeguarding issues
- Display their Club's own Safeguarding Policy Statement prominently at the club house where possible and in all cases on the website
- Ensure that all coaches and other volunteers who are engaged in Regulated Activity hold a current RFL DBS
- Follow the RFL reporting procedures by reporting all concerns, allegations and disclosures to the Safeguarding Case Management Group (SCMG)
- Comply with Do Not Deploy, Temporary or Permanent Suspension Orders and inform the SCMG if they believe a person is breaching such an Order
- Work within Safeguarding Principles including a commitment to RESPECT and Anti-Bullying
- Listen to children to ensure they feel empowered and ensure there is an open and listening environment
- Display CWO contact details around the club and on the website
- Have a Safeguarding policy which everybody at the club understands and puts into practice on a daily basis
- Ensure that children are appropriately supervised at all times including, at training, on match day and at any club organised events, festivals and tours
- Ensure that the following policies & procedures exist within the Club:

**Policies**

- Safeguarding Policy
- Selection & Recruitment Policy
- Whistle Blowing Policy
- First Aid Standards
- Dressing Room Policy
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Equality Policy
- RESPECT
- 100% ME Anti-Doping Policy
- Confidentiality and Data Protection
- Managing Challenging Behaviour & the Use of Force
- Photography Policy
- Travel Policy
- Social Media Policy

- Live Streaming Policy
- Escalation Policy
- Touring with Children Guide.

### **Procedures**

- Procedures for reporting concerns of abuse or poor practice
- Complaints & disciplinary procedures
- System for collecting player information and parental consent
- A Listening Club forum for children to express their views
- Information for parents and children
- Transport & away game/tour procedures
- Safer Recruitment and Selection procedures.

These policies and procedures are available on request from the RFL either as completed documents or as templates for clubs to adapt to their own circumstances.

### **3.3 RECRUITMENT, EMPLOYMENT AND DEPLOYMENT OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS**

Anyone may have the potential to abuse children and some sex offenders use sport as a means to access and groom children in preparation for abuse, therefore all reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that people who are potential perpetrators of abuse or are otherwise unsuitable to work with children and young people due to their sexual or other behaviours are prevented from doing so.

It is also important to ensure that individuals who have a record of violence or an inability to control their temper or a record of domestic or animal abuse or abuse of drugs are appropriately risk assessed and where appropriate do not have access to children.

However, having a criminal record does not necessarily prohibit an individual from working with children. The RFL are obligated to conduct thorough risk assessments on any DBS disclosures that include relevant information. All staff involved in the risk assessment process are trained and carry out risk assessments in line with their training and the provisions of the RFL Policy on the Rehabilitation of Offenders. It is essential that the same procedures are used consistently for all posts whether staff or volunteers are full time or part-time.

Under this Policy all individuals working on behalf of, or otherwise representing, an organisation are treated as employees whether working in a paid or voluntary capacity.

All Clubs at all levels must use the recruitment procedures set out in detail on the RFL website and these must be followed for all relevant recruitment whether staff or volunteers. Clubs should remember that these procedures should be applied to people who are already involved in the club and subsequently take on a role which gives them greater access to children. Clubs should ensure that those staff and volunteers already involved in the game undergo the appropriate parts of the recruitment procedures in particular DBS checks, although these are only part of a safe and effective recruitment and selection procedure.

In particular, pre-appointment checks should be made including carrying out Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) checks through the RFL and taking up references. DBS checks must be completed every three years for existing staff or more frequently if instructed to do so by the SCMG. Coaching staff must have their qualifications checked and their coaching licence must be inspected and the number recorded. Coaches must also be reminded that they have agreed to abide by the Coaches'

Code Conduct and the RESPECT Code of Conduct. Coaches (and other volunteers where relevant) should be given copies of these documents

In addition, clubs should be clear about their club's aims and philosophy and whether a coach or volunteer is a good match for that club. Carrying out interviews, taking up references and criminal record checks are an important part of safe recruitment but also help to check that individuals meet the club ethos.

Once volunteers and staff are in place it is essential that they go through an induction process and that their behaviour and performance is monitored and feedback given. Club Management should be vigilant and look out for any concerns about poor practice or abuse and act on them at an early stage following the guidelines in this document. The Club management should also offer appropriate support, through liaison with the RFL Safeguarding Manager to those who report concerns/complaints and those accused.

### **3.4 GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE**

The following is a non-exhaustive list of the general principles of good practice with children:

- Treating all children equally, and with respect and dignity
- Promoting a culture which ensures children are listened to and those views acted on (see RFL Listening Club Initiative)
- Respecting all children as individuals
- Always putting the welfare of each child first, before winning matches or achieving goals or supporting coaches
- Making rugby league fun, enjoyable and promoting fair play
- Ensuring that all disciplinary sanctions are fair, proportionate to the issue and the child's age, and do not involve violent or physical punishment or humiliation
- Communicating with parents to promote positive outcomes for children
- Physical exertion, e.g. running around the pitch should not be used as a method of punishment
- Always working in an open environment (e.g. not having private or unobserved situations and encouraging an open environment (e.g. no secrets)
- Maintaining a safe and appropriate distance, both physical and emotional, with children
- Building balanced relationships based on mutual trust which empowers children to share in the decision-making process
- Not having sexual relationships with children at the club including 16- or 17-year-olds - this includes all coaches and other staff or volunteers at a club
- Being an excellent role model – this includes not smoking, vaping or drinking alcohol in the company of children whilst undertaking any role within an RFL setting, promoting a healthy diet and condemning the use of illegal and performance enhancing substances.

Policies covering best practice guidelines for working with children can be found on the RFL website [Resources \(rugby-league.com\)](https://www.rugby-league.com/resources)

### **3.5 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

The RFL endorses the principle of equality, diversity and inclusion and will strive to ensure that everyone who wishes to be involved in Rugby League:

- Has a genuine and equal opportunity to participate to the full extent of their own ambitions and abilities, without regard to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation; and
- Can be assured of an environment in which their rights, dignity and individual worth are respected, and in particular, that they are able to enjoy their engagement with Rugby League without the threat of intimidation, victimisation, harassment, bullying or abuse.

The RFL is committed to avoiding and eliminating discrimination of any kind and will under no circumstances condone unlawful discriminatory practices. Rugby League has a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, intimidation, harassment, victimisation, bullying and abuse.

Diversity is recognising, valuing and respecting the diversity of everyone. Diversity encompasses visible and non-visible differences which may include, but are not limited to, differences protected by the Equalities Act 2010.

### **Why is a commitment to Equality and Diversity essential?**

- 1 It is morally the right thing to do – both in terms of everyone's wellbeing and the wider reputation of the club as a safe and welcoming environment
- 2 It will grow the sport of Rugby League – if a club is seen to be inclusive, to challenge inequality and discrimination and to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants – there will be increased participation particularly among underrepresented groups and a greater likelihood that participants will stay involved
- 3 Legal responsibility – if a child experiences discrimination, victimisation or harassment based on their gender, race, disability, religious beliefs, faith, age or sexual orientation the club could face legal proceedings which are costly in terms of possible fines as well as a damaging loss of reputation
- 4 Certain groups can be more vulnerable to abuse.

### **3.6 EDUCATION**

It is essential that a sufficient number of individuals within the club have a basic level of Safeguarding training to ensure that this Policy is adhered to throughout the club. The current course which gives this knowledge is 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' (SPC.) This course is an Activefirst course which is required for the RFL L2 Coaching Licence and is also a mandatory qualification for all those working with children. For those who have previously attended this course a refresher is available online.

The RFL will only accept SPC completed by Activefirst as this qualification has been accredited by The Chartered Institute For The Management of Sport and Physical Activity (CIMSPA) which forms part of the CPSU Accreditation.

CWOs need more knowledge than other volunteers in order for them to be as effective as possible in fulfilling their role and responsibilities. This knowledge is imparted through the 'Time To Listen' (TTL) course. This course was designed by the NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) and has been amended by the RFL (with CPSU approval) to reflect practices within the game. Although this course is primarily aimed at CWOs, other volunteers are more than welcome to attend in order to increase their knowledge.

### **3.7 LIVE STREAMING**

Clubs, Leagues and other organisations are regularly making use of live streaming to showcase their matches and events in Rugby League. It is important that those involved in youth and junior Rugby League are aware of the RFL's Live Streaming Policy which can be obtained by contacting the RFL.

This Policy sets out the mandatory requirements when providing a live stream in Rugby League and is intended to encourage good practice and ensure that streaming is carried out in a safe and appropriate manner.

Further guidance is available from the Safeguarding Manager at the RFL.

### **3.8 MANAGING CHALLENGING BEHAVIOUR**

Coaches & other volunteers may have to deal with challenging behaviour from the children or young people in their care. It is important that those involved in youth and junior Rugby League are aware of the RFL's Policy for Managing Challenging Behaviour which can be found on the RFL website or can be obtained by contacting the RFL.

This Policy aims to encourage good practice, suggest some strategies and sanctions which can be used and identify unacceptable sanctions or interventions which must never be used.

The Policy is based on the following principles:

- The welfare of the child is paramount
- All those involved in the sport including children, coaches & volunteers should have clear guidelines about the standard of behaviour which is expected and the processes for dealing with behaviour which is unacceptable
- Children must never be subject to any form of treatment that is harmful, abusive, humiliating or degrading
- Some children's behaviour may be caused by medical or psychological conditions. Coaches & volunteers may need additional help including discussing the child's needs with parents and/or carers and possibly from external agencies that already support that child
- Rugby League can be a beneficial experience for all children and children should only be excluded from the sport in exceptional cases.

## **4 ABUSE &/OR POOR PRACTICE**

### **4.1 RECOGNISING ABUSE &/OR POOR PRACTICE**

It is essential that all adults involved with children in Rugby League understand what constitutes abuse and/or poor practice, how to recognise it and how to respond to disclosures and allegations (see Section 5). Abuse and poor practice can be very emotive and difficult subjects; however, it is important that they are discussed openly at clubs as this helps create an environment where people are more aware of the issues and sensitive to the needs of children. This open environment also gives people more confidence in recognising abuse and /or poor practice and reacting to it.

Abuse can and does occur outside the family setting. Even for those experienced in working with child abuse, it is not always easy to recognise a situation where abuse may occur or has already taken place. The staff and volunteers in Rugby League, whether in a paid or voluntary capacity, are not experts at such recognition. However, they do have a responsibility to act if they have any concerns about the behaviour of someone (an adult or another child) towards a child and to follow the procedures set out in Section 5 of this document.

### **4.2 DEFINING ABUSE**

Any person may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm or by failing to act to prevent harm. Children may be abused in a family or institutional or club environment by people known to them or

more rarely by a stranger. Children can be abused by adults or by other children and some forms of abuse may be carried out through social media.

The effects of abuse can be extremely damaging and if allowed to continue or left unacknowledged may follow a person into adulthood. For instance, a person who has been abused as a child may find it difficult to maintain stable or trusting relationships, may suffer from low self-esteem or self-harm, may become involved in drugs or prostitution, may attempt suicide and may inflict the same behaviour on to other children in future.

#### 4.2.1 **Categories of Abuse**

##### **i) Physical Abuse**

Physical abuse occurs if people physically hit, burn, poison, shake or in some way hurt or injure children and young people, or fail to prevent these injuries from happening. In Rugby League, physical abuse could happen where training methods are inappropriate for the developmental age of the child or young person, where they are allowed to play with an injury or when concussed or potentially concussed or before the appropriate Graduated Return To Play has been completed or where inappropriate drugs or alcohol are offered or accepted. It would clearly happen if a child or young person is hit or physically restrained or manhandled by those supervising the game or training session.

##### **ii) Neglect**

Neglect takes place if adults fail to meet a child or young person's basic physical needs, e.g. for food, warmth and clothing, or emotional needs such as attention and affection. It occurs if children or young people are left alone or inadequately supervised or where they are exposed to danger, injury or extreme weather conditions. In Rugby League, neglect could occur if children or young people do not have proper supervision, clothing or are allowed or encouraged to play whilst injured or the concussion rules are not followed. It could occur if a child or young person's particular health needs are disregarded before, during, or after a game.

##### **iii) Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse occurs if children or young people are used to meet another person's sexual needs. This includes any form of sexual behaviour with a child or young person (by an adult or another child or young person), the use of sexually explicit language and jokes, inappropriate touching and exposure to pornographic material. It also includes 'sexting' an increasingly common activity among children and young people, where they share inappropriate or explicit images online or through mobile phones. 1 in 4 children have received unwanted images on the subject of sex according to the NSPCC 2014. Creating an indecent image of someone under 18 or sending such images is against the law. Sexual abuse can occur in Rugby League. For example, where there is inappropriate touching, or where sexually explicit jokes occur between adults and children or young people or if indecent images are taken or adapted and placed on pornography sites.

##### **iv) Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse includes frequent threatening, taunting or sarcastic behaviour, along with holding affection or being extremely overprotective. It includes racist or sexist behaviour and demeaning initiation ceremonies. It can be inflicted by other children and young people as well as by adults. Children and young people who are being abused or bullied in any way will also experience emotional abuse. In Rugby League, coaches or parents emotionally abuse children and young people if they constantly criticise, abuse their power, or impose unrealistic pressure to perform to a high standard. It may also occur if a club allows members to deride people with disabilities or from minority cultures and use derogatory language about them.

##### **v) Bullying**

Although anyone can be the target of bullying, children and young people who are perceived as “different” from the majority may be at greater risk of bullying. This includes children and young people from minority cultures or children and young people with disabilities. Bullying can be defined as:

- Physical: hitting, kicking and theft
- Verbal: name calling, constant teasing, sarcasm, racist or homophobic taunts, threats and gestures
- Emotional: tormenting, mobile text messaging, ridiculing, humiliating and ignoring
- Sexual: unwanted physical contact or sexually abusive comments.

Bullying can take place anywhere but is more likely to take place where there is inadequate supervision. In Rugby League it is more likely to take place in the changing rooms or on the way to and from the Rugby League pitch - but can also take place at a training session or in a competition. Rugby League’s competitive nature can create and even support an environment for the bully if individuals and clubs are unaware.

In an NSPCC survey of young people (2000), bullying was reported to be the most common source of distress and anxiety.

The bully in Rugby League can be:

- A parent who pushes too hard
- A coach or manager who has a win-at-all-costs philosophy
- A coach who excludes a player or does not give them game time
- Allowing other children or parents to make decisions on excluding a child
- A child or young person intimidating another
- An official who places unfair pressure on a child or young person.

Bullying includes Cyber-Bullying which is using on-line spaces to spread rumours about someone or exclude them. It can also include text messaging, including video and picture messaging.

#### **vi) Child Trafficking &/or Modern Day Slavery**

Child Trafficking and/or Modern Day Slavery involves the taking of children out of their protective environment and preying on their vulnerability for the purpose of exploitation. Any concerns about the possibility of a child or young person being trafficked or enslaved should be reported via the statutory agencies.

Although no precise figures exist, the International Labour Organization (in 2005) estimated that between 980,000 to 1,225,000 children - both boys and girls - are in a forced labour situation as a result of trafficking internationally.

#### **vii) Female Genital Mutilation**

Female genital mutilation is a form of child abuse common to some African, Asian and Middle Eastern communities in the UK. This illegal and life-threatening initiation ritual can leave young victims in agony and with physical and psychological problems that can continue into adulthood. Carried out in secret and often without anaesthetic it involves the partial or total removal of the external female genital organs. The NSPCC Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) helpline offers specialist advice, information and support to anyone concerned that a child’s welfare is at risk because of female genital mutilation. Though callers’ details can remain anonymous, any information that could protect a child from abuse will be passed to the Police or Social Care services. Clubs should be mindful if a regular attender goes missing from a club or if a child, their peer or relative starts expressing worries about a trip abroad. If you are worried that a child may be at risk of FGM, you can contact the 24 hour helpline anonymously on 0800 028 3550 or email [fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk](mailto:fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk). If you wish to find out more about FGM then you can access the NSPCC’s fact sheet: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-abuse-and-neglect/fgm>

**viii) Forced Marriage**

A forced marriage is where one or both people do not (or in cases of people with learning disabilities, cannot) consent to the marriage and pressure or abuse is used. It is recognised in the UK as a form of violence against women and men, domestic/child abuse and a serious abuse of human rights. The pressure put on people to marry against their will can be physical (including threats, actual physical violence and sexual violence) or emotional and psychological (for example, when someone is made to feel like they're bringing shame on their family).

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) operates a public helpline to provide advice and support to victims and those being pressurised into forced marriages. Of the 1,300 plus cases dealt with in 2012 40% of victims were under 18. If you are worried that a child may be at risk of forced marriage, you can contact FMU via the helpline on 020 7008 0151 or email [fmu@fco.gov.uk](mailto:fmu@fco.gov.uk) . For more information on forced marriages go to [www.gov.uk/forced-marriage](http://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage)

**ix) Honour Based Violence**

The term 'Honour Based Violence' (HBV) is the internationally recognised term describing cultural justifications for violence and abuse. It justifies the use of certain types of violence and abuse against women, men and children. The Association of Chief Police Officers defines HBV as: 'A crime or incident, which has or may have been committed, to protect or defend the honour of the family and/or community'. HBV cuts across all cultures, nationalities, faith groups and communities and transcends national and international boundaries. HBV is also a Domestic Abuse issue, a Child Abuse concern and a crime. If you are worried that a child may be at risk of HBV contact Children's Social Care for further advice and guidance or speak to the RFL Safeguarding Manager.

**x) Radicalisation**

Protecting children from the risk of radicalisation should be seen as part of an organisation's wider safeguarding duties and is similar in nature to protecting children from other forms of harm and abuse. During the process of radicalisation, it is possible to intervene to prevent vulnerable people being radicalised.

Radicalisation refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and/or forms of extremism. There is no single way of identifying an individual who is likely to be susceptible to an extremist ideology. It can happen in many different ways and settings. Specific background factors may contribute to vulnerability which are often combined with specific influences such as family, friends or online, and with specific needs for which an extremist or terrorist or racist or supremacist group may appear to provide an answer. The internet and the use of social media in particular has become a major factor in the radicalisation of young people. As with managing other safeguarding risks, staff/volunteers should be alert to changes in children's behaviour which could indicate that they may be in need of help or protection.

**xi) Child criminal (CCE) and sexual exploitation (CSE)**

Child Criminal and Child Sexual Exploitation are complex issues that everyone who works with children, young people and/ or their families should have a good understanding of. They both involve hidden crimes and young people often know their abuser.

When a child is being exploited in either of these ways, they may be given things such as gifts, drugs, money, status and affection, in exchange for performing sexual activities or taking part in criminal activities.

If a child reports either of these forms of abuse to you or you suspect a child is involved in criminal or sexual exploitation you should report this to the RFL Safeguarding manager as soon as possible

**4.2.2 Poor Practice**

Poor practice is the term used to describe practice which falls below the standards expected to such an extent that a child's welfare is compromised and is where an adult's or another child's behaviour is inappropriate and may be causing concern to a child. In application of this Policy, poor practice includes any behaviour of a Safeguarding nature which contravenes the RESPECT Code of Conduct or Coaches' Code of Conduct, infringes an individual's rights and/ or is a failure to fulfil the highest standards of care. Poor practice is unacceptable in Rugby League, should never be sanctioned and will be treated seriously with appropriate actions taken.

Some examples of Poor Practice are:

- Insufficient care is taken to avoid injuries e.g. by excessive training or inappropriate training for the age or maturity, experience and ability of players;
- Giving continued and unnecessary preferential treatment to individuals and regularly or unfairly rejecting others e.g. singling out and focusing on the talented players or the coach's own children or not having a fair team selection policy;
- Having a win at all costs mentality
- A club supporting a coach so that it appears that this overrides the principle that the welfare of the child is paramount
- Placing children in potentially compromising and uncomfortable situations with adults
- Allowing abusive or concerning practices to go unchallenged and unreported e.g. failing to deal with or report a coach who ridicules or swears at players who make a mistake during a match
- Failing to adhere to the game's RESPECT or other codes of conduct including the use of foul and abusive language
- Issuing disciplinary sanctions which are not proportionate to age and/or involve violent or physical punishment or humiliation
- Excluding a child from a club without working with the child and parents to improve behaviour
- Permitting a child to be identified by virtue of either social media or inappropriate naming on shirts
- Adults participating in training sessions or drills including other variants of the sport. E.g., The holding of tackle shields and the participation in touch and pass with children under the age of 14.

#### 4.2.3 **Practice Never to be Sanctioned**

No one involved in the game should ever:

- Engage in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay
- Share a room with a child
- Shower with a child
- Allow or engage in any form of inappropriate touching
- Using or allowing children to use inappropriate language unchallenged
- Make sexually suggestive comments to a child, even in fun
- Reduce a child to tears as a form of control
- Allow allegations made by a child go unchallenged, unrecorded or not acted upon

- Do things of a personal nature for children, young people or disabled adults, that they can do for themselves
- Take a child or children to their home where they will be alone with them
- Invite or allow a child or children to stay with them at their home unsupervised
- Contact a child directly by telephone or social media
- Allow or encourage children to drink alcohol, take drugs, smoke or vape
- Ignoring Health & Safety Rules

### **N.B Personal Care**

It should be clear to everyone at the club (including young people and their parents/carers) that sports coaches and other volunteers should not be involved in providing intimate personal care for young or disabled participants. This should always be the responsibility of the parents, carers or other identified chaperones, care staff or volunteers. The reasons for this include:

- It puts the child in a potentially vulnerable position
- The potential negative impact on the young person's privacy and dignity
- Sports staff are unlikely to be trained to carry out this role and it isn't their role – they are there to facilitate and supervise sports activities • It can impact on the level of adult supervision for the remainder of the group
- There may be health and safety considerations around manual handling procedures
- The adult may be vulnerable to others misinterpreting their behaviour or motivation, and may result in concerns or allegations arising
- It can reinforce the child's vulnerability and lack of autonomy
- It models and may help to perpetuate poor practice.

If any of the following incidents should occur to staff or volunteers they should be reported immediately to another colleague/CWO and make a written note of the event. This action should be taken as soon as possible for the protection of all individuals concerned. Parents should also be informed of the incident:

- If you accidentally hurt a player
- If he/she seems distressed in any manner
- If a player appears to be sexually aroused by your actions
- If a player misunderstands or misinterprets something you have done.

### **4.3 INDICATORS OF ABUSE**

Children and young people may be reluctant to tell someone when they are being abused or may be bullied out of disclosing or be forced to retract their concerns, so it is essential that every adult is aware of the possible signals that a child and young person's welfare or safety is being threatened. However, there is rarely a clear sign, and you may often have to piece together various snippets of information and rely on your instinct that something does not seem quite right. You may have one piece of information that, when added to that of others, forms a clear picture of abuse. This is often compared to fitting pieces of a jigsaw together. Only when you have a few pieces can you start to see the true picture.

It is not the responsibility of those working in Rugby League to decide that child abuse is occurring, but it is their responsibility to act and pass on suspicions and/or information to the RFL SCMG and/or appropriate statutory agencies.

The list below gives some possible physical and behavioural signs of abuse. Some are very explicit and specific, others are much more general. You need to be careful as any one of these signs might have another very plausible explanation, such as a death in the family, loss of a pet, an absent family member or problems at school. However, you should remember to raise your concerns if there is a combination of unexplained changes over a period of time. Never allow a child or young person's disability or cultural difference to explain away concerns. This is not a judgement for you to make.

Indications that a child may be being abused include the following:

Physical Abuse	Fear of contact, aggression, temper, running away, fear of going home, reluctance to change or uncover body, depression, withdrawal, bullying or abuse of others. Unexplained and unusual bruising, finger and strap marks, cigarette burns, bite marks, fractures, scalds, missing teeth.
Neglect	Always being tired, early or late, absent, few friends, regularly left alone, stealing, no money, parents or carers not attending or supportive. Constant hunger, dirty, ill-fitting clothes, inappropriate clothing, weight change, untreated conditions and continual minor infections.
Sexual Abuse/Female Genital Mutilation	Apparent fear of someone, nightmares, running away, sexually explicit knowledge or behaviour, masturbation, bedwetting, eating problems, substance abuse, unexplained money or gifts, acting out with toys, self-harm. Distress or anxiety on reading texts, being withdrawn, anger, moodiness, reduced performance. Genital pain, itching, bleeding, bruising, discharge, stomach pains, discomfort, pregnancy, incontinence, urinary infections, STDs, thrush, pain on passing motions.
Emotional Abuse	Unable to play, fear of mistakes, low self-esteem, fear of telling parents, withdrawn, unexplained speech & language difficulties, few friends. Weight change, lack of growth or development, unexplained speech disorders, self-harm.
Bullying	Difficulty making friends, anxiety over school, truancy, withdrawn, anger, moodiness, suicide attempts, reduced performance, money and possessions lost, stealing, distress and anxiety on reading texts Weight change, unexplained injuries and bruising, stomach and headaches, bedwetting, hair pulled out.
Forced Marriage/Female Genital Mutilation	A regular attendee goes missing from the club or a child, their peer or relative starts expressing worries about a trip abroad.
Radicalisation	Showing sympathy for extremist causes, glorifying violence, especially to other faiths or cultures, making remarks or comments about being at extremist events or rallies outside school, intolerance of difference, including faith, culture, gender, race or sexuality or attempts to impose extremist views or practices on others.
Child Criminal Exploitation	Children who are being criminally exploited may be recruited to gangs to commit crimes. There are many signs to look out for which may indicate a child is being criminally exploited which include but not limited to them going missing, hanging out with older peers, being angry, violent or aggressive. Having unexplained items and buying new things and self-harming or feeling emotionally unwell.
Child Sexual Exploitation	Sexual exploitation can be difficult to spot and sometimes mistaken for 'normal' teenage behaviour. However, you may notice sharp changes in mood or character, the child may have money or other things they can't or won't explain.

The RFL website <https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/safeguarding/reporting-a-concern> contains detailed information about how to report any concerns.

#### **4.4 AWARENESS OF INCREASED VULNERABILITY TO ABUSE**

All those involved in rugby league need to be aware that some children can be more vulnerable to abuse because of their needs and background.

##### **4.4.1 Disability**

Disabled Children may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- Require intimate personal care
- Experience negative attitudes and abuse due to their disability
- May be ignored and excluded from activities if people fail to recognise that it is the barriers that society puts up which prevent their involvement not their disability *per se*
- May be dependent on their abuser for care
- Be less able to resist either verbally or physically
- Have a smaller network of friends to support and protect them
- Lack access to peer groups to discover what is acceptable behaviour
- Have significant communication difficulties including the use of sign language
- Be more likely to have their verbal or non-verbal communication misinterpreted as relating to their disability rather than abusive experiences
- Have medical needs which may be used to explain abuse.

##### **4.4.2 Race**

Children from ethnically diverse communities may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- Experience racism and racist attitudes
- Expect to be ignored by people in authority due to experience of institutionalised racism
- Be afraid of further abuse or racist abuse if they challenge others
- Be subjected to myths based on racial stereotyping
- Want to fit in and not want to make a fuss
- Be using or learning English as a second language and therefore find it more difficult to communicate.

##### **4.4.3 Religion or Faith**

Children from various religions and faiths may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- Experience religious intolerance, fear or hatred based on their religious beliefs
- Be subjected to myths based on stereotypes
- Suffer bullying or assumptions about their commitment to the game due to their religious beliefs and practices
- Be discriminated against, harassed or bullied based on their actual or perceived religious beliefs due to fear of religious extremism.

#### 4.4.4 **Sexual Orientation and Gender Reassignment**

Children are often aware of their sexual orientation from an early age and many children may already identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBTQ+). LGBTQ+ children may be more vulnerable to abuse because they may:

- Be subjected to homophobia – which includes bullying abuse or physical attacks
- Have their experiences as LGBTQ+ children rendered invisible by heterosexist attitudes and assumptions which assumes that everyone is heterosexual and that this is preferable to being gay.

#### 4.4.5 **Match Officials**

A considerable proportion of the match officials at youth and junior games are children and their role makes them particularly vulnerable to abuse in all its forms. Many young officials face verbal, emotional and even physical abuse whilst carrying out the role and many become disillusioned at best or suffer a significant and lasting loss of confidence when faced with abuse of this nature.

In addition to abuse from coaches and spectators match officials are vulnerable to abuse from other match officials. It is important that Leagues and Match Officials Societies implement all the safeguarding principles to protect young match officials.

#### 4.4.6 **Players on an Elite Pathway**

Research shows that players who are on an elite performance pathway may be subject to burn out, increased focus on win at all costs, excessive training regimes. Due to the culture of sport, an authority system may be created which facilitates power, obedience and potentially the rationalisation of abuse which can be more prevalent at the elite level. This abuse can take any form including physical, sexual and bullying. The elite environment can also be used to suggest that suffering, poor practice or abuse is part of the requirements to succeed in that environment.

For many young people, reaching a scholarship or academy or representative level has been their focus for a number of years, and they will have trained hard to achieve this. Some parents will also have made a significant contribution and often considerable sacrifices to support their child's progress and success. In these circumstances it can be difficult for children, young people and parents to report abuse.

The RFL has support systems in place for players on the elite pathway and their parents. In addition to the Club Welfare Officer there is a separate Player Welfare Manager at each club.

#### 4.4.7 **Children who take on Leadership Roles**

More and more children are taking on leadership and volunteering roles within Rugby League. This should be an enjoyable and positive experience. Unfortunately, some adults (coaches, parents, volunteers and spectators) lose sight of the fact that an individual in a leadership role who is under 18 is still legally a child.

Many children suffer verbal, physical and emotional abuse in leadership roles. This is unacceptable in Rugby League and the harm that is caused to these children needs to be recognised by adults within the game.

#### 4.4.8 **Economic Deprivation**

Children who come from families suffering short- or long-term economic deprivation may be more susceptible to abuse through neglect (which may be unintentional), lack of purchase power making them an easier target to a groomer using gifts and bullying by peers.

#### 4.5 REDUCING THE POTENTIAL FOR VULNERABILITY

Children in Rugby League may be subjected to bullying by children of the same or opposite sex and may have assumptions made relating to their sexuality or sexual orientation because of their involvement in playing a competitive contact sport such as Rugby League. Such assumptions or stereotypes are wholly inappropriate and should not be condoned as they may increase the vulnerability of some children to abuse.

It is important that both girls and boys are accorded the same levels of respect by all those working with them and should not be treated unequally because of their gender.

Given the increased vulnerability of some groups of children it is important that clubs (match officials societies) create a safe culture including:

- Finding ways of understanding and communicating with all children
- Maintaining best practice at all times in physical and health care
- Considering and responding to the diverse cultures within which a club is based
- Respecting and valuing diversity
- Building positive relationships with parents and carers and include them in club activities
- Observing changes in mood, appearance and behaviour and discuss those concerns with families, carers, the CWO, or RFL Safeguarding Manager if suspicions or concerns are significantly raised about the care or welfare of the child
- Acknowledging that disabled children are additionally vulnerable, and that vigilance is essential
- Having systems in place that ensure there is no abuse of match officials from anyone connected with the club
- Taking a zero-tolerance approach to abusive behaviour directed towards a child who is carrying out a leadership role is not acceptable
- Reporting inappropriate behaviour to the RFL Safeguarding Manager as abuse or poor practice
- Ensuring that the RESPECT code of conduct is enforced and actively promoted at the club
- Making sure that all club officials always set good examples of behaviour
- Ensuring that CWO and others are aware of the dangers of radicalisation
- Seek advice from RFL Safeguarding Manager.

#### 4.6 POSITIONS OF TRUST

The power and influence that a coach (or other member of staff/volunteer) has over a child involved in sport cannot be underestimated. If there is an additional competitive aspect to the activity and the coach/staff member/volunteer has some responsibility for the child's success or failure, then the power and influence of that person is increased. It is therefore vital for coaches/staff/volunteers to recognise these issues and to ensure that they do not abuse their positions of trust.

Whilst young people aged 16 or 17 can legally consent to some types of sexual activity, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 states that "It is an offence for a person aged 18 or over to involve a child under that age in sexual activity where he or she is in a specified position of trust in relation to that child. This includes those who care for, advise, supervise or train children and young people". The RFL's policy is based on the principles within that Act.

Any person who has any direct and/or indirect power or influence over a Child within the Game (including, but not limited to coaches, team managers, match officials, CWOs, club officials, professional and semi-professional Players) are in a position of trust with that Child. Each such person shall:

- act within appropriate boundaries in relation to all forms of communication with any such Child;
- not have intimate, sexual or inappropriate relationship with any such Child

Any breach of the above is not only serious Misconduct but is a criminal offence under the amended Sexual Offences Act 2003 Any breaches of this must now be reported to the police as it is a criminal offence.

For the avoidance of doubt a Child may be in a position of trust with another Child where they have taken on a leadership role.

#### **4.7 GROOMING**

The majority of adults working with children in Rugby League are committed to providing an enjoyable and safe environment in which to participate. However, a small proportion of adults actively seek opportunities to abuse children for their own sexual needs. When thinking about danger signs of grooming it is important to recognise that both boys and girls are groomed and/or sexually abused.

Sexual abuse of children is often the result of pre-meditated actions that are carefully planned. Preparing a child or organisation (i.e. a Club) is described as 'grooming' and is illegal under the provisions of The Sexual Offences Act 2003 and Misconduct under this Policy. It is important to understand how an abuser can 'groom' a club or parents or a child by appearing trustworthy and helpful, therefore giving the impression that they can take responsibility for a young person/some young people.

Abusers come from all sections of society, within and outside of the family and within and outside Rugby League. They may be perceived as 'respectable' people – the very last person anyone could suspect of abusing a child; this is usually the image they work hard to portray. Research into abuse demonstrates clearly that children are most likely to be abused by someone they know and who is likely to be in a position of trust with the child. Whilst the vast majority of sexual abusers are male, it is important not to overlook the fact that female sexual abusers do exist.

Sexual abusers use various techniques to 'groom' children, organisations and parents. These include:

- Seeking opportunities to be in contact with children, e.g. volunteering.
- Making friends with children, coaches, volunteers or parents
- Appearing trustworthy and helpful
- Giving presents to children or offering additional individual support/coaching
- Complementing the child to make them feel comfortable and confident
- Threatening (you won't get picked for the team) or bribing (you will get picked for the team) the child.

Abusers target children who they see as particularly vulnerable, this may be due to the child having low self-esteem or it appearing that they have little parental support. Therefore, children's parents should always be encouraged to be part of the club as this can act as an extra safeguard.

There are particular risks for talented children and these children are more at risk of abuse on 'away trips'. These risks are particularly acute at the point at which a player is at 'pre-peak' performance. These risks relate to:

- Separation from close family and friends– due to amount of ‘away’ travel and possibly living away from home
- Dependence on the coach for team selection, advice, emotional support, money
- Lack of safeguards away from home such as lack of checks on accommodation practices
- Too much emphasis on winning and high performance and not enough on personal development and enjoyment. This environment can sometimes be condoned by parents.

Any concerns relating to an adult’s behaviour or intentions towards children should be reported appropriately, see Section 5.

#### **4.8 Contextual Safeguarding**

Contextual Safeguarding is an approach to understanding, and responding to, children’s experiences of significant harm beyond their families. It recognises that the different relationships children form in their neighbourhoods, schools and online can feature violence and abuse. It requires all who work with children to have a consideration for their needs in the wider non-family context and an understanding that environmental factors around children and their activities including sporting and communication are highly relevant to ensuring children are kept safe.

Children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from within their peer groups, those in a position of trust, or from within the wider community and/ or online. These threats can take a variety of different forms and children can be vulnerable to multiple threats including direct or online abuse and sexual exploitation.

Within our sport we recognise there are certain environments or contexts where children may be vulnerable, and we need to ensure all members take action to prevent risk. An example of a specific risk may include in the changing rooms, where the use of cameras and other devices capable of taking/ recording images may be possible due to unmonitored direct communication with children which may be peers or those in a position of trust.

On that basis, all clubs must ensure they adopt the RFL policies set out in section 3.2 of this policy.

## **5 RESPONDING TO, RECORDING & REPORTING POOR PRACTICE, ABUSE AND BULLYING OR OTHER CONCERNS WITHIN OR OUTSIDE RUGBY LEAGUE**

### **5.1 BACKGROUND**

There is a legal and moral responsibility to report any concerns about a child within Rugby League and any concerns which may be raised about a child outside the sport. Child abuse of all types, particularly sexual abuse, can generate strong and confusing emotions in those facing such a situation for instance disbelief, disgust, anger etc. It is important to understand these feelings and not allow them to interfere with your judgement about any action to take. Abuse and poor practice can occur within many situations including the home, school and the sporting environment.

It is understood that people may often have concerns about reporting the behaviour of adults who are aggressive and potentially violent. Where possible the RFL will protect the identity of the person who has reported an incident when they feel threatened by the individual concerned. It should be remembered that if these individuals are intimidating to other adults they are likely to be even more intimidating to any children within their care and that there is a duty of care and an obligation under this Policy to report such behaviour.

Rugby League clubs are often close communities which generate strong loyalties between the volunteers working together. The RFL appreciates that it can be difficult to report close colleagues but would remind all those involved in the game of their over-riding moral duty to ensure the welfare

of the children at the club above any sense of loyalty to colleagues or the club. All suspicions of abuse or cases of poor practice should be reported following the guidelines in this document.

A coach, official or volunteer may have regular contact with children and be an important link in the identifying cases where a child needs protection. In addition coaches can often become the only adult that a child feels they can trust. This can often lead to a coach receiving a disclosure about abuse outside the club environment. In these circumstances there is a duty to pass on the information and coaches and other volunteers need to be aware of the action to take in these circumstances.

## 5.2 WHISTLE BLOWING

The RFL is determined to ensure that the culture of the sport is one in which it is safe, acceptable and gives confidence to those involved in rugby league to raise concerns about unacceptable practice and misconduct. In order to achieve this, the RFL has a Whistle Blowing Policy which can be found at <https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/safeguarding>. The RFL rules make it an offence to harass or victimise a whistle blower.

## 5.3 WHAT TO REPORT

In order for the Safeguarding Case Management Group (SCMG) to carry out its responsibilities under the Safeguarding Policy the Group needs to be informed of the following issues or related allegations. In appropriate instances the Group will log the issue/allegation and refer it to the relevant League or Club to deal with and report back to the SCMG, alternatively the SCMG will deal with the issue/allegation itself or refer it to the appropriate statutory agencies.

When reporting an allegation/incident the LWO and/or CWO should complete a cause for concern/safeguarding intervention form <https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/safeguarding/reporting-a-concern> and submit it to the RFL Safeguarding Department who will deal with the allegation or incident.

In the event that any individual working with children be required to make a statutory referral they can find the relevant Local Authority by entering the postcode of the child's main home address here: <https://www.gov.uk/find-local-council>

The following is a list of issues and/or allegations which should be referred to the SCMG, please note this is not exhaustive and if anyone in the game believes a Child is at risk of harm this should be reported.

### 5.3.1 Physical abuse

- Assault or inappropriate contact on a Child by an adult
- Allegations or suspicions that a Child is being physically abused in or outside Rugby League

### 5.3.2 Verbal Abuse

- Threatening and/or abusive language that causes (or that a reasonable adult would expect to cause) emotional distress to a Child

NB just because a Child does not appear to be emotionally distressed does not mean that they are not, when verbal abuse is regular Children learn to hide their feelings.

### 5.3.3 Racist, homophobic or other discriminatory abuse

- Racist, homophobic or other discriminatory abuse or allegations of abuse which have not resulted in a dismissal.

NB if the Match Official has heard the abuse and dismissed the player then the report should be dealt with in the same manner as any other dismissal.

#### 5.3.4 **Neglect**

- Allegations or suspicions that a Child is being neglected.

#### 5.3.5 **Sexual abuse/breach of Relationships of Trust**

- Allegations or suspicions that a Child is being sexually abused either in the game or in any other place e.g. school, home, church, by other Children
- Allegations of an adult sharing a room with a Child, showering with Children, making sexually suggestive comments to a Child, inappropriate touching, taking or inviting a Child to their home on their own
- Allegations or suspicions that a volunteer or employee is entering into a sexual relationship with a Child under 18 involved in the game.

#### 5.3.6 **Information about Participants**

- Information and/or rumours about participants in the game which if true would lead a reasonable person to believe that the participant (regardless of age) may be a threat to the safety of Children.

#### 5.3.7 **Bullying**

- Bullying of Children by adults

Child on Child bullying should usually be dealt with by the CWO at the club who may contact the Safeguarding Manager for advice.

#### 5.3.8 **Female Genital Mutilation, Honour Based Violence, Radicalisation**

Allegations or suspicions of any of the above should usually be reported to the police, however CWOs may contact the Safeguarding Manager for advice.

#### 5.3.9 **Poor Practice**

Poor practice should initially be reported to the Safeguarding team who may decide to deal with it (particularly if either the adult concerned is already known to the Safeguarding team or if there have been a number of incidents of poor practice raised at a particular club which the club does not appear to be capable of dealing with) or may refer the issue back to the club/league to deal with internally. In these situations the club/league must report back on their findings.

#### 5.4 **WHAT ACTION TO TAKE TO REPORT CONCERNS, REPORT A DISCLOSURE OR AN ALLEGATION**

On becoming aware of or witnessing a concern, receiving a disclosure or an allegation or a breach of this Policy you should:

##### **In the case of Abuse:**

- Contact the CWO who will report to the RFL Safeguarding Manager
- If the CWO is not available report your concerns direct to the RFL Safeguarding Manager
- The RFL Safeguarding Manager will report to the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group or the statutory agencies as appropriate
- If neither the CWO or the Safeguarding Manger is available and/or immediate action is required to protect the child contact Children's Social Care or the police as appropriate.

**In the case of Poor Practice:**

- Contact the CWO who will report to the RFL Safeguarding Manager
- If the CWO is not available report your concerns direct to the RFL Safeguarding Manager.

**5.5 ADVICE ON ACTION TO BE TAKEN IF A CHILD DISCLOSES TO YOU**

The points below set out general principles to be followed with all concerns, allegations and disclosures.

If a child informs you directly that he/she, or another child, is concerned about someone's behaviour towards them (this is termed a 'disclosure') then:

**The person receiving the information should:**

- React calmly so as not to frighten or deter the child
- Believe what the child is telling you
- Tell the child he/she is not to blame and that he/she was right to tell
- Ensure the immediate safety of the child
- If the child needs immediate medical treatment, take them to hospital or telephone for an ambulance, inform doctors of the concerns and make sure that they know that this is a Safeguarding issue
- Take what the child says seriously, recognising the difficulties inherent in interpreting what is said by a child who has speech disability and/or differences in language
- Keep any questions to the minimum required to ensure a clear and accurate understanding of what has been said
- Do not ask leading questions or make suggestions about what may have happened
- Reassure the child but do not make promises of confidentiality which might not be feasible in the light of subsequent developments
- In the event of suspicion of sexual abuse do not let the child shower or wash until given permission to do so by the police as washing can destroy valuable evidence
- Before contacting parents ensure that they are not the perpetrators
- Where appropriate seek advice immediately from Children's Social Care or Police who will advise on the action to be taken, including advice on contacting parents, Expert advice can also be provided by the NSPCC Helpline on 0808 800 5000 or ChildLine on 0800 1111 (both 24 hours)
- Alternatively contact the RFL Safeguarding Team who can make referrals on your behalf
- Involve somebody else – if not Children's Social Care or Police then the CWO, or the RFL Safeguarding Manager so that you can begin to protect the child and gain support for yourself.
- Write down the details of the concern, incident and/or what the child has disclosed as soon as possible, including details of who this information has been shared with and when.

**The person receiving the information should NOT:**

- Panic
- Allow their shock or distaste to show
- Show any disbelief or fail to take the allegations seriously
- Ask questions other than to clarify that they have enough information to act
- Speculate or make assumptions
- Make negative comments about alleged abuser
- Approach the alleged abuser
- Make promises or agree to keep secrets
- Take sole responsibility
- Shirk the responsibility to report the concern.

**5.6 CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort should be made to ensure that confidentiality is maintained for all concerned. The legal principle that the "welfare of the child is paramount" means that considerations of confidentiality which might apply to other situations within the organisation should not be allowed to override the right of children to be protected from harm.

However every effort must be made to ensure that appropriate confidentiality is maintained when an allegation has been made and is being investigated.

Information should be handled and disseminated on a 'need to know' basis only. This may include the following people:

- The CWO
- The League Welfare Officer
- The RFL Safeguarding Manager and Safeguarding Case Management Group
- The parents of the person who is alleged to have been abused (only following advice from the Children's Social Care/Police or where the abuse does not involve the family)
- The person making the allegation
- Children's Social Care/the Designated Officer/Police
- The alleged abuser (and parents if the alleged abuser is a young person) only following advice from the Children's Social Care/Police.

Information should be stored in a secure place with limited access to designated people, in line with the data protection laws (e.g. that information is accurate, regularly updated, relevant and secure).

**5.7 RECORDING THE INCIDENT OR ALLEGATION**

Information passed to Children's Social Care or the Police must provide as much detail as is available and relevant in order to be as helpful as possible, hence the necessity for making a detailed record at the time of the disclosure/concern. The initial report should be made to the RFL Safeguarding Manager using a cause for concern/ safeguarding intervention form. <https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/safeguarding/reporting-a-concern> The RFL Safeguarding Manager will act as the single point of contact with all statutory agencies.

Information required at the referral stage:

**Child** - Age/ gender / name / disabilities / address /date of birth/ contact details/ parental responsibility / agencies already working with the family / relationship between child and accused.

**Accused** - Name / address / contact details/ position – employee / volunteer / paid / level of coach; Any other allegations; Marital status; Age; Previous incidents.

### Primary evidence

Core information about the alleged incident.

- a) Facts from the person making the allegation including dates/times/venue/witness details
- b) Records with dates
- c) Has anyone else been informed or is anyone else already involved in the investigation.

Other than in the case of an emergency situation the initial report should be made to the RFL Safeguarding Manager who will act as the point of contact with the statutory authorities.

In an emergency reporting the matter to the Police or Children's Social Care should not be delayed by attempts to obtain more information. A record should also be made of the name and job title of the Children's Social Care or Police Officer whom the concerns were passed, together with the time and date of the call. Any information forwarded to the Children's Social Care or Police must also be provided to the RFL Safeguarding Manager and/or the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group (as soon as reasonably possible) who will take over management of the case and consider any wider issues within the game and put in place relevant protections.

Where reports are made to the RFL, the Safeguarding Manager will inform the Designated Officer where relevant as soon as possible.

In cases which are not an emergency but where there are concerns about a child's welfare the RFL Safeguarding Manager can make a referral to Children's Social Care on behalf of a club.

## 5.8 THE ROLE OF THE STATUTORY AGENCIES

Where clubs are made aware by any of the statutory agencies including but not limited to the Designated Officer, Children's Social Care and the Police, that their club or a volunteer or child at their club is subject to an investigation relevant to any issue related to the Safeguarding Policy the **club must always inform the RFL Safeguarding Manager immediately**. The RFL may have to take immediate action to protect the welfare of children but will always work in tandem with the statutory agencies.

## 5.9 THE RFL CASE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (Please refer to RFL Operational Rules D1 and D4 for full details)

<https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/rules-and-regulations/operational-rules>

All reports of alleged abuse or poor practice made to the RFL Safeguarding Manager are referred to the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group (SCMG) who meet regularly throughout the year to consider those cases. The powers of the SCMG are set out in RFL Operational Rules Tiers 1-3 and Tiers 4-6.

- The SCMG may refer allegations to the RFL's team of Independent Compliance Investigators, some of whom have specific Safeguarding experience. The Investigators will carry out an investigation and provide a report to the SCMG. Following the investigation the SCMG will consider the Compliance Investigator's report and decide on the course of action to take under the Operational Rules.

Where the Police and/or Children's Social Care and/or a Designated Officer is involved in a case the RFL SCMG will liaise with the statutory bodies and may defer any action until the statutory bodies have completed their work. Irrespective of the findings of statutory bodies enquiries, the RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group will assess all individual cases to decide whether action should be taken by the RFL in line with the Operational Rules.

The welfare of the child will always remain paramount.

#### **5.10 SUPPORT TO DEAL WITH THE AFTERMATH**

Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to children, parents and members of staff and volunteers. Use of Help Lines, support groups and open meetings will maintain an open culture and help the healing process. The British Association of Counselling Directory may be a useful resource. The RFL may be able to advise on counselling options.

#### **5.11 SUPPORT FOR THE ALLEGED PERPETRATOR**

Consideration should be given about what support may be appropriate to the alleged perpetrator of the abuse.

Additional information is available on request from the RFL.

## 5.12 REFERRAL FLOWCHART



## REPORTING CONCERNS PROCESS

If a child has disclosed information to you, OR you have witnessed, OR had reported to you an incident or complaint involving the behaviour of an individual/s in relation to a child, which may be considered abuse or poor practice, below is the reporting process.

**Is the child in need of urgent medical treatment or in immediate danger?**

**NO**

Report to your Club Welfare Officer (CWO)  
or League Welfare Officer (LWO)  
**or**  
RFL Safeguarding Team  
at the earliest opportunity

**YES**

Contact the emergency services (999)  
and inform them of potential Safeguarding  
issues.  
Then inform your CWO, LWO or RFL  
Safeguarding Team

**Does the allegation or incident involve the child's parent(s) guardian(s) or carer(s)  
or someone in a position of trust?**

**NO**

CWO, LWO or RFL Safeguarding Team  
to inform the child's parent(s) guardian(s)  
or carer(s)

**YES**

Where possible RFL Safeguarding Team  
to report to local social services when  
the concern involve the child's parent(s)  
guardian(s) or carer(s).

**FOLLOW**

The RFL Safeguarding Team will decide  
either of the following:  
**1**, low level concern to be managed by the League  
**2**, poor practice to be managed by the RFL

In some circumstances you may be  
asked to do this.

if the concerns relate to someone in a  
position of trust the RFL Safeguarding  
Team will make a referral into the Local  
Authority Designated Officer

**The person receiving, and then reporting the complaint or concerns must send a  
written statement to the RFL Safeguarding Team at the earliest opportunity.**

**All relevant parties will be kept up to date with information and the case outcome  
where appropriate.**

### USEFUL CONTACTS

Find your local social services - [www.gov.uk/find-local-council](http://www.gov.uk/find-local-council)

NSPCC helpline 10am—4pm Monday to Friday **0808 800 5000**

Childline—**0800 1111**

RFL Safeguarding Team—[safeguarding@rfl.co.uk](mailto:safeguarding@rfl.co.uk)

**APPENDICES | SECTION F2**

# **ADULTS AT RISK POLICY**

**SECTION F2 | ADULTS AT RISK POLICY**



## RFL SAFEGUARDING ADULTS AT RISK POLICY

### 1.0 Policy Statement – Safeguarding ‘Adults at Risk’

**An Adult at Risk is a person aged 18 or over who is in need of care and support (regardless of whether they are receiving that care or support) and because of those needs is unable to protect themselves against abuse or neglect.**

The Rugby Football League (RFL) is the National Governing Body for Rugby League in England. This Policy relates to all people or organisations who participate in Rugby League under the auspices of the RFL. The RFL believes it is important to raise awareness of individuals in Rugby League who may be at risk. The RFL will not tolerate abuse of such individuals and is committed to providing a welcoming environment, activity and interest to all members of the community who wish to take part.

The Tackle It action plan (<https://www.rugby-league.com/governance/inclusion-&-diversity/tackle-it>) expresses the Rugby League’s commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion. Through its strategic goals Tackle It aims to widen the reach and impact of Rugby League through diversifying its talent pool and workforce, improving its culture, and actively dealing with discrimination.

This Policy:

- seeks to ensure that all can recognise an adult who may be at risk and know how to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all such individuals.
- provide a framework for taking action when abuse against an Adult at Risk may be taking place.

The RFL will encourage, and support all involved in the game, including clubs, match officials’ societies, workers and volunteers and club Foundations, to adopt and demonstrate their commitment to this Safeguarding Adults at Risk Policy.

### 2.0 Definitions & Assumptions

To assist working through and understanding this Policy a number of key definitions need to be explained:

#### 2.1 Adult at Risk

For the purposes of this Policy an “adult at risk” is one who:

- has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority or other organisation is meeting any of those needs) and;
- is experiencing, or is at risk of, abuse or neglect; and;
- as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of, abuse or neglect.

For the avoidance of doubt, this is a very different test to whether an individual has a disability. If you want further advice on whether someone is an “adult at risk” please contact the RFL Safeguarding Manager ([safeguarding@rfl.co.uk](mailto:safeguarding@rfl.co.uk)).

Whether someone is an ‘adult at risk’ may evolve over time such that someone who is not considered an ‘adult at risk’ at one particular time, may be so at another point.

- 2.2 Abuse** is a violation of an individual's rights by another person or persons.
- 2.3 Adult** is anyone aged 18 or over.
- 2.4 Adult safeguarding** is protecting a person's right to live in safety, free from abuse and neglect.
- 2.5 Capacity** refers to the ability to make a decision at a particular time, for example when under considerable stress. This ability can change and the starting assumption must always be that a person has the capacity to make a decision unless it can be established that they lack capacity (MCA 2005).
- 2.6 Are people with disabilities 'at risk'?**

No, the fact that an individual has a disability does not mean they are an 'adult at risk'. However, some adults with disabilities will have additional vulnerabilities which means that they are also an 'adult at risk'.

### 3.0 RFL Commitment

The RFL is committed to:

- welcoming people into the sport and providing a positive experience that is genuinely inclusive;
- making reasonable adaptations and adjustments in a flexible manner to allow people of different ability, disability and/or impairment to have positive experiences of Rugby League;
- taking action to protect adults involved in Rugby League that may be at risk;
- seeking ways to improve the safety and well-being of all 'adults at risk' who take part in Rugby League;
- emphasising that everyone in Rugby League has a responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of all 'adults at risk' who take part;
- recognising that ability and disability can change over time, such that some adults may be additionally vulnerable to abuse, for example those who have a dependency on others or have different communication needs;
- recognising that a disabled adult may or may not be identified as an 'adult at risk';
- improving outcomes for 'adults at risk' by adhering to current legislation that supports the safeguarding of adults; and providing support and advice to everyone involved in Rugby League at all levels.

As part of this commitment the RFL will:

- manage its services in a way which minimises the risk of abuse occurring;
- support 'adults at risk' who are experiencing or have experienced abuse within the Game;
- work with 'adults at risk' and other agencies to tackle any abuse that may occur within the Game;
- seek ways to improve the safety and well-being of all 'adults at risk' who take part in Rugby League.

In achieving these aims the RFL will:

- ensure that relevant staff and volunteers have access to and are familiar with this Safeguarding Adults at Risk policy and procedures and their responsibilities within it;
- ensure concerns or allegations of abuse are always taken seriously;

- ensure that referrals are made to the appropriate authorities in a timely manner;
- ensure appropriate guidance and training in relation to safeguarding adults is made available to staff and volunteers;
- ensure that participants in Rugby League, their relatives and/or informal carers have access to information about how to report concerns or allegations of abuse;
- ensure that the RFL Safeguarding Team provide support and advice;
- ensure there is a named lead person to promote safeguarding awareness and practice within the organisation.

The RFL Safeguarding Manager: contact [safeguarding@rfl.co.uk](mailto:safeguarding@rfl.co.uk) or [07540636516](tel:07540636516)

#### 4.0 General Principles

This Policy is based on the Definitions and Legal Framework set out in sections 8 and 9 below and the guidance and procedures are based on the following six principles of Adult Safeguarding:

- 4.1 Empowerment** - People being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and informed consent.
- 4.2 Prevention** – It is better to take action before harm occurs.
- 4.3 Proportionality** – The least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.
- 4.4 Protection** – Support and representation for those in greatest need.
- 4.5 Partnership** – Local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse.
- 4.6 Accountability** – Accountability and transparency in delivering safeguarding.

#### 5.0 Overview

The Safeguarding Adults at Risk policy has been developed to ensure that procedures are in place to protect adults, including those at risk, to seek to ensure that they are safe from harm and have an enjoyable Rugby League experience. It confirms that abuse will not be tolerated in Rugby League, and where possible abuse involves an 'adult at risk', this policy and procedures provide the framework for action.

#### 6.0 Responsibility

This policy states that it is everyone's responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of all participants so that they can enjoy Rugby League.

In addition, each club or organisation should decide based on its own circumstances and involvement in different programmes whether it should have a dedicated Club Welfare Officer or whether the current Club Welfare Officer has the time and knowledge to cover the dual role. In either case the relevant Officer should be clearly identified in club literature and should receive relevant training.

For the RFL the Safeguarding Manager covers both Adults at Risk and Safeguarding children and young people and can be contacted in the case of any concerns or for advice at [safeguarding@rfl.co.uk](mailto:safeguarding@rfl.co.uk) or by telephone or [07540636516](tel:07540636516)

## 7.0 Best Safeguarding Adults at Risk Practice

Everyone in Rugby League has the responsibility to be open and welcoming, and to reach out to all in the communities where our clubs are based.

Good practice in welcoming people includes making sure the club, team or squad explicitly states that new people are welcome, and that everyone is welcome.

There are already some examples of great practice where Rugby League has welcomed and embraced different communities – the rise in women, girls and disability Rugby League is testimony to this. We want to ensure that this welcome is extended to all communities, whatever their background.

### 7.1 Policies and Procedures

#### 7.1.1 Safer Recruitment

Legally, anyone undertaking a role that involves contact with, or responsibility for, children or other vulnerable groups should be taken through a safer recruitment process. Adults at risk would be classed under the term 'vulnerable group'. Some individuals may not be suitable to work with adults at risk due to gaps in their understanding, skills or knowledge or due to previous concerns about conduct.

Rugby League clubs and organisations are only as good as the people who work and volunteer there. They should create a setting that makes everyone feel welcomed and safe. This can only be undertaken by ensuring that people are recruited as safely as possible. It is therefore essential that all clubs and organisations have effective recruitment and selection procedures for both paid staff and volunteers. These will help to screen out and discourage those who are not suitable from joining your club/organisation.

#### 7.1.2 DBS Applications

Anyone who is working with Adults at Risk should have a DBS through the RFL which includes checking against the Barred from working with Adults list. It is important to distinguish between roles involving working with Adults at Risk and Children roles as the risk assessment criteria is different and includes for instance assessing for risk of fraudulent activity. Failure to do so is a breach of this Policy.

#### 7.1.3 Other Checks

The DBS disclosure and checking against the barred list, if appropriate to the role, is only one part of a safe recruitment process. In all cases regarding the vetting of paid and voluntary staff working in sport, standard best practice dictates that:

- a thorough checking of a person's qualifications and training attended;
- detailed application forms;
- robust interviews that include the opportunity for self-disclose and check safeguarding, equality and diversity knowledge and skills;
- checking references;
- thorough induction processes;
- verification of qualifications and experience; and
- risk assessment of concerning information,

all form the basis of safe recruitment and best practice when recruiting individuals to work with adults at risk. A template is available for recruitment purposes [Resources \(rugby-league.com\)](https://www.rugby-league.com/resources)

Then when people are in post there should be a probationary period and review and regular safeguarding training that includes safeguarding adults at risk (currently part of the Safeguarding and Protecting Children course).

## 7.2 Good practice

Everyone should:

- aim to make the experience of participating in Rugby League fun and enjoyable.
- promote fairness and playing by the rules.
- not tolerate the use of prohibited or illegal substances.
- treat all adults equally and preserve their dignity; this includes giving more and less talented members of a group similar attention, time and respect.

The RFL expects that that coaches of adult players in environments in which there are or are likely to be Adults at Risk to:

- adopt and endorse the RFL Coach Codes of Conduct;
- abide by the RESPECT policy;
- respect the developmental stage of each player and not risk sacrificing their welfare in a desire for team or personal achievement.
- ensure that the training intensity is appropriate to the physical, social and emotional stage of the development of the player.
- work with adults at risk, medical advisers and their carers (where appropriate) to develop realistic training and competition schedules which are suited to the needs and lifestyle of the player, not the ambitions of others such as coaches, team members, parents or carers.
- build relationships based on mutual trust and respect, encouraging adults at risk to take responsibility for their own development and decision-making.
- always be publicly open when working with adults at risk.
- avoid coaching sessions or meetings where a coach and an individual player are completely unobserved.
- avoid unnecessary physical contact with people. Physical contact (touching) can be appropriate so long as:
  - it is neither intrusive nor disturbing.
  - the player's permission has been openly given.
  - it is delivered in an open environment.
  - it is needed to demonstrate during a coaching session.
- maintain a safe and appropriate relationship with players and avoid forming intimate relationships with players as this may threaten the position of trust and respect present between player and coach.
- be an excellent role model by maintaining appropriate standards of behaviour.
- gain the adult at risk's consent and, where appropriate, the consent of relevant carers, in writing, to administer emergency first aid or other medical treatment if the need arises.
- be aware of medical conditions, disabilities, existing injuries and medicines being taken and keep written records of any injury or accident that occurs, together with details of treatments provided.

- gain written consent from the correct people and fill out relevant checklists and information forms for travel arrangements and trips. This must be the adult themselves if they have capacity to do so.

Some Adults at Risk will be able to participate in Rugby League, in the way that they wish, with the minimum of support and adaptations required. Others will require a different approach that takes particular account of their needs and makes specific provision for these. A simple example of good practice is where a player with a learning disability has a playing 'buddy', a person who they can turn to for support, or if they have any questions about the session or game.

## 8.0 Recognising Abuse and Poor Practice

### 8.1 Poor practice

The following are regarded as poor practice and must be avoided in all circumstances and never condoned:

- unnecessarily spending excessive amounts of time alone with an individual adult.
- engaging in rough, physical or sexually provocative games, including horseplay.
- allowing or engaging in inappropriate touching of any form.
- using language that might be regarded as inappropriate by the adult and which may be hurtful or disrespectful.
- making sexually suggestive comments, even in jest.
- reducing an adult to tears as a form of control.
- letting allegations made by an adult go un-investigated, unrecorded, or not acted upon.
- taking an adult at risk alone in a car on journeys, however short.
- inviting or taking an adult at risk to your home or office where they will be alone with you.
- sharing a room with an adult at risk.
- doing things of a personal nature that adults at risk can do for themselves.

When poor practice is clearly deliberate or persistent it will be considered to be dealt with as such.

If, during your care, an adult at risk suffers any injury, seems distressed in any manner, or misunderstands/misinterprets something you have done, report these incidents as soon as possible to another adult in the organisation and make a brief written note of it. Do not repeat the action that caused this reaction.

### 8.2 Abuse

In Rugby League, the following examples may cause concern that an adult at risk is being abused:

- a member of a learning disability squad being financially exploited by another member of the squad.
- a young woman confiding in her coach about a forthcoming holiday where she fears she will be married against her will.
- a coach who regularly neglects the individual needs of disabled participants when training.
- a player being 'groomed' for sexual abuse by his or her coach.

- a player who frequently has unexplained bruises and injuries, and who will not change with their team-mates.

### **8.3 Reporting Occasionally an individual may need protecting**

If an 'adult at risk' may require the protection of either the Police or Social Care Safeguarding Services, either because of something happening inside or outside of Rugby League, in an emergency this should be reported to the appropriate Service immediately and the RFL Safeguarding Team should be informed.

An example of good practice in passing concerns to the RFL Safeguarding Team would be where an 'adult at risk' has informed somebody that they are receiving text messages from another player that are sexually explicit and unwelcome.

If it is unclear whether or not the individual would meet the definition of 'at risk', the information should be shared with the RFL Safeguarding Team, who will help make the decision.

Where an adult does not meet the definition of 'at risk', either because they do not have a health or social care need, or it does not prevent them protecting themselves, then the matter can be dealt with as a complaint, but with appropriate levels of support provided depending on the adult's particular needs. The RFL Safeguarding Team can advise on what sort of support may be appropriate.

Where a potential offence has been committed (as in the texting example above), the complainant should always be advised of their right to contact the police in the first instance, and advice sought from the RFL Safeguarding Team.

In any case and in all situations, if it is thought that a crime may be currently being committed, or in an Emergency situation, dial 999 and inform the police.

Any individual becoming aware that an adult may be suffering abuse, whether or not they meet the definition of 'adult at risk' has a responsibility to raise their concern with somebody: a relevant officer at the club / team / squad, , with the Police or with local Social Services.

### **8.4 Recognising the Different Types of Abuse of Adults at Risk**

The majority of adults, including 'adults at risk' live a life free from harm and abuse; however, some do suffer abuse. This is usually carried out by a family member, close family friend or person in a position of trust. Everyone involved in Rugby League is encouraged to be vigilant to such abuse. Any or all of the different types of abuse may be perpetrated as the result of deliberate intent, negligence or ignorance.

It can be difficult to distinguish poor practice from abuse, whether intentional or accidental.

It is not the responsibility of any individual involved in a Club to make judgements regarding whether or not abuse is taking place, however, all involved in Rugby League personnel have the responsibility to recognise and identify poor practice and potential abuse within a Rugby League setting, and act on this if they have concerns.

Physical abuse	<p>This may include hitting, slapping, shaking, throwing, pushing, kicking, biting, or otherwise causing physical harm to an individual. Physical harm may also be caused by the misuse of medication, inappropriate restraint, or inappropriate sanctions;</p> <p>Rugby League: examples would be incidents of violence such as the shoving and jostling of opponents, or where the nature and intensity of training or matches does not take account of an individual's needs, circumstances or health, to the point where they experience harm or distress.</p>
Emotional abuse	<p>This may include bullying, threats of harm or abandonment, deprivation of contact, humiliation, blaming, controlling, intimidation, coercion, harassment, verbal abuse, isolation or withdrawal from services or supportive networks;</p> <p>Rugby League: emotional abuse may occur if people are subjected to undue or repeated criticism, name-calling, bullying, humiliation, threats, blame, sarcasm, or any discriminatory abuse, or because of unrealistic pressure to perform to expectations that are beyond their potential.</p>
Sexual abuse	<p>This may involve forcing or enticing an individual to take part in sexual activities (directly or indirectly) to which the individual has not consented or could not consent or was pressured into consenting. This can include compelling 'adults at risk' to listen to or take part in talk of a sexual nature. Sexual abuse can occur through social media activity.</p> <p>Rugby League: examples would range from the sharing of inappropriate jokes to the discomfort of individuals, through to activities of a criminal nature.</p>
Financial abuse	<p>includes theft, fraud, exploitation, pressure in connection with wills, property or inheritance or financial transactions, or the misuse or misappropriation of property, possessions or benefits.</p> <p>Rugby League: an example in Rugby League would be an individual with a learning disability who is always expected to buy drinks for his 'mates', (see Mate Crime below) or exploited by being expected to host after match get-togethers at his/her house at his/her expense.</p>
'Mate Crime'	<p>'Mate Crime' is the phenomenon of people with disabilities being groomed by those who pretend to be their friends before being exploited by them financially, physically or sexually.</p> <p>Rugby League: an 'adult at risk' might be exploited by his or her peer group by being asked always to pay for after match drinks or always asked to do things on behalf of the group – which others are not e.g. pack the kit bags of other players after a game</p>
Social media, electronic communication and online abuse	<p>Abuse can occur through social media; this may be difficult to detect. It is important to remember that the type of abuse that can occur through social media always includes emotional and psychological abuse and can include sexual and financial abuse. Some examples of abuse that can occur through social media include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– unwanted sexual text messages (sexual abuse);</li> <li>– unwanted communication (emotional abuse);</li> <li>– inappropriate messaging; (emotional and sexual abuse);</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– requests for money (financial abuse);</li> <li>– harassment (emotional abuse);</li> <li>– intimidation (emotional abuse);</li> <li>– sexual coercion (sexual abuse);</li> <li>– stalking (emotional abuse); and</li> <li>– cyber-bullying (emotional abuse)</li> </ul>
Neglect and acts of omission	<p>includes ignoring medical or physical care needs, failure to provide access to appropriate health, social care or educational services, the withholding of necessities such as medication, adequate nutrition and heating.</p> <p>Rugby League: neglect may be either intentional or unintentional. It could include situations such as officials not giving players appropriate breaks on hot days or coaches not taking a player's injury seriously and asking them to continue playing.</p>
Discriminatory abuse	<p>includes abuse or ill-treatment based on a person's 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>Rugby League: In Rugby League this type of abuse is often difficult to detect and it may not always be clear as to who is the perpetrator. Discrimination can be based on age, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender reassignment, HIV status, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, religion or sexual orientation, all of which are 'protected characteristics' under the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>'Adults at risk' may also be seen to discriminate against each other, for example, using their disability as a joke with other disabled players. It is important to remember that the emotional impact of this type of joking or 'banter' on the other player is not always evident and may constitute emotional abuse. It also sets a level of expectation amongst others who may hear or see this behaviour, as being an acceptable way to address someone with a disability. This is not acceptable in Rugby League and needs to be addressed straight away. In all of the above circumstances the RFL Compliance Manager may issue or direct anyone else to issue a formal charge for a breach of the RFL Operational Rules.</p>
Institutional abuse	<p>This mainly refers to neglect and poor professional practice. This may take the form of isolated incidents of poor or unsatisfactory professional practice, through to pervasive ill treatment or gross misconduct. Repeated instances of poor care may be an indication of more serious problems.</p> <p>Rugby League: Institutional abuse could occur due to poor management or practice causing harm. Within Rugby League an example might be where management put the success of a team before, and without due care and attention for, the health and well-being of individual players.</p>
Other issues outside Rugby League	<p>Other issues outside Rugby League may be relevant. These may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– self-neglect or self-harm</li> <li>– hate crime</li> <li>– harassment and Intimidation</li> <li>– domestic abuse (including ...forced marriage and honour-based crime)</li> <li>– human trafficking</li> </ul>

- |  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– abuse by another ‘adult at risk’</li> <li>– abuse by children</li> <li>– exploitation by people who promote violence</li> <li>– modern slavery.</li> </ul> |
|--|---|

## 8.5 Frequently Asked Questions

### 8.5.1 Why don't ‘adults at risk’ always report abuse?

Often adults feel disempowered and unable to speak about abuse that may be occurring to them. This is often due to fear about what people will say or being upset at not being able to resolve the situation for themselves.

### 8.5.2 What are my responsibilities? When should I report a risk?

You are not required to make assessments of whether someone is at immediate risk of harm or is likely to suffer harm. This is something for statutory agencies such as Police and Social Care to assess.

Your responsibility is to report any concerns you may have and to report anything you may have witnessed. In an emergency you should report to statutory agencies immediately alternatively you can ask the RFL Safeguarding Manager to report on your behalf where this will not cause unacceptable delay.

If you fail to respond and report a concern, an ‘adult at risk’ may continue to suffer harm.

### 8.5.3 What should I do if I am worried about an adult in Rugby League who may be an ‘adult at risk’?

You should share your concerns with someone suitable. If your club, team or squad has a designated Club Welfare Officer, share your worries with them and agree a course of action. If there is nobody at the club you feel comfortable sharing your worries with, please contact the Safeguarding manager at the RFL: [safeguarding@rfl.co.uk](mailto:safeguarding@rfl.co.uk) or by telephoning 07540636516.

Somebody needs to talk to the person concerned, to let them know you are worried and ask them if they would like to talk to you or to someone else. (They have the right to say ‘no’).

### 8.5.4 What should I do if I am worried about the safety of an adult who may be an ‘adult at risk’?

Someone needs to speak with the adult you are worried about and let them know that you are worried and want to get some support for them. If you need advice about how to do this, contact the RFL Safeguarding Manager.

If you think anyone may be in danger, or that a crime may have been committed, do not hesitate to tell the police. If your team, club or squad has an identified Club Welfare Officer, share your concerns with them or the Club Welfare Officer where appropriate. If they do not, please contact the RFL’s lead officer for Safeguarding: email safeguarding email address for an initial discussion.

When reporting any information, it is important to do so with sensitivity for the people involved and the person who may have raised the concern.

**8.5.5 What should I do if they don't want me to tell anyone else or I don't have consent to report a problem?**

Please consider the following:

- is the adult placing themselves at further risk of harm?
- is someone else likely to get hurt?
- has a criminal offence occurred? This includes: theft or burglary of items, physical abuse, sexual abuse, financial abuse or harassment.
- is there suspicion that a crime has occurred?

If the answer to any of the questions above is 'yes' - then you can share without consent and need to share the information with the RFL Safeguarding Team and Police or Social Care. If in doubt you should always share the information with the RFL Safeguarding Team who will make the decision about whether it is appropriate to share the information with statutory services.

If you do not think they are at immediate risk of harm, you need to respect their right, as an adult, not to seek or accept help, unless you think they may not have the mental capacity to make this decision (see below).

Please remember: If somebody is in a position where they may be at risk of immediate harm, always contact the Police or Social Care.

**8.5.6 What should I do if I have a concern about the well-being of an adult who may be an 'adult at risk'?**

Somebody needs to talk to them. Difficulties can often be easily resolved at this level. If you do not feel confident to do this, please contact the Club Welfare Officer, if one is appointed, or the RFL Safeguarding Team who will be able to offer advice.

**8.5.7 What if I think the person needs support to make a safe choice?**

If you think the adult may not have the mental capacity to make appropriate decisions about their situation you should seek the advice of local Social Care services or discuss the matter with the RFL Safeguarding Team, or where appointed, the Club Welfare Officer.

**8.5.8 What about adults who are not deemed 'at risk'?**

Where an adult does not meet the definition of 'at risk', either because they do not have a health or social care need, or it does not prevent them protecting themselves, then the matter should be dealt with as a complaint, but with appropriate levels of support provided depending on the adult's particular needs. The RFL Safeguarding Team can advise on what sort of support may be appropriate.

**8.5.9 Are all disabled people ‘adults at risk’?**

No. Many disabled people live independently and do not need the help of others, nor do they need Community Care services. Just because an adult has a disability does not necessarily mean they are ‘at risk.’

**8.5.10 How thorough should the records I Create be, and what should they contain?**

Make a written record of relevant information as it happens. This should include the date, venue, your concerns, the date and times of any conversations, who was involved, and what was said. Record actions taken. If you feel your records would benefit from the input of others, then you should involve them where appropriate.

**8.6 Self-reporting of concerns**

If you are an Adult at Risk involved in Rugby League and you feel that you may have been abused, may still be being abused, or are otherwise unhappy about your treatment, it is important that you try to speak to someone. If the club, team or squad has a Club Welfare Officer, please talk to them.

If not, please talk to someone you trust, or the local Social Care Department, or the Police.

Make a written record of relevant information as it happens. This should include the date, venue, your concerns, the date and times of any conversations, who was involved, and what was said. Record actions taken. You may contact the RFL Safeguarding Team by emailing [safeguarding@rfl.co.uk](mailto:safeguarding@rfl.co.uk)

**8.7 RFL Case Management System**

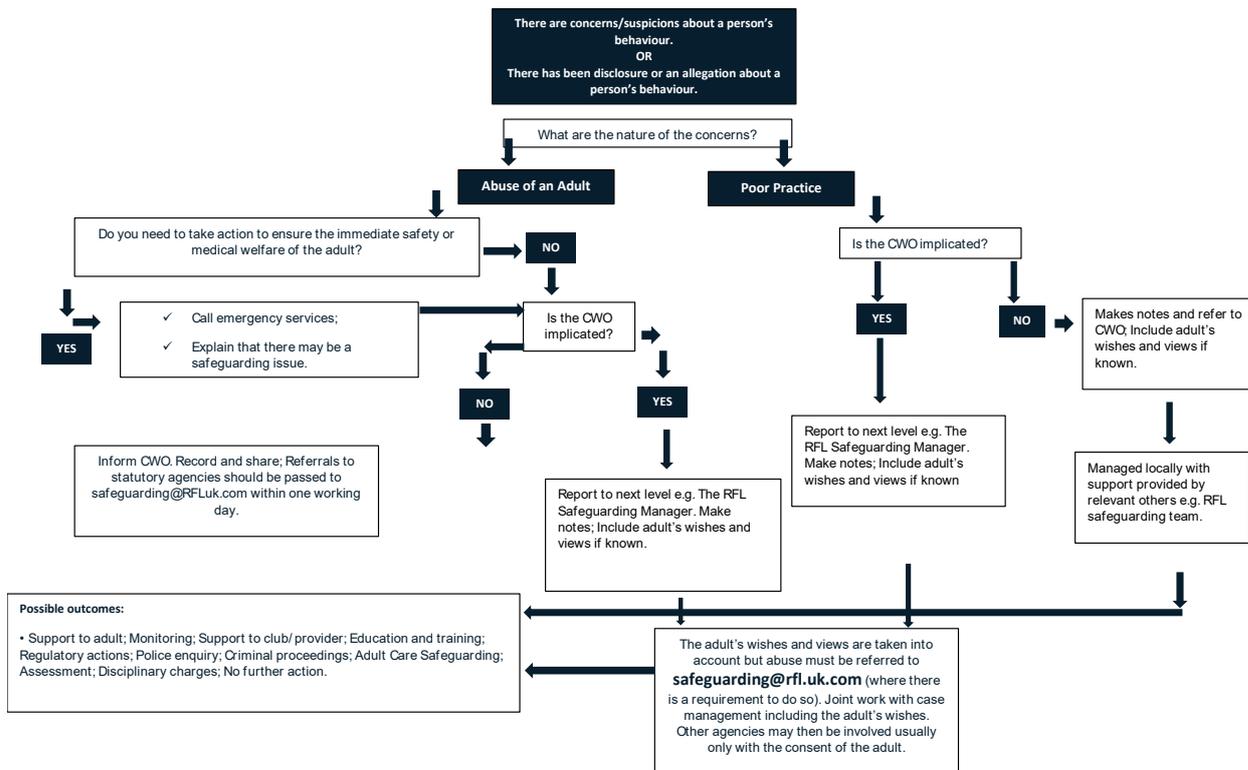
The RFL Safeguarding Case Management Group deals with cases involving Adults at Risk under the processes set out in the RFL Operational Rules Sections D1 and D4.

**9.0 Guidance and Legislation**

The practices and procedures within this policy are based on the principles contained within the UK and legislation and Government Guidance and have been developed to complement the Safeguarding Adults Boards policy and procedures, and take the following into consideration:

- The Care Act 2014
- The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012
- Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims (Amendment) Act 2012
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Mental Capacity Act 2005
- Sexual Offences Act 2003
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- The Data Protection Act 2018
- The General Data Protection Regulations.

**APPENDIX A - FLOWCHART FOR REPORTING**



*APPENDICES | SECTION F3*

# *RESPECT*

*SECTION F3 | RESPECT*



## **RESPECT**

### **GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

Rugby League prides itself on being a family game which is inclusive, uncompromising and passionate. The principles of RESPECT set out the obligations on all people engaged in the Sport in any capacity, to maintain the game's high standards.

The game will take positive action to ensure that high standards of behaviour are always maintained in Rugby League. For the avoidance of doubt this includes matches, training and at all other times, and includes comments or behaviour made in person or by any other means, including, but not limited to social media. RESPECT sets out the standards of behaviour which the game expects from the entire Rugby League family. Rugby League is passionate about, and prides itself, on its reputation as "The Family Game" and as such, will take responsibility to ensure that this reputation of the game is maintained and improved. The Game is an inclusive sport and is committed to the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion and will not tolerate any form of discrimination.

In order to uphold these values anybody involved in the game of Rugby League - players, parents/guardians, spectators, coaches, match officials, other volunteers and administrators of all ages – should:

- Encourage people to abide by the General Principles of this code.
- Be supportive of all people involved in the sport and challenge people who fail to abide by the General Principles.
- Discourage all instances of unsporting behaviour, foul or illegal play, or acts of violence, both on and off the field.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every person regardless of their age, colour, ethnic origin, disability (including physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual, mental illness or some chronic disease), gender identity, marital or civil partner status, political persuasion, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, socio economic background.
- Accept the moral and legal responsibility to implement procedures to provide a duty of care for children (under the age of 18) and Adults at Risk, safeguard their wellbeing and protect them from abuse and poor practice.
- Condemn the use of recreational and performance enhancing drugs and doping practices; their use endangers the health of players and is contrary to the concept of fair play.
- Be respectful on social media towards other people. This includes not posting offensive photos, using offensive language, or criticising fellow participants, including Match Officials.

Important – Every person who attends a Rugby League match does so with the permission and licence of the home club &/or league.

This code of conduct was drafted after consultation with children and young people. Below are some of the key principles they would like to see from others involved in the game:

- Keep training and games fun - winning is not the primary objective for young people playing the game; having fun is.
- Everyone makes mistakes. There should be no undue criticism of any player who makes a mistake – encouragement reaps more benefits.
- Coaches should not lose their temper.

- All adults should be role models in everything they do – do not swear, abuse officials, show unsporting behaviour, encourage foul play, enter the field of play or drink or smoke when around children and young people.
- Report any incidents of bad behaviour.

Any breach of this Code of Conduct is Off Field Misconduct.

## **PLAYER**

- Be a good sport. Respect all good play whether from your team or the opposition.
- Participate for your own enjoyment and benefit. Make every effort to develop your own abilities.
- Always respect the match official's decision.
- Make every effort to be consistent with the General Principles of this code of conduct
- Honour both the spirit and letter of the competition rules and live up to the highest standards of ethics and sportsmanship; avoid gamesmanship and respect the traditions of the game.
- Never engage in discriminatory or unacceptable conduct of any sort including swearing, obscene gestures, offensive remarks, taunting or other actions that are demeaning or disrespectful to other players, officials or supporters. Treat others as you would like to be treated.
- Care for and respect the facilities and equipment made available to you during training and competition.
- Safeguard your health; don't use any illegal or unhealthy substances.
- Recognise that many officials, coaches and match officials are volunteers who give up their time to provide their services. Treat them with the utmost respect. Remember, without them you do not have a game.

## **COACH**

- Be a good role model.
- Encourage all people engaged in the sport to abide by the General Principles and challenge people respectfully when they do not.
- Actively discourage foul play and/or unsporting behaviour by players.
- Seek to maximise the participation and enjoyment for all players regardless of ability;
- Avoid the tendency to over-use a talented player; treat all players as equals, regardless of their talent.
- Show concern and caution towards all sick and injured players. Follow the advice of a doctor, First Aider and/or physiotherapist to the letter when determining when an injured player is ready to recommence training or playing.
- Teach players that an honest effort and competing to the best of their ability is as important as victory.
- Encourage players to respect and accept the judgement of the Match Officials.
- Never engage in any conduct that could be deemed to be disrespectful of a Match Official.
- Never engage in public criticism of officials.
- Never engage in discriminatory or unacceptable conduct of any sort including swearing, obscene gestures, offensive remarks, taunting or other actions that are demeaning or disrespectful to other players, officials or supporters. Treat others as you would like to be treated.
- Maintain appropriate, professional relationships with players at all times.

- Make a personal commitment to maintain an accurate knowledge of the rules of the game and keep abreast of current coaching methods; maintain or improve your current accreditation level.
- Always consider the health, safety and welfare of the players.
- Teach young players to realise that there is a big gap between their level of play and the professional game; do not coach them as if they are professionals.
- Ensure that your coaching reflects the level of the competition being played; do not be a “win-at-all-costs” coach.
- As the coach, conduct yourself at all times and in all situations, in a manner, that demonstrates leadership, respect for the game of Rugby League and respect for all those that are involved in the game – the players, officials, the fans, the parents/guardians, the referees and the media.
- Abide by the Coach Code of Conduct.

### **MATCH OFFICIAL**

- Apply the laws of the game with complete impartiality.
- Prepare fully for a match, both physically and mentally.
- Conduct yourself both on and off the field with the utmost integrity.
- Set a good example by the way you dress, speak and act towards players, coaches, officials, parents and spectators.
- Place the safety and welfare of the players above all else.
- Be alert to minimise dangerous physical play, fair or foul, especially in junior matches.
- Respond swiftly to all instances of unsporting, foul or unfair play.
- Respond swiftly to any discriminatory or unacceptable language or behaviour
- Show concern and caution for sick and injured players.
- Be accountable for your actions.
- Report any incidents of Misconduct, accurately and impartially including any incident or action that could have prevented people from Enjoying the Game
- Avoid any situation, which may lead to a conflict of interest both on and off the field.

### **PARENT/GUARDIAN/SPECTATOR**

- Encourage all people involved in the sport to abide by the General Principles and challenge behaviours that do not do this.
- Do not force an unwilling child to participate in sport.
- Remember that children participate in Rugby League for their own enjoyment, not yours!
- Understand that sport is part of a total life experience, and the benefits of involvement go far beyond the final score of a game.
- Condemn all violent or illegal acts, whether they are by players, coaches, officials, parents/guardians or spectators.
- Respect the match official's decisions – don't complain or argue about decisions during or after a game.
- Behave! Unsporting or discriminatory language, harassment or aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated.
- Encourage players to play by the rules and to respect opposition players and officials.
- Never ridicule or scorn a player for making a mistake – respect their efforts.

- Participate in positive cheering that encourages all the players in the team; do not engage in any jeering that taunts or intimidates opponents, their fans or officials.
- At all times, follow the directions of the Ground Manager and/or other match day staff.
- Never arrive at a game under the influence of alcohol, never bring alcohol to a game, and only drink alcohol, if it is available at the ground, in the designated licensed area.

#### **VOLUNTEER AND ADMINSTRATOR**

- Always operate to the principle of “Friendship first – competition second”.
- Ensure that all operations are under the supervision of appropriately qualified staff who have been through the required recruitment and selection checks.
- Ensure that all staff understand and adhere to the Code of Conduct.
- Ensure that all equipment and facilities meet safety standards.
- Encourage all participants to remember that sport is enjoyed for its own sake- play down the importance of awards.

#### **CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE**

##### **After consultation, children and young people agree to:**

- Give 100% effort at all times.
- Encourage team mates who make mistakes.
- Not argue with the referee.
- Listen to the coach.
- Play as a team.
- Dress smartly.
- Welcome all new players, from all backgrounds, whether or not they have played before.
- Treat the other team with RESPECT.
- Attend all training sessions when possible.
- No bullying.

*APPENDICES | SECTION F4*

# *TACKLE IT*

*SECTION F4 | TACKLE IT*



**TACKLE IT!**

Tackle It! is a sport-wide action plan to make Rugby League a truly inclusive sport by tackling discrimination and breaking down any barriers to involvement.

Tackle It! has four strategic goals and, crucially, the specific and measurable actions that will be taken to achieve them. These are:

- 1 - Widen the reach and impact of Rugby League
- 2 - Diversify the game's talent pool
- 3 - Improve the culture of Rugby League
- 4 - Clarify processes, instil confidence in and encourage reporting of discrimination, and ensure that appropriate sanctions are in place.

The goals and actions support all the protected characteristics (in the Equality Act 2010): age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation. **Tackle It! has been informed by a number of parties including Players, Coaches, Volunteers and Administrators. A link to the plan is attached below and details of the responsibilities of all stakeholders to achieve its delivery are included within this.**

[Tackle It \(rugby-league.com\)](http://rugby-league.com)

**By way of summary the responsibilities for clubs include but are not limited to**

**Club responsibilities**

1. Adopting a Zero-Tolerance approach to discrimination, and Unacceptable Language and/or Behaviour including bullying or abuse based on an individual's protected characteristics as outlined above. Doing nothing is not an option.
2. Ensuring **all** club staff and volunteers understand why it is vital to the club and Rugby League that discrimination and abuse is challenged effectively. Utilise training to support this.
3. Ensuring club policies and procedures include the protected characteristics as outlined above and in the 2010 Equality Act and the club takes practical steps to ensure the club and match day experience is welcoming and inclusive for all and maintain a family friendly environment.
4. Responding consistently and appropriately to discrimination, abuse or bullying. It is important to consider all the relevant factors when deciding what action to take; the safety of those impacted, staff and other spectators is paramount. Sanctions and / or education may be the most appropriate actions depending on the context and gravity of the situation. Ultimately if abusive behaviour or language cannot be brought under control the game could be abandoned or perpetrators suspended from the club.
5. Celebrate, acknowledge and promote the diversity within the club. Identify and put in place actions to attract targeted underrepresented groups. Raise awareness of the diversity within the club through media channels by, for example, sharing examples of good practice across the sport, identify local ambassadors / role models, work with fan groups (where applicable) advertising roles across diverse media and including a link to Tackle IT! on the club website.

6. Maintain accurate records of any incidents and actions taken by the club and outcomes and report these to the RFL according to established procedures and protocols. Encourage reporting of any incidents of discrimination and unacceptable behaviour.

*APPENDICES | SECTION F5*

# *ANTI-DOPING RULES*

*SECTION F5 | ANTI-DOPING RULES*



---

## **ANTI-DOPING REGULATIONS**

In accordance with Operational Rule D3:1:1 (c), Persons Subject to the Operational Rules within the Community Game are bound by the Anti-Doping Regulations as set out within section D3 of the Operational Rules Tiers 1 – 3. These can be found on the RFL Website.

*APPENDICES | SECTION F6*

# *FIRST AID STANDARDS*

*SECTION F6 | FIRST AID STANDARDS*



---

**COMMUNITY GAME FIRST AID STANDARDS****INDEX****1 RESPONSIBILITY AND RISK ASSESSMENTS**

- 1.1 Duty of Care
- 1.2 Club's Responsibilities
- 1.3 Volunteers' Responsibilities
- 1.4 Risk Assessment
- 1.5 Risk Management

**2 FIRST AID PROVISION**

- 2.1 Level of First Aid Provision
- 2.2 Qualifications
- 2.3 Relevant Courses
- 2.4 First Aider Duties
- 2.5 Allied Health & Health Care Professionals
- 2.6 Insurance & Liability
- 2.7 DBS Disclosures

**3 FIRST AID EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- 3.1 Emergency Action Plan (EAP)
- 3.2 Medical Responsibilities Checklist

**4 FIRST AID EQUIPMENT & FACILITIES**

- 4.1 First Aid Kit
- 4.2 Automated External Defibrillators
- 4.3 First Aid Room
- 4.4 Ambulance Access
- 4.5 Communication
- 4.6 Directions

**5 RECORDS**

- 5.1 Recording Injuries
- 5.2 Information about Players
- 5.3 Reporting Death or Serious Injury
- 5.4 Witness Statements

**6 MANAGING HEAD INJURIES & IN RUGBY LEAGUE**

- 6.1 Red Flags Structural Brain Injuries
- 6.2 Concussion
  - 6.2.1 What is concussion?
  - 6.2.2 Roles and Responsibilities
  - 6.2.3 Recognise
  - 6.2.4 Remove
  - 6.2.5 Recovery
  - 6.2.6 Return
  - 6.2.7 Prevention
- 6.3 Reporting Concussion
- 6.4 Concerns about Concussion Management

**7 HYGIENE AND INFECTION CONTROL**

- 7.1 Infectious disease policy
- 7.2 Blood Borne Disease Guidelines – Matches & Training
- 7.3 Blood Borne Disease – Rules
  - 7.3.1 Wounds and Bleeding Injuries
  - 7.3.2 Blood Bin Procedure
  - 7.3.3 Contaminated Clothing and Dressing
  - 7.3.4 Use of Detergent/Bleach Sprays
- 7.4 Facilities and Equipment Guidelines
  - 7.4.1 Dressing Rooms
  - 7.4.2 First Aid Room
  - 7.4.3 First Aid Kit
  - 7.4.4 Drink Containers
  - 7.4.5 Team Kit Bag

**8 OTHER RELATED ISSUES**

- 8.1 Medical Screening
- 8.2 Players with an Existing Medical Condition
- 8.3 Cardiac Screening
- 8.4 Moving the Seriously Injured and Abandoning a Match
- 8.5 Protective & Other Equipment
  - 8.5.1 Head Guards
  - 8.5.2 Mouth Guards
  - 8.5.3 Electronic Tags & Medical Devices
  - 8.5.4 Sports Goggles
  - 8.5.5 Boxes
- 8.6 Weather
  - 8.6.1 Hot Weather Code
  - 8.6.2 Sunscreen
  - 8.6.3 Cold Weather Code
- 8.7 Mental Health

**9 ANTI-DOPING**

- 9.1 Anti-Doping Rules
- 9.2 Responsibilities of Volunteers in Rugby League
- 9.3 Prohibited Substances
  - 9.3.1 Steroids
  - 9.3.2 Stimulants
  - 9.3.3 Social Drugs
- 9.4 Supplements
- 9.5 Education

**10 APPENDICES**

- A1** Risk Assessment
- A2** First Aid Emergency Action Plan
- A3** Accident or Injury Report Form
- A4** Head Injury Form
- A5** Mental Health
- A6** Concussion Recognition Tool

**Disclaimer**

This document contains general medical information, but this does not constitute medical advice and should not be relied on. Nor is this guidance a substitute for medical advice from a qualified medical practitioner or healthcare provider. You must not rely on this guidance as an alternative to seeking medical advice from a qualified medical practitioner or healthcare provider. If you have any questions or concerns about a particular medical matter, you should immediately consult a qualified medical practitioner or healthcare provider. If you think you may be suffering from a medical condition, you should seek immediate medical attention. You should never delay seeking medical advice, disregard medical advice or discontinue medical treatment because of the information contained in this guidance.

## 1 RESPONSIBILITY FOR FIRST AID IN COMMUNITY CLUBS

Rugby League is a high-speed collision sport in which injuries to participants may occur. The Club and volunteers in roles of responsibility have a legal duty of care to ensure that appropriate health and safety and first aid standards are met. This includes adequately trained staff who can provide First Aid to players. In addition, clubs have legal obligations to ensure the safety of the public on their premises, which also extends to ensuring the safety of volunteers. The Community Game First Aid Standards focus solely on First Aid for playing, training and related matters.

### 1.1 What is “Duty of Care”?

The duty rests upon an individual or organisation to ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to ensure the safety of any person involved in any activity for which that individual or organisation is responsible.

### 1.2 What are the Club’s Responsibilities?

The Club (or other body) which runs club and team activities, including the organisation of matches (which in practice usually means the Management Committee), is responsible for ensuring that it conducts all of the following steps:

- Ensures that RFL policies relating to first aid provision, protocols and injuries are accessible to all and followed by all staff and volunteers at Clubs.
- Ensure a system is in place for ensuring that First Aiders (FA) have relevant qualifications and a system to record these qualifications, keep track of expiry dates and make sure that refresher training is undertaken.
- Ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of their Duty of Care to players
- Complete a risk assessment to determine the appropriate level of first aid provision before any rugby league activity.
- Establishes a First Aid Emergency Action Plan (EAP) to cover all possible medical emergencies (More details in Section 3)
- Ensures no staff or volunteer acts beyond the scope of their qualification
- Makes sure that recording and reporting of incidents take place
- Ensures that suitable first aid facilities and equipment are available, in date and good working order

### 1.3 Risk Assessment

During any activity rugby-related or otherwise, the number and type of first aid personnel and facilities should be based on a risk assessment. This process is no different from other risk assessments carried out for Health and Safety purposes. Guidance on this is provided in Appendix 1.

In assessing the need, the club/organiser should consider the following:

- Rugby and non-rugby hazards and risks
- The club’s and individual team’s history (at each level of competition) of injuries and accidents, including any relevant research.
- The number of people involved (players and spectators)
- The needs of players at away matches
- The nature (adult/child/additional needs) and distribution of the players, such as the size of the site or more than one site
- The remoteness and accessibility of the site from emergency medical services, including phone signal
- Use of shared facilities and first aid resources
- Facilities in use and any risk mitigations required to avoid increased risk of injury (e.g., corner flags, padding, 3G/4G pitches, etc.)
- Holiday and other absences of first aid trained personnel.
- Additional requirements for special groups, i.e., children and disabled players.

#### 1.4 Risk Management

Once the risk assessment is complete and the level of first aid cover has been decided, additional risk management measures should be considered:

- A person (or group of people) with the appropriate qualifications to take day-to-day responsibility for First Aid. We encourage having multiple people in this role to ensure coverage in case of absence.
- Emergency procedures should be developed as part of the First Aid Emergency Action Plan and be readily available and shared with all staff (for further guidance on emergency procedures, refer to Section 3).
- Emergency services contact details must be readily available.
- Ambulance access to the pitch/training ground must be maintained at all times.
- Establish contacts with the local NHS Ambulance Trust and Hospital Emergency Department. Maintain a good level of communication with them on the club's activities, especially festivals.
- Appropriate first aid facilities and equipment based on their risk assessment and the level of training of personnel.
- First aid equipment must be appropriately stored, maintained, and cleaned
- Annual training of any personnel who may be required to assist in emergencies.

## **2 FIRST AID PROVISION**

### **2.1 Minimum Level of First Aid Provision**

The level of First Aid provision at each club and event should be determined by the Risk Assessment process as set out above.

Please refer to the HSE link for information on the appropriate qualifications.  
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/geis3.htm>

However, as a minimum, the RFL states that each club should have:

- A FA qualified to the relevant Emergency First Aid Course standard on duty at every game.
- and the RFL recommends that each club should have a trained Mental Health First Aider (see Section 8.7)

All FA persons must be appropriately trained with a list of all qualified FAs registered on GameDay. NB It is the responsibility of each Club to check that each FA holds valid qualifications and find alternative cover if this cannot be evidenced.

### **2.2 Qualifications**

Clubs must see their certificate and make sure that they attend refresher courses as recommended by the awarding body. Holders of the Football Association or RFL Emergency First Aid Course should attend another course as a refresher every three years

Please remember that it is known for individuals to masquerade as an FA or Health Care Professional – clubs must always check.

### **2.3 Relevant Courses**

First Aiders must have completed the relevant course, which is HSE compliant, together with the completion of the concussion module on EtrainU.

The RFL sport-specific Emergency First Aid course includes a section on managing head injuries. People can book the course by visiting the activfirst website <https://www.activfirst.co.uk/product/rfl-firstaid/>

Alternative approved first aid courses include:

- FA Emergency First Aid in Football
- RFL Emergency First Aid
- HSE EFAW Course
- Equivalent Emergency First Aid course to the RFL Emergency First Aid course
- A First Aider must hold Safeguarding qualifications as set out within the RFL Safeguarding Policy. They must always adhere to the RFL Safeguarding Policy when delivering care to children and vulnerable adults.

### **2.4 First Aiders – Duties**

A First Aider holds a current First Aid certificate from a recognised awarding body (see above). A First Aider may be the person who writes the club's EAP.

During matches or training where relevant, the FA should introduce themselves to the team manager, venue officials, match officials, opposing team's FA, coaches and players and make them aware of where the FA will be stationed during the match, in an accessible location to the pitch, to allow immediate care during the match.

. They should:

- Operate within their scope of practice and in line with professional, sport and club regulations.

- Share the club EAP with the opposition FA for home games on arrival.
- Take charge when someone is injured or ill, including calling an ambulance if required.
- Provide emergency first aid to the injured or ill person until more expert help arrives.
- Understand, apply, and disseminate education to participants, volunteers and parents on the RFL Concussion Rules.
- Be present pitch side for the duration of the match and be situated on or near the team benches. Other than to treat a casualty, the FA should remain in situ until the match is complete.

Away from match day:

- Look after the first aid equipment, e.g., restocking the box and removing and replacing expired items.
- Report any concerns regarding FA provision, facilities or equipment to the Club Chair.
- Support in the development of club EAPs.

## 2.5 Allied Health Professional & Health Care Professional

Clubs may engage an Allied Health Professional (AHP) or Health Care Professional (HCP) in a voluntary or paid capacity to provide First Aid services in rugby league activities. Eligible professionals include Sports Therapists, Sports Rehabilitators, Paramedics, Nurses, Physiotherapists, Doctors, Osteopaths, and Chiropractors. These individuals must be:

1. **Certified** – They should be members of their relevant professional bodies.
2. **Insured** – They must have appropriate indemnity insurance, with confirmation that this coverage extends to providing First Aid in rugby league settings.
3. **Competent and Qualified** – They must hold a current First Aid qualification and only operate within the scope of their professional competencies.

For Allied Health Professionals and Health Care Professionals clubs should ask for their professional body registration and registration number (i.e., General Medical Council (GMC), The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), Society of Sports Therapists, British Association of Sport Rehabilitators (BASRaT) which allows the club to check that they are qualified online. Clubs should also check the Health Care Professional is covered by their own medical indemnity insurance.

## 2.6 Insurance and Liability

In a medical emergency, it is recommended to avoid any delay in lifesaving interventions that may arise on the grounds of concerns of 'being sued'. The Resuscitation Council UK said in August 2010 that *'Although there have been a few cases in the United Kingdom where a claim has been brought against a 'rescuer, there have been no reported cases where a victim has successfully sued someone who came to their aid in an emergency.'*

The RFL Public Liability policies extend to indemnify volunteers (except medical doctors, where their medical indemnity must cover any care provided). As such, volunteer FA will have protection under the policies. Reaffirming the club's responsibility to ensure adequate training and maintain equipment: *'third parties, ...that maintain resuscitation equipment or administer the system under which rescuers operate, could also be potentially held liable if training were below standard, or equipment had not been correctly maintained, leading directly to harm'.*

## 2.7 DBS Disclosures

FA (or Health Care Professionals) who will work with Junior or Youth teams must always be subject to an enhanced Disclosure & Barring Service check through the RFL. The Club Welfare Officer will be able to assist with this.

### 3 FIRST AID EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN AND RESPONSIBILITIES

#### 3.1 Emergency Action Plan (EAP)

All Rugby League clubs should have a clear EAP that outlines the actions and processes that need to be fulfilled in various medical emergencies, including home and away matches and training sessions for each team within the club. It should consider all those involved, including players, coaches, officials, first aiders, volunteers, parents and spectators. It should provide a simple, safe and systematic approach to ensure that any emergencies can be dealt with quickly and efficiently. Clear plans can make a significant difference to the outcome of an emergency. Once an EAP has been created, it must be communicated to all staff, volunteers and players within the organisation. It is best practice to share the EAP with your opponent on or ahead of the matchday.

The club must nominate who is responsible for developing, reviewing and sharing the EAP. A First Aider would be the usual choice to develop the EAP due to their training in medical emergencies. EAPs should be under annual review as a minimum review, and more frequently if there are any operational or venue changes. The responsible person must ensure they are familiar with the club's risk assessments to develop on this; the playing and training venues and other areas used at the club; and RFL policy and First Aid Standards.

The EAP must include:

##### People

- Who will be part of the emergency team for matches and training for each team within the club, and potential reserves should they not be available to attend a match?
- Roles and responsibilities should be allocated within their competencies.
- Who and how will emergency services be contacted
- Who will meet and guide emergency services on arrival
- Who will contact players' next of kin
- Who will travel with a player if they need to attend the hospital
- How will a player attend the hospital if an ambulance is not needed
- The contact details of all FA in the club.
- Who is the club safeguarding lead

##### Facility

- Address and postcode of call club facilities that may be used. It is best practice to include [what3words](#) for accurate locations.
- Ambulance access points.
- Plan for the opening of gates and doors for all routes where access may be needed.
- Location of first aid room.

##### Local Services

- Nearest trauma A&E centre, minor injuries unit.

##### Equipment

- Location of first aid equipment and defibrillator (if available)
- How will equipment be checked for presence, working order, restocking and valid dates
- Where are the nearest accessible phones
- Where is the medical information and next of kin details for players stored
- Easily accessible information cards for CPR step-by-step guidance for children and adults, choking, and other emergency treatments as an aide memoire

<https://www.resus.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-04/Adult%20Basic%20Life%20Support%20Algorithm%202021.pdf>

<https://www.resus.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-04/Adult%20Choking%20Algorithm%202021.pdf>

<https://www.resus.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-01/Paediatric%20Out%20of%20Hospital%20Basic%20Life%20Support%20Algorithm%202021%20Jan%202024%20V1.1.pdf>

<https://www.resus.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-04/Paediatric%20Choking%20Algorithm%202021.pdf>

- Location and distribution of EAPs procedures
- Useful patient information leaflets for common medical problems, such as concussion.

It is also recommended to develop notices referencing key information from the EAP that can be displayed in public places such as entrances, changing rooms and notice boards for ease of reference. It should also be provided to volunteers, visiting teams and FA and stored in first aid kits. For example, the location of equipment

An example of an Emergency Action Plan is shown in Appendix 2.

### 3.2 Medical Responsibilities Checklist

The following is a list of the club and FA responsibilities which must be covered by the EAP or other procedures:

- Ensure all FA understand their responsibilities and are aware of how the club wishes them to behave on match days
- Maintaining the accident book and looking after completed accident reports
- Ensuring Club signage in relation to First Aid at the Club is visible to those unfamiliar with the site
- Distributing the EAP document to visiting teams
- Requesting the same information from visiting teams before playing away matches, and allocating a room for first aid treatment on match days
- Distribution of relevant processes and protocols from the RFL to the wider FA team from time to time
- Assess who will cover the FA role in the event of treatment being given to another player, with consideration to monitoring play
- Understanding that team FA will work together with opposition FA's and volunteers to assist in the treatment of a player, including listening to observations reported between teams.
- Ensuring FA are aware not to act beyond their level of qualification and competence.
- Ensuring enough qualified FA role is always allocated for training days, home matches and away matches
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of the FA and make sure that they have the full support of the club for the decisions that they choose to make.
- Ensuring that all FA:
  - o have attended a relevant first aid training course
  - o are familiar with the RFL First Aid Standards, including Concussion Rules and Protocols
  - o are familiar with the contents of the first aid kits
  - o always have their first aid kit with them when acting as an FA and have checked that it is fully stocked
  - o can administer appropriate treatments to ill or injured casualties both on-pitch and off-pitch
  - o understand that they have the authority to stop play if they deem it necessary
  - o understand what actions need to be completed after an incident has taken place
  - o wear a tabard to clearly identify themselves as the FA
  - o introduce themselves to visiting teams (including Match Officials) as the duty FA and make sure that their contact number is entered into the necessary person's phone
  - o will hold the contact details of next of kin, provided and stored in a GDPR compliant manner

**NB** Only First Aiders who are trained and qualified Health Care Professionals with appropriate indemnity should assess and manage injuries to players. This includes strapping. If there is no HCP available, either the parents or child should apply strapping before arrival at the game and only if considered absolutely necessary. Freeze spray is only to be used by a HCP – if a player cannot participate without the use of this, they should not participate.

## 4 FIRST AID EQUIPMENT & FACILITIES

### 4.1 First Aid Kit

A fully equipped first aid kit should be available for each FA. Kits should be clearly labelled and easily accessible. There should be at least one first aid kit for each team training and/or playing at any one time. Please note FA should only use those parts of a first aid kit for which they have received training.

Example minimum content for first aid box:

- Minimum of 4 pairs of latex-free (nitrile) disposable gloves
- Hand sanitiser/alcohol gel
- Sterile, saline cleansing wipes
- Pocket mask (disposable resuscitation aid)
- Scissors
- Minimum of 5 sterile water sachets/pods
- Gauze pads/swabs
- Assorted adhesive sterile dressings and plasters
- Assorted non-adhesive sterile dressings
- Minimum of 2 sterile eye pads
- Adhesive dressing tape (to hold dressings in place or to hold the loose end of bandages)
- Minimum of 6 crêpe bandages in assorted sizes
- Minimum of 4 triangular bandages
- Yellow disposable clinical waste bags
- Material and foil blankets
- Umbrella
- Pen/notebook
- Torch / Flashlight
- EAP and medical emergency aide memoir

Under no circumstances should over-the-counter or prescription drugs be administered by FA or kept in the first aid box.

### 4.2 Automated External Defibrillator (AED)

An Automated External Defibrillator (AED) can save lives. Clubs are strongly recommended to have one on site, ideally pitch side during matches and training. It should be checked regularly as part of the EAP to ensure it is in good working order and all elements including the battery and pads are in date. Where a club has access to an AED we recommend key personnel including FA know where it is stored and feel comfortable on how to use it. However, the UK Resuscitation Council state that an AED can be used safely and effectively without previous training and its use should not be restricted to trained rescuers. Training should however be encouraged to help improve the effectiveness of their use such as to minimise the time to shock and correct pad placement.

Clubs can get help in purchasing an AED through the Danny Jones Defib Fund <https://www.dannyjonesdefibfund.co.uk/>

**4.3 First Aid Room**

It is best practice for clubs to have a designated first aid room. This should be well signed. A first aid room should have a treatment bed for assessing injured or unwell persons, good lighting, hand washing facilities, washable surfaces and adequate heating and ventilation. The first aid room must be cleaned after use.

**4.4 Ambulance Access**

Wherever possible, training and matches should take place in areas which have vehicular access so that an ambulance can drive onto the playing area. Where this is not possible, it is important to work out how emergency services will be able to reach seriously injured players on the pitch and to make sure that everyone is aware of the route. Access plans should be incorporated into the EAP and included in notices at the Club.

**4.5 Communication**

It is important that the FA can call for an ambulance or other assistance immediately, so an FA should have a fully charged mobile phone and check that there is a signal before matches and training. If the venue does not have mobile phone reception, an alternative means of emergency communication must be accounted for, such as a landline in the club buildings.

**4.6 Directions**

It is vital that FA have details of the location of all venues for club activity, including buildings and pitches. This should include, as a minimum, postcode and directions to the exact facility. It is best practice to use what3words for accurate location (<https://what3words.com/>). This information must be readily available to be provided to the ambulance service.

Where grounds have more than one access point, it is essential that the correct information is given to the emergency services, and it is recommended to have a volunteer at the entrance to the ground to direct any emergency service vehicles on arrival.

## 5 RECORDS

### 5.1 Recording Injuries

It is Best Practice for the Club's FA to record all injuries they deal with and medical attention they provide. As a minimum should record:

- Date, time and place of incident
- Name (and age if under 18) of the injured or ill person
- Details of the injury – what happened, and the first aid given
- What happened to the person immediately after the incident, e.g. continued playing, went to the hospital, or went home with
- If under 18 names of the parent or guardian responsible for the young person
- Name & signature
- It is recommended that records be kept for 3 years.

Please note that the reporting of a concussion is contained within RFL Head Injury Form in Appendix 8.

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) requires individuals who control or manage premises to report and record certain injuries. Further information can be found [HERE](#) on the HSE website. Use of the accident book required under the Health & Safety at Work Regulations is recommended. Alternatively, find a template provided by the RFL in Appendix 3 for recording incidents. This information should be provided to the Club Management Committee regularly to inform its risk assessment and risk management processes.

### 5.2 Information about Players

All players should complete a medical and consent to participation form. For those under 18 this should be signed by their parent or legal guardian and include the right to act *in loco parentis* in the event of an incident where parents of those players who are under 18 are not present or cannot be contacted in time. This should seek to gain confirmation that there are no known reasons the player would be unsafe to participate in rugby related activity, emergency contact details. Where a player has a medical condition that may impact rugby related activity it is good practice to ask for any further information. This may include names and location of medications e.g., inhalers and when they might be needed, or a letter from a medical practitioner confirming it is safe to participate where relevant. For some medical conditions it may be appropriate to have a letter from the GP or specialist on record, confirming safe participation and any special considerations.

Medical and Consent Form - An example template can be found [HERE](#)

### 5.3 Reporting Death or Serious Injury

When a player has died or has been admitted to hospital for a serious medical condition or injury sustained during a rugby-related activity the RFL should be notified immediately using the emergency number provided below so adequate support can be provided. This does not apply if a person is simply attending A&E and they are subsequently discharged.

Head of Delivery Community Game Competitions - Kelly Barrett 07739 819750

Please provide the following information:

Name of the player  
Contact details for player / next of kin.  
Injury/condition and prognosis.

The RFL will:

- Inform the Benevolent Fund who will provide moral and financial support to the player and their family
- Handle any enquiries from the media

- Inform the RFL's insurance brokers where relevant

#### **5.4 Witness statements.**

Following incidents where a compliance issue or potential insurance or personal injury claim may arise, clubs are advised to retain on file witness statements for 7 years, in line with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA). These statements must confine themselves to the facts and not include opinion or hearsay or apportion or infer blame. They must be signed and dated by the person making them, or the responsible parent/guardian for those under 18s.

## 6 MANAGING HEAD INJURIES & CONCUSSION IN RUGBY LEAGUE

All head injuries are serious and potentially life-threatening. If a head injury is not treated properly this may lead to persistent symptoms, time from work or school, and in some cases can be fatal. All head injuries are not concussion and traumatic injuries to the brain can be divided crudely into the following categories:

- Structural brain injuries- for example brain tissue damage and bleeding within the skull.
- Concussion -impairment in the way the brain acts and functions on a chemical level, but no identifiable structural damage on hospital brain scans

**Everyone in the game has a responsibility to understand what can cause head injuries and how they should be managed safely.**

It is mandated for every FA working in rugby league to undertake the Concussion in Sport Module on EtrainU alongside their First Aid HSE qualification.

The FA must be aware of the signs and symptoms of and effective management of potential concussion and structural brain injuries. At all levels in all sports, if an individual is suspected of having a concussion, they must be immediately removed from play. Caution must be applied where any sign or symptom may be present, and players must be removed and remain off the field of play.

### IF IN DOUBT SIT THEM OUT!

It is not the role or responsibility or role of any volunteer, coach, or FA to diagnose concussion. There is no 'Head Injury Assessment' process in the community game. It is the roles of club associated staff to **recognise possible** signs and symptoms of concussion and brain injuries and to act in an appropriate and safe manner by prioritising removal from the field and appropriate medical assessment by a trained professional.

#### 6.1 Red Flags of Structural Brain Injuries

Any player who suffers head injury may develop a structural traumatic injury to the brain, this includes bleeding, swelling and damage to brain tissue. These injuries can be life altering or fatal.

It can be challenging to tell the difference between concussion and structural brain injury as many of the signs and symptoms overlap, which is another reason it is very important that all players with possible signs of injury to the brain seek medical attention as outlined below.

If a player has one or more of the following **red flag** signs or symptoms after a head injury or they should have an urgent medical assessment in a hospital Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department using emergency ambulance (999) transfer if necessary:

They must be accompanied by a responsible adult, and they should not personally drive under any circumstances.

- Previous history of brain surgery or bleeding disorder
- Current 'blood-thinning' therapy
- Current drug or alcohol intoxication

Symptoms may include the following.

- Any loss of consciousness because of the injury
- Deteriorating consciousness- becoming more drowsy
- Develops slow or noisy breathing
- Problems with memory, before or after the event.
- Confusion following the injury
- Unusual behaviour such as restlessness, irritability, aggression
- Any changes in neurological function
  - o Difficulty with understanding speaking, writing, reading
  - o Decreased sensation in part of the body
  - o Weakness in part of the body

- 
- Poor balance or coordination
  - Double or blurry vision
  - Seizure/convulsion or limb twitching or lying rigid/ motionless due to muscle spasm
  - Severe or increasing headache
  - Repeated vomiting
  - Severe neck pain
  - Suspicion of a skull fracture: cut, bruise, swelling, depression, severe pain
  - Clear runny fluid coming out of ears or nose after injury
  - Deafness in one or both ears after injury
  - Symmetrical bleeding around both eyes, or behind the ear

**Anyone with any of the above symptoms must only return to exercise and sporting activity under the direction of a medical doctor.**

## **6.2 Concussion**

### **6.2.1 What is Concussion?**

Concussion is an injury to the brain resulting in a temporary disturbance to brain function- it affects the way a person thinks, feels and remembers. It may be caused either by an impact to the head, which may be a direct (e.g., head clash, high tackle or head to ground) or indirect transfer of force to the head (such as to the neck or elsewhere on the body e.g., late hit on the passer's body which they weren't expecting causing a whiplash like effect). This causes the brain to be shaken inside the skull.

Signs and symptoms of a concussion can be apparent immediately, or they can take some time to develop over the next few days, called an evolving injury. Not all concussions are the same for each person, or each concussion for the same person. Being knocked out (loss of consciousness) happens in less than 1 in 10 concussions. FA and coaches must be aware of the potential for a delayed onset of concussion, and continue to consider this during training and/or matches even if an obvious mechanism isn't present, but symptoms are suggestive of possible concussion.

**There is no reliable test for concussion and there is no head injury assessment process in the community game. If any possible signs/symptoms of concussion are seen or reported, safety is paramount, and the player MUST be removed from all activity immediately.** Continuing to play when concussed while the brain isn't functioning normally can lead to poor decision making, which puts the player, teammates and opponent at risk of increased injury from reckless actions, or slow reaction times, as well as further injury.

A history of previous concussion may make someone more likely to have another concussion that takes longer to recover. Repetitive head injuries may result in changes to a player's mental health and longer-term functional impairment of the brain. Players experiencing a second concussion within a short time frame of a first could cause rapid swelling of the brain, 'Second Impact Syndrome'- this can result in death or severe brain damage. Just a single concussion can make someone more likely to have another sports-related injury for a year after.

Concussion is more serious in children and young people, where the brain is still developing. Children are more susceptible to having concussion, having complicated returns from concussion and rare neurological complications.

### **6.2.2 Roles and responsibilities**

It is encouraged that both Team's first aid staff work together should possible signs of concussion be observed for either team, asking questions on what they have observed and share information for the wellbeing of all participants. If there is concern regarding a player and suspected concussion, this must be raised with the First Aider or Coach of the opposing side and Match Official(s).

### First Aiders, Coaches, Teachers and Volunteers

It is encouraged that both teams' first aid staff work together, should potential signs of concussion be observed for either team, asking questions on what they have observed and sharing information for the well-being of all participants. If there is concern regarding a player and a suspected concussion, this must be raised with the First Aider or Coach of the opposing side and the Match Official(s).

- All must be aware of the signs and symptoms of a potential concussion
- **Remove** the player from training or a match **immediately** if there are **possible** signs of concussion- Be cautious in your approach, you do not need to be sure there is a concussion, **if in doubt, sit them out.**
- Safely remove any individual from the field of play if you see any possible signs of concussion, or if they report any possible symptoms.
- Ensure no one returns to activity or play even if they say that their symptoms have resolved, or they or their parents disagree with your decision.
- Listen to those around you and act on reliable information.
- Do not act beyond the scope of your qualification.
- Monitor the player or assign a responsible adult to monitor the individual once the player is removed until they are with their nominated responsible adult.
- If the player is under 18 years old, contact the parent/guardian to inform them of the possible concussion.
- Provide written information regarding concussion, its management and red flags to watch out for. Such as a copy of the RFL Head Injury advice sheet and a passport provided by the Club
- Arrange for the player to get home safely. They should not drive themselves home or ride a bike.
- Arrange for a responsible adult to supervise the player over the next 24-48 hours.
- Advise anyone with a suspected concussion to be assessed by an appropriate healthcare professional, such as 111 or other NHS services.
- Ensure any relevant injury report form is completed and stored by the club/school/organisation.
- Ensure the player follows the Graduated Return to Activity and Play unless a health care professional has advised they are not concussed.
- Do not apply any pressure to the player or parent to return sooner than is appropriate, either within the Graduated Return to Activity and Play timelines or as symptoms dictate.

### Match Officials

- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of a potential concussion.
- You stop the match if you witness possible signs of concussion, or a player reports them to you
- Inform the First Aider of your observations, including any mechanism which may have caused the suspected concussion and anything you have seen or heard that raised your concern.
- If you are clear and confident that you have observed a **suspected** concussion, ask for the Player to be removed from the field and do not allow play to continue should the player not leave the field or attempt to return.
- Report the matter on your Match Report, upload HeadCam footage if available.

### Parents & Carers

- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of a potential concussion.
- Arrange for a responsible adult to supervise the player over the next 24-48 hours to monitor for worsening signs and symptoms of head injury. Do not leave your child alone for the first 24 hours.
- Ensure anyone with a suspected concussion is assessed by an appropriate healthcare professional, such as 111 or other NHS services. Ensuring full details of the incident are relayed to the medical professional.
- Encourage initial rest/sleep as needed and limit smartphone/ computer and screen use for the first 24-48 hours.

- Inform school/work/other sports clubs of the suspected concussion to avoid activity that would impair recovery and risk worse injury.
- Follow a graduated return to activity (education/work) as the priority, and alongside this, but not before a return to sport.

### Players

- Be aware of the signs and symptoms of a potential concussion.
- During training and matches always watch out for teammates and encourage them to be honest and report any concussion symptoms.
- If you think another player may have signs or symptoms of possible concussion, report this to the coach, match official or FA.

### Anyone with a suspected concussion should:

- Stop playing/training immediately if you experience any possible symptoms of concussion.
- Be honest with how they feel and report any symptoms of a possible concussion immediately to your coach, medic and/or parent.
- Be aware that delays in reporting symptoms of concussion are associated with a risk of delayed or incomplete recovery of the brain.
- Be aware that longer recovery can lead to a delayed return to school and work, which could have financial or future consequences.
- Get assessed by an appropriate Healthcare Professional within 24 hours of the incident – even if the symptoms may have resolved. Such as calling 111, or other NHS service.
- Inform your school/work/sports clubs of your concussion
- Rest & sleep as needed for the first 24-48 hours – this is good for recovery. Easy activities of daily living and walking are also acceptable.
- Minimise smartphone, screen and computer use for at least the first 48 hours. Limiting screentime has been shown to improve recovery
- Avoid stressful situations, as they can make symptoms worse
- Follow the graduated return to activity (education/work) and sport programme.
- If you have continuing symptoms, do not return to training or sport activities until evaluated by an appropriate Healthcare Professional.

### Anyone with a suspected concussion should not:

- Be left alone in the first 24 hours.
- Consume alcohol in the first 24 hours or if symptoms persist.
- Drive a motor vehicle within the first 24 hours. Commercial drivers (HGV etc.) should seek review by an appropriate Healthcare Professional before driving
- Consume alcohol in the first 24 hours and/or if symptoms persist, as this can worsen any underlying unidentified structural brain or concussion.
- Take medication which may mask or minimise the symptoms of concussion unless directed to do so by a Health Care Professional
- Return to play that day or in timeframes sooner than following the Graduated Return to Activity and Sport process

## 6.2.3 Recognising Concussion

Concussion is a challenging medical condition to diagnose; formally diagnosing concussion should be left to trained medical staff only - this is not the role of the responsibility of the first aider or coach.

Not every concussion is easy to see. Less than 1 in 10 concussions result in a person losing consciousness. Symptoms should not be ignored as they may be the only indication of injury to the brain.

Concussions can affect people in 4 main ways: physical, mental processing, mood and sleep.

### Signs of concussion – What you see

Any one or more of the following visible clues can indicate a concussion:

- Loss of consciousness or responsiveness
- Lying motionless on ground/slow to get up
- Unsteady on feet/balance problems or falling over/ incoordination
- Dazed, blank or vacant look
- Slow to respond to questions
- Confused/not aware of plays or events
- Grabbing/clutching of head
- An impact seizure/convulsion
- Tonic posturing – lying rigid/ motionless due to muscle spasm (may appear to be unconscious)
- More emotional/irritable than normal for that person
- Vomiting

### Symptoms of concussion at or shortly after injury

#### What you might be told and what you should ask about

Presence of any one or more of the following signs & symptoms may suggest a concussion:

- Disoriented (not aware of their surroundings e.g. opponent, period, score)
- Headache
- Dizziness/feeling off-balance
- Mental clouding, confusion or feeling slowed down
- Drowsiness/feeling like 'in a fog'/ difficulty concentrating
- Visual problems
- Nausea
- Fatigue
- 'Pressure in head'
- Sensitivity to light or sound
- More emotional
- Don't feel right
- Concerns expressed by the parent, official, spectators about a player

FA must always consider the possibility of structural brain injuries and concussion as sometimes they can look the same initially. This is why monitoring of players is important for the initial 24-48 hours. Coaches and/or FA may also use the [Concussion Recognition Tool 6 \(CRT6\)](#) to help support them in identifying potential concussion.

#### 6.2.4 Remove

Where a player is observed to have a mechanism consistent with possible concussion, such as a head impact or indirect contact with a big whiplash effect, the player must be checked and continued to be monitored to make sure they aren't feeling any symptoms even if none were seen.

If any possible signs and/or symptoms are observed, the player must be removed from the field immediately and must not return to activity unless cleared by a health care professional such as 111. Importantly, if a player reports or demonstrates any of the features above related to concussion but a clear head impact has not been seen, the player must be removed from play for their own protection as a precaution, this would be enough to be

considered doubtful to sit them out. It is very possible the injury event can be missed in a dynamic game of rugby league, and we must not assume to have seen everything.

### IF IN DOUBT SIT THEM OUT!

Sometimes, head injuries and neck injuries can occur together. If there is a neck injury suspected or the player doesn't have a normal level of consciousness, they should only be moved by trained health care professionals. This may mean waiting in the place where the injury occurred for an ambulance.

All players who have been suspected of having experienced a concussion must seek medical support from 111 or another NHS service within 24 hours of injury. This is to provide a diagnosis of concussion, given the best and safest medical advice by a trained professional, and guided through an appropriate recovery. It is possible that following this assessment, a person may be told they do not have a concussion. **If a First Aider, Coach, Club Welfare Officer or any other volunteer has confidently observed signs or symptoms of suspected concussion, despite the NHS service saying a concussion wasn't present, the Club should take a safe and cautious approach to instruct the player through full Graduated Return to Activity and Sport. If there was no reason to doubt the decision by the NHS assessment, then return to sport can be permitted without a Graduated process.**

#### 6.2.5 Recovery

Generally, a short period of relative rest (24–48 hours) followed by a gradual stepwise return to normal life and then subsequently sport is the cornerstone of concussion management. In the first 24–48 hours, it is ok to perform mental activities like reading, and activities of daily living as well as walking.

After initial assessment and confirmation of concussion by calling 111 or other NHS service, the graduated return to activity (education/work) and sport programme typically can be self-managed, although severe or prolonged symptoms (over 28 days) should be under the supervision of an appropriate Healthcare Professional and management will depend on the severity of symptoms and the types of symptoms and difficulties that are present. This varies from person to person and is not a 'one size fits all' process.

After a 24–48-hour period of relative rest, a staged return to normal life (education/work) and sport at a rate that does not exacerbate existing symptoms, more than mildly, or produce new symptoms is the main aim. **This is before return to sport is contemplated.** It is acceptable to allow students to return to school or work activities, and subsequently school or work part-time (e.g. half-days or with scheduled breaks), even if symptoms are still present, if symptoms are not severe or significantly worsened. The final stage of return to school or work activity is when the individual is back to full preinjury mental activity, and this should occur before return to unrestricted sport is contemplated.

Similar to the return to education/work progression, the return to sport progression can occur at a rate that does not, more than mildly, exacerbate existing symptoms or produce new symptoms. It is acceptable to begin light aerobic activity (e.g. walking, light jogging, riding a stationary bike etc.), even if symptoms are still present, provided they are stable and are not getting worse and the activity is stopped for more than mild symptom exacerbation. Symptom exacerbations are typically brief (several minutes to a few hours) and the activity can be resumed once the symptom exacerbation has subsided. Although symptoms may resolve quickly following a concussion, it takes longer for the brain to recover. The aim is to rehabilitate the person and give the brain time to recover.

#### Concussion Recovery Time

Concussion recovery time varies. Most symptoms of a concussion resolve by two to four weeks, but some can take longer. Everyone is unique in their recovery duration which is why completion of a graduated return to activity (education/work) and sport programme is important to reduce the risks of a slow recovery, further brain injury, and longer-term problems.

Children and adolescents may take longer to recover than adults. If symptoms persist for more than 28 days, individuals need to be assessed by an appropriate Healthcare Professional – typically their GP.

Please note that headaches can persist for several months or more, well after the acute injury from the concussion has resolved. They may resemble migraine and may be associated with nausea and sensitivity to light and/or sound. Sometimes they are from a neck injury. Persisting symptoms are not usually due to a more severe brain injury and, if the headache is not increased by mental or physical activity and the frequency and intensity is managed adequately, it should not preclude an individual from returning to school, work and physical activity.

There must be no pressure applied to players, parents, coaches or other volunteers to return a player early from a concussion and/or advise them to mask symptoms. This is serious misconduct.

The RFL recommends where a player has suffered two concussions within a 12-month period that the player is referred to a specialist prior to returned to contact sports participation.

## **6.2.6 Return**

**The graduated return to activity (education/work) and sport programme is a cross sport rehabilitation program developed by the [Sport Recreation Alliance \(2024\)](#)**

### **Graduated Return to Activity (GRAS): education, work and sport**

Where a Community Player is on a Scholarship, Academy or Dual Registration program their Return to Sport must be managed by their Professional Club who have professionals experienced in sports concussion management who take responsibility for an individualised, structured, multimodal, multidisciplinary management plan.. Athletes who are managed in such Enhanced Care pathways may be formally cleared for an earlier return to competition only by their Professional Club.

The graduated return to activity (education/work) and sport programme is designed to safely allow a return to education, work and sport after concussion for the overwhelming majority of people who will not benefit from individualised management of their recovery.

Generally, a short period of relative rest (first 24-48 hours) followed by a gradual stepwise return to normal life (education, work, low-level exercise), then subsequently to sport is safe and effective.

Progression through the stages below is dependent upon the activity not more than mildly exacerbating symptoms. Medical advice from the NHS via 111 should be sought if symptoms deteriorate or do not improve by 14 days after the injury. Those with symptoms after 28 days should seek medical advice via their GP.

Participating in light physical activity is beneficial and has been shown to have a positive effect on recovery after the initial period of relative rest. The focus should be on returning to normal daily activities of education and work in advance of unrestricted sporting activities.

If symptoms continue beyond 28 days remain out of sport and seek medical advice from a GP.

The instructions and timelines apply to all Rugby League Players and are not age-specific. Extra care and caution must be taken with players with physical disabilities.

**GRAS Tables**

The instructions and timelines apply to all Rugby League Players and are not age-specific. Extra care and caution must be taken with players with physical or cognitive impairment/ disabilities.

**Please note that if a First Aider, Coach, CWO or any other volunteer has observed signs or symptoms of a suspected concussion, despite the information from an HCP/111, the Club should enforce a cautious approach and instruct the player to follow a full GRAS for the well-being of the player.**

None of the timelines listed is a target/maximum; all recoveries must be led by the individual's symptoms. The timelines are, however, a minimum, and players must not progress through faster than the timeframes at each stage set out.

RETURN TO SPORT	Day zero	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
	Day of injury	Rest	Increase exercise	Light aerobic exercise	Non-Contact training	Contact training	Return to competition
<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Day zero</b>	<b>Days 1 – 2 following injury minimum</b>	<b>Day 3 – Day 7</b> <b>Between Stages 2 – 3 - Each stage must take a minimum of 24 hours.</b> <b>The player cannot progress to Stage 4 before day 8.</b>		<b>Day 8 – 14 minimum</b>	<b>Day 15 – 21 minimum (Must be symptom-free for 14 days before returning to full contact training)</b>	<b>Day 21 minimum (remember the day of injury is day 0)</b>
<b>REMEMBER these timeframes are a minimum and not a target for the fastest return to play.</b>							
<b>Permitted exercise</b>	None – recognise and remove from play	Sleep and rest.  Gentle everyday activity (such as walking) for no more than 15 minutes at a time.  Minimise screen time	Increase activities such as short walks  Chores at home	Light jog  Swimming  Stationary cycling  No rugby, resistance training, weightlifting, jumping or hard running.	Limited body and head movement . No activity where increased risk of head impacts or head injury  Intensity of exercise and resistance training can be increased  Simple movement activities (e.g. kicking, running drills)  Limited body and head movement  Increase drills which encourage return to contact, without any contact.	Gradual increase in difficulty in opposed sessions.  Introduction to participation in drills, which encourages decision-making.  Check player is using good technique.  Build to normal training activities (including tackle shield work, wrestle, etc)	The player can now play in matches
Progressing too quickly through stages 3 - 5 whilst symptoms are significantly worsened by exercise may slow recovery. Although headaches are the most common symptom following concussion and may persist for several months, exercise should be limited to that which does not more than mildly exacerbate them.							
<b>Duration of session</b>	N/A	15-minute timeframe max per day	15-minute timeframes max per day	Increased from 15 mins in total to 15-minute segments, max to 45 minutes per day max	Increase to max 60 minutes per day	Contact training should only make up max 30 mins	N/A
<b>Objective</b>	Rest	Rest and Recover	Increase in daily activity	Increase heart rate	Coordination and skills/tactics alongside increased intensity of exercise	Restore players confidence and assess functional skills by coaches	Return to play

<p><b>Important points</b></p>	<p>There is no HIA in the Community Game</p> <p>Remove the player as quickly as possible</p> <p>DO NOT allow them to return to play</p>	<p>Call 111 and be alert to worsening symptoms</p> <p>A person with a suspected concussion shouldn't be left alone in the first 24 hours.</p> <p>Don't drive or drink alcohol</p>	<p>If this Stage is commenced and symptoms get worse, rest and only resume once they have subsided, ideally until the following day.</p>	<p>Stage 3 can only commence once symptoms are no more than mild and are not getting worse.</p> <p>If this Stage is commenced and symptoms get worse, rest and only resume once they have subsided.</p>	<p>If symptoms more than mildly increase, or new symptoms appear, cease activity and rest briefly until they subside</p> <p>Resume at a reduced level of exercise intensity until able to tolerate it without more than mild symptoms occurring.</p>	<p><b>The player must be symptom-free for a total of 14 days before progressing to this stage</b></p> <p>If resumption of contact training results in concussive symptoms, the player must be removed from training.</p>	<p>The player must be symptom-free during contact training at stage 5.</p>
<p><b>ANY PLAYER WHO EXPERIENCES SYMPTOMS BEYOND 28 DAYS MUST SEE A GP WHO MAY REFER TO A SPECIALIST. THEY MUST REMAIN OUT OF SPORT until completed.</b></p>							
<p><b>RETURN TO ACTIVITY</b></p>	<p><b>Day zero</b></p>	<p><b>Stage 1</b></p>	<p><b>Stage 2</b></p>	<p><b>Stage 3</b></p>	<p><b>Stage 4</b></p>	<p><b>Stage 5</b></p>	
	<p>Rest</p>	<p>Relative Rest Period</p>	<p>Return to normal daily activities outside of school or work.</p>	<p>Increasing tolerance for thinking activities</p>	<p>Return to study and work</p>	<p>Return to full academic or work-related activity</p>	
<p><b>Permitted activity</b></p>	<p>Rest</p>	<p>Any mental activity should be limited to 15 minutes maximum at a time</p> <p>Screen time to be kept to an absolute minimum</p>	<p>Increase in mental activity, such as reading.</p> <p>Introduce short and basic school and work activities at home gradually</p> <p>Limit screen time</p> <p>Activity can be increased gradually, provided it does not more than mildly increase symptoms</p>	<p>Once a normal level of daily activities can be tolerated add in some more complex homework, longer periods of reading or paperwork in 20 to 30-minute blocks with a brief rest after each block.</p> <p>Discuss with school or employer about returning part-time, breaks, doing limited hours etc each week from home</p>	<p>May need to consider a part-time return to school or reduced activities in the workplace (e.g. half-days, breaks, avoiding hard physical work, avoiding complicated study).</p>	<p>Return to full activity and catch up on any missed work.</p>	

### 6.2.7 Concussion Prevention

It is important to minimise the risk of exposure of players to concussion and incidents where the head moves at speed, causing potential injury to the brain, to reduce the potential risk of longer-term poor brain function. In a collision sport, the risk cannot be eliminated; therefore, players and coaches must be aware of how they can optimise the safety of those playing rugby league.

#### Laws

The laws of rugby league are designed with safety in mind and should be followed. Safe tackle technique is important for the ball carrier and tackler. Encouragement to play within the rules, creating a culture where high tackles, dangerous throws, shoulder charges and spear tackles are discouraged.

#### Training

Minimise the amount of unnecessary contact training players are exposed to, beyond what is needed for safe and effective performance. Tackle technique is an important focus. Most concussion in rugby league occur during the tackle event, to the tackler, and most commonly due to contact with their (and their opponents) head. Encouraging contact to the safe zone below the shoulders and above the waist would help minimise concussion risk.

Be aware of the activity participants engage in aware from rugby league, with special consideration to participants who play multiple sports such as Rugby Union, both in respect to how much contact training they may be exposed to, but also the greater opportunity for injury.

#### Playing surface

It is important that the playing surface is not too hard (frost or drought) and that there are no dangerous structures such as unpadded posts or fences close to the pitch.

#### Head guards

The RFL is aware of ongoing research into head guard technology and its potential to reduce the risk of concussion, however, at the current time generic soft helmets / head guards do not prevent brain injury. The RFL does not support the mandatory wearing of protective head guards in Rugby League at the current time. Head guards however can reduce the risk to superficial head injury such as cuts to the skin and scalp.

#### Sharing information

It is Best Practice to check before each match and training session with Players and Parents that they are well and have not suffered any concussions in or suspected concussions in general day-to-day life or other sport – before their participation.

Sharing information following a concussion is important to protect players' brains to avoid someone with a recent concussion being involved in inappropriate activities in school or professional club.

### 6.3 Reporting Concussion

In the Community Game Concussion Survey, 43% of players reported they did not disclose symptoms of concussion as they did not want to miss a match or let the team down. It is the Club's responsibility to provide and maintain an environment where players feel comfortable in reporting concussions and not be unduly pressured to return before they are fully recovered and a Graduated return to activity (education/work) and sport is completed.

Concussions must be reported to the RFL within 48 hours of the injury, by the Club Volunteer set out in their EAP, in the manner prescribed by the RFL.

#### 6.4 **Concerns about Concussion Management?**

The RFL welcome and encourages reporting on concussion management and takes the matter seriously.

If a player, coach, FA, volunteer or parent is worried about concussion management either at their club or at another this concern should be raised with club officials or match officials

at the time if they feel comfortable to do so. Concerns must also be reported to the RFL Community Game Delivery Department at [competitions@rfl.co.uk](mailto:competitions@rfl.co.uk). Also, report any concerns regarding under-18s or vulnerable adults to [safeguarding@rfl.co.uk](mailto:safeguarding@rfl.co.uk).

Please provide as much information as possible to allow thorough investigation at the time of reporting, and you may be contacted by an RFL representative for more details.

## 7 HYGIENE AND INFECTION CONTROL

- 7.1 Rugby league is a close-contact sport, where there is a risk of passing on infections from person to person. Having good infection control practices and following the guidance below will reduce this risk for all.

Good hygiene practices, by Clubs and individuals, will be essential in reducing the spread of infectious diseases. Infectious diseases are commonly spread through the air (coughs, sneezes etc), through bodily fluids (blood, saliva, mucus etc.), direct contact with infected surfaces (skin-to-skin contact or shared equipment) or through contaminated water and food.

The below lists considerations of maintaining good hygiene and infection control in line with the information from [Hygiene for sport and physical activity | Sport England](#).

- Encourage all to undertake good personal hygiene at home and within Rugby League.
- Ensure clean hands, washing hands for 20 seconds with antibacterial soap. Avoid touching your face.
- Cover coughs and sneezes, dispose of tissues in the bin and wash hands after.
- Clean surfaces and equipment regularly with disinfectant wipes or a disinfectant solution.
- Clean and cover any wounds and change soiled clothing
- Avoid equipment sharing and touching personal equipment of others, particularly water bottles and towels
- If individuals are unwell, they should stay at home until symptoms have resolved. If the individual has attended their GP because of their symptoms, the GP advice should be followed.
- Correct use and disposal of Personal Protective Equipment by FA
- Encourage all members at the Club to stay up to date with screening and vaccination programmes and promote positive hygiene messages for example with posters.

### 7.2 BLOOD BOARD DISEASE (BBD) GUIDELINES - MATCHES & TRAINING

Although contact with blood is a possible occurrence whilst playing rugby league, it is important this is minimised by adhering to the BBD protocols. There are several infections that can be passed through bodily fluids, including blood. The most common in the UK are Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). These will be referred to as Blood Borne Diseases. As these infections can be passed on from contact with the blood and bodily fluids of an infected person or carrier, there is a very small risk of these being transmitted during contact sport such as rugby league if present. It is possible to be immunised against Hepatitis B to reduce the risk of infection, but not Hepatitis C or HIV. The RFL recommends that Players, Match Officials and Volunteers who may come into contact with blood through their role are vaccinated against Hepatitis B, which is initially a three-vaccine course with 5 yearly boosters. Advice should be sought from the individual's GP or Sexual Health Clinic. It is also available to purchase through travel clinics.

### 7.3 BLOOD BORNE INFECTIOUS DISEASES - RULES

This is a synopsis of the most relevant regulations; the full Rules are available on the RFL website within the Operational Rules.

The RFL has adopted these Blood Borne Diseases (BBD) Rules ("the Rules") to protect the rights and the health and safety of all participants in the sport.

These Rules shall only apply to BBD (including HIV and Hepatitis B and C) and shall apply to all Participants.

A Participant who becomes aware that they have been diagnosed as having contracted and/or have contracted a blood borne disease shall notify the Blood Borne Diseases Officer (BBDO) currently RFL Head of Medical and Integrity at [medical@rfl.co.uk](mailto:medical@rfl.co.uk), of their medical status as soon as possible.

Where any Club Official is advised that a Participant has contracted a BBD, they shall notify the BBDO of this as soon as possible. When the BBDO is informed that a Participant is suffering from a BBD, the BBDO shall issue a Provisional Suspension preventing participation in the game until the matter has been investigated.

In that case a BBD Tribunal will carry out a risk assessment as to whether or not the Participant should be permitted to participate in the sport having regard to the need to protect the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport. Until the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal has issued its decision the Provisional Suspension shall continue.

The Participant may have a review of the decision or appeal depending on the circumstances.

It is the responsibility of each Participant to:

- be as fully aware of their medical condition as is reasonable in all the circumstances
- ensure that they protect the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport.

Any Participant agrees to:

- be bound by and abide strictly by these Rules.
- provide all requested assistance to the RFL in the application and enforcement of these Rules.
- waive medical confidentiality only in so far as it is necessary to apply and enforce these Rules
- the processing of data, including sensitive and personal data, pursuant to the Data Protection Act 1998
- make him/herself available to undergo any necessary medical examination and or non-invasive test, including blood test, or sample collection, including blood sample collection.
- submit to the jurisdiction of the BBD Tribunal and/or Appeal Tribunal.

### 7.3.1 **Wounds and Bleeding Injuries**

Players must report all bleeding wounds and are responsible for wearing appropriate protective bandaging or strapping to prevent blood contamination of other players or volunteers when wounds occur.

If a player suffers a cut at training or during a match, the player must leave the field straightaway and blood bin procedures will apply

### 7.3.2 **Blood Bin Procedure**

The following procedure will apply in all cases where a Player is bleeding on their person, clothing or if equipment has been contaminated by blood:

- If the Referee notices a bleeding or blood contaminated Player the Referee will immediately stop play and signal to the FA attend to the Player.
- The FA will immediately enter the field of play to assess whether the Player can be quickly treated on the field or whether the Player will require treatment off the field.
- If the FA advises that the Player can be treated on the field, the Referee will instruct the player to drop out behind play for that purpose and the match will immediately recommence.
- If the FA advises the Referee that the Player will have to be treated off the field, the match will not restart until the player has left the field. The Player may be interchanged, or alternatively the team can elect to temporarily play on with 12 players. (Note: other than for the initial assessment, the match will not be held up while the bleeding player receives treatment or is interchanged).
- If the Referee stops play twice for the same player and the same wound, the Player must be taken from the field for treatment and either interchanged or the team may elect to play on with 12 players until the bleeding player returns.
- If a bleeding player has left the field for treatment and is not interchanged, they may return to the field of play at any time provided they do so from an on-side position. If

---

the bleeding Player has been interchanged; they may only return to the field as a normal interchange player.

- A bleeding player returning to the field of play who has not been interchanged, is not to be regarded as a replacement/interchange player and therefore may take a kick for goal. Conversely, a bleeding player returning to the field of play who has been interchanged may not take a kick for goal at that time.

### 7.3.3 **Contaminated Clothing & Dressing**

Where a player has blood on themselves or their clothing the Player must be free of blood contamination before the Referee will allow them to rejoin play. This may involve changing the contaminated clothing. Until those steps have been taken, the Player shall, at the minimum, drop out behind play. Contaminated clothing, surfaces, and / or equipment should be treated with a solution of detergent and bleach.

Contaminated clothing/equipment must be sealed in a plastic bag within a clearly marked bin and laundered separately in a hot wash at a minimum temperature of 80°C.

Please be aware of the club's duty of care to other volunteers at the Club such as ground staff and cleaners who may encounter bloodstained dressings and ame/training. These volunteers should be trained in procedures to handle and dispose of such items and understand the risks involved and should be provided with adequate bleach solution as per regulations and disposable gloves.

### 7.3.4 **Use of Detergent/Bleach Sprays**

- A spray container with 15mls of standard washing up liquid and 32mls of standard household bleach should be standard equipment for each team, on the touchline and in the dressing rooms.
- Minor contamination of clothing and equipment must be sprayed and thoroughly soaked with the solution immediately after the player leaves the field.
- The decontamination solution should be in contact with the blood spill for between one and five minutes.
- Prior to return to the field, the area must be thoroughly rinsed off with water.
- All but minor blood contamination of clothing and equipment must result in the contaminated clothing and equipment being replaced prior to the player returning to the field.
- As standard household bleach deteriorates with time, the decontamination solution should be made up on the day of the game. Typically, a solution of one part household bleach to ten parts waters should be prepared fresh daily and used as a disinfectant for contaminated areas.
- A 0.5% concentration of bleach is not considered hazardous; however care must be taken to avoid contact with eyes or wounds and prolonged contact with the skin. Thorough rinsing with water will further reduce the risk.

## 7.4 **FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT GUIDELINES**

### 7.4.1 **Dressing Rooms**

Hand basins, toilets, showers and benches should be cleaned with disinfectant after each training session and game.

Dressing rooms should be maintained well and kept clean. Sharing of equipment, including towels should be avoided. Communal baths are to be strongly discouraged.

### 7.4.2 **First Aid Room**

The first aid room must be cleaned after each match.

The rubbish bin must contain plastic liners, which are to be disposed of after each training session/match

### 7.4.3 **First Aid Kit**

The kit must contain disposable protective gloves, chlorhexidine handwash and plastic bags for disposal of contaminated equipment/clothing.

### 7.4.4 **Drink Containers**

Potentially life-threatening illnesses can be shared through saliva.

- 
- Players are to bring their own and use their own drink containers which they must bring with them and use at every training session
  - During matches, Players should ideally drink from individual labelled bottles. Where this is not possible Players must drink only from water containers possessing spouts whereby when they drink, making sure they do not make contact with or touch the nozzle, but squirt the water into their mouth.

#### 7.4.5 **Team Kit Bag**

Spare jerseys, shorts and socks should be available in the event that blood contaminated clothing needs to be replaced. The kit bag should also contain plastic bin liners to bag up any blood contaminated clothing.

## **8 OTHER RELATED ISSUES**

### **8.1 MEDICAL SCREENING**

Players are recommended to obtain a medical assessment before participation in Rugby League, to review the personal risks in the context of their health background.

### **8.2 PLAYERS WITH AN EXISTING MEDICAL CONDITION**

Where a player has an existing medical condition, it is the responsibility of the player to seek medical clearance to participate from their GP or other relevant overseeing clinician (i.e., hospital specialist) to advise whether he/she is medically fit to play Rugby League before participating in training or matches. If it is not clear from the medical notes provided whether they could participate, please contact the RFL for review.

See Consent & Medical forms Section 5.2.

### **8.3 CARDIAC SCREENING**

Sometimes an individual may have a heart abnormality without any symptoms. Screening with an electrocardiogram (ECG) is aimed at identifying people with conditions such as heart muscles disorders or electrical faults of the heart. Players may wish to undergo cardiac screening to help reduce their risk of rare cardiac events playing sport causing sudden cardiac death (an umbrella term used for the many different causes of cardiac arrest in young people). This is particularly encouraged for anyone with a family history of heart related problems below the age of 60, or unexplained deaths from incidents such as a drowning or car accidents.

Player should be advised to contact their GP if they have any of the following and not participate in sports until cleared to do so:

- chest pain, especially during exercise.
- loss of consciousness.
- breathlessness.
- dizziness.
- heart palpitations or fluttering feeling.
- unexplained fainting, especially during exercise.

The charity CRY <http://www.c-r-y.org.uk/index.htm> provides information and screening services. In addition, the Danny Jones Defib Fund may provide clubs with a grant towards the costs <https://www.dannyjonesdefibfund.co.uk/>

### **8.4 MOVING THE SERIOUSLY INJURED AND ABANDONING A MATCH**

Where a player has suffered an injury which prevents them from being safely moved from the pitch then play should cease and ambulance assistance called. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES should any pressure be put on the player or the FA to allow play to continue by removing the player from the pitch until it is safe to do so. Where necessary the match should be abandoned, player safety must be put before results or fixture backlogs.

#### **Turning players over on the field of play**

Players may, with all good intentions, attempt to turn an injured player onto their side following an injury, also known as 'the recovery position'. This can be an extremely dangerous act and could potentially make some injuries more severe, particularly in the case of spinal injuries. Coaches and FA should explain to all Players and other staff the potential hazards to injured players of attempting this and reassure players that injured players are not at risk of "swallowing their own tongue", which is a common misconception. Players should wait for the FA to attend to the player.

## **8.5 PROTECTIVE & OTHER EQUIPMENT**

### **8.5.1 HEAD GUARDS**

See section 6.2.7 Concussion prevention

### **8.5.2 MOUTH GUARDS**

It is strongly recommended that players wear a mouth guard when playing or taking part in contact training sessions. It is recommended that this mouthguard be custom-fit made by a Dentist, rather than a generic mouth guard of the 'boil and bite' variety. Mouthguards reduce the risk of dental injury, including instrumented mouthguards, which provide data on head impacts.

### **8.5.3 TAGS AND MEDICAL DEVICES**

Players may play with electronic tags and medical devices (such as blood glucose monitors and insulin pumps) providing these can be padded and strapped so as not to cause a danger to other participants or risk injuring the wearer. The Referee shall be the final arbiter in this regard.

### **8.5.4 SPORTS GOGGLES**

The RFL conditionally permit the use of protective goggles for use in games and training within Rugby League providing the goggles have no rigid components which could cause harm to a Player. These goggles should usually be made of soft plastic with an elastic head band to keep them in place. The RFL recommend that head guards are worn by players wearing goggles to reduce the chance of the head band slipping from the head.

Any player wearing goggles should seek written clarification from their optician/equipment provider that the goggles are suitable for contact sport. This letter together with this RFL policy may prove useful on match days to reassure match officials and opponents. However, despite this policy, the final decision on the suitability of any player equipment is ultimately the referee's decision.

### **8.5.5 BOXES**

Boxes may be worn provided that they have sufficient external padding not to cause a danger to opponents.

## **8.6 WEATHER**

### **8.6.1 HOT WEATHER CODE**

When a FA believes that the heat and/or humidity is such that players require additional water, they should approach the Referee to request one or both of the special measures below. The Referee shall grant this request and shall ensure that both teams are aware of his decision.

- The positioning of water containers around the ground (ensuring that there is no danger to players or spectators) to enable players to help themselves.
- A two-minute break at an appropriate natural pause in the game, approximately half way through the first and second halves to allow players to take on extra water.

FA should be familiar with recognising and managing heat-related illnesses. Please refer to World Rugby Hot Weather guide for detailed advice.

### 8.6.2 SUNSCREEN

Research has shown that people do not apply sunscreen frequently enough. FA should reinforce messages about using high SPF sunscreen to all before training or playing outdoors, and at half time in matches. Cancer Research recommends using a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. Broad-spectrum sunscreens, which protect against harmful UVA and UVB rays are preferred, in addition to considering a waterproof nature given sweating during exercise. Sunscreen should be applied generously and regularly to remain effective. Be mindful, sunscreens have a shelf life of two to three years, refer to best before dates and expiry on the bottle.

In respect to skin cancer, the FA should advise their players on regular monitoring of skin for changes and seek a GP review if there are any new changes or concerns.

### 8.6.3 COLD WEATHER CODE

Severe cold weather is infrequent but can provide a source of discomfort, impair sporting performance, and predispose to severe cold injury if players are unprepared. Frostbite, hypothermia, injury and exacerbation of pre-existing medical conditions can all be results of exposure to cold weather.

FA should be familiar with recognising and managing cold weather-related illnesses. Please refer to World Rugby Cold Weather guide for detailed advice.

[Cold Weather Guideline | World Rugby](#)

FAs should assess the activity due to be undertaken by the group and consider weather conditions including air temperature, wind chill, precipitation, and solar exposure. Location of the facility and time of activity should also be considered alongside forecasts for the day.

If possible, indoor facilities should be considered for activities such as fitness training. Attention should be given to appropriate clothing during activity (base, middle and outer layers) and post activity (warm, dry change of clothes). Minimise time spent still or not active can play a part in ensuring outdoor activity can continue safely.

Where pitches are frozen this should be assessed by the referee before the match and by coaches before training. Activity should not take place on frozen pitches.

## 8.7 MENTAL HEALTH

The RFL would recommend that all clubs have at least one volunteer who has attended Mental Health First Aid Lite. Details about this course are included in Appendix 8.

In addition, Rugby League Cares can deliver mental health literacy workshops for the following player groups:

- Juniors aged U12+
- Parents of all players
- Coaches of all players
- Open age teams.

For more information on workshop content and/or to book a workshop clubs should email [info@rlcares.org.uk](mailto:info@rlcares.org.uk).

Further information on Mental Health, including signposting information for those in crisis or struggling can be found here – <https://rlplayersportal.co.uk/need-help>

Consider having a mental health emergency action plan in cases of a mental health crisis to ensure safe and effective action is taken.

## 9 ANTI DOPING

The RFL is committed to the principles of drug-free sport for the following reasons:

- To uphold and preserve the ethics of the Game.
- To safeguard the physical and mental health of players.
- To ensure that all players have an opportunity to compete equally.

To underpin that commitment the RFL will:

Provide information on its website and through other means of communication about the dangers of drugs and consequences of taking drugs or breaching the Anti-Doping Regulations.

- Comply with the WADA Code.

This is a summary of the information available in full on the RFL website.

### 9.1 Anti-Doping Rules

All sports including Rugby League are governed by the World Anti-Doping Code (WADA Code). All players, coaches and volunteers have to abide by the Code and are subject to the RFL Anti-Doping Regulations which can be downloaded from the RFL Website [Rugby League \(rugby-league.com\)](http://RugbyLeague(rugby-league.com)). The Regulations allow the RFL to carry out anti-doping tests at any level of the game although in practice the majority of testing will be carried out at professional level. They also permit the RFL and UKAD to investigate intelligence reports , which must be complied with.

### 9.2 Responsibilities of Volunteers in Rugby League

All volunteers should support the principle of anti-doping and should:

- Make it clear to all players that doping in Rugby League is simply not acceptable and is not necessary to win
- Ensure that players are aware of the Anti-Doping Regulations of the RFL
- Discourage and challenge the use of “performance enhancing” or illegal substances or “legal highs” amongst all players
- Not put pressure on players to change their body shape (i.e. to bulk up or slim down) without giving clear direction how to achieve this in a healthy way without resort to doping
- Not pressure players to engage in a culture which encourages drug or alcohol abuse
- Undertake education modules and seminars as mandated by the RFL and share relevant communications issued by the RFL from time to time.
- Ensure players who are retiring inform the RFL in writing directly.

Volunteers should not:

- Ignore possible evidence of doping in their team
- Avoid enforcing rules or enforce rules selectively
- Ignore doping because the team needs a particular player
- Ignore drug misuse by coaches or volunteers

For further information and advice please visit <https://www.ukad.org.uk/>

### 9.3 Prohibited Substances

The Prohibited List is available on WADA's website: [www.wada-ama.org](http://www.wada-ama.org) Players and officials can also find out the status of a particular substance according to the rules by visiting the Global Drug Reference Online website at [www.GlobalDRO.com](http://www.GlobalDRO.com)

The current Prohibited List includes the following:

- Anabolic Agents
- Hormones & related substances
- Beta-2 agonists

- 
- Agents with anti-estrogenic activity
  - Diuretics & other masking agents
  - Stimulants

### 9.3.1 Steroids

Steroids stimulate the development of male sexual characteristics and the build-up of muscle tissue. Perceived benefits of steroid use are increased muscle tissue leading to increased strength and power.

However, steroids affect the body's natural balance and can have very serious effects including:

- Increased violence, mood swings, depression and personality changes (Roid-Rage)
- Serious liver damage
- Increased risk of heart disease and kidney damage
- Increased risk of muscle injury – the muscle mass gets bigger, but the supporting tendons and ligaments do not and may not be able to cope
- Adolescents may stop normal growth
- Development of breasts in men
- Shrinking of the testicles
- Loss of hair
- Impotence & infertility

Steroids can be injected, and this poses other risks associated with syringes including infections, HIV and Hepatitis B.

### 9.3.2 Stimulants

Stimulants act on the central nervous system by speeding up parts of the brain and the body's reactions. Stimulants also suppress hunger and give the impression of increased concentration.

However, stimulants can cause difficulty sleeping, sweating, shaking, anxiety, depression and mood swings. Stimulants can also cause overheating of the body leading to organ failure, put undue pressure on the heart and lead to cardiac arrhythmias.

Some pre-workout/energy boosting supplements contain stimulants so players should be extra vigilant with supplements of that nature and should seek advice prior to using them.

Common stimulants are ephedrine, pseudoephedrine, methylhexanamine, cocaine, ecstasy, and amphetamines.

### 9.3.3 Social Drugs

In addition to being banned by WADA the following drugs are also illegal under the Misuse of Drugs Act.

**Marijuana** (cannabis, weed, hash) is usually smoked to give a relaxed (stoned) feeling, however it can lead to mental health problems including schizophrenia, paranoia and depression. It can also affect co-ordination and make users drowsy.

**Cocaine** (Coke, Charlie, Crack) can be snorted, smoked or injected in order to give users a "buzz" where they feel really alert followed by down periods after use. Cocaine can cause heart problems, overheating and convulsions.

**Amphetamine** (speed, whizz) has similar effects and risks to cocaine

**Ecstasy** gives a sense of energy, alertness and happiness but can induce panic attacks, raise body temperature to a dangerous level and put pressure on the heart.

**Heroin** (H, smack) is usually injected or smoked and is highly addictive. It gives a sense of relaxation and well-being but includes the dangers of lethal overdoses and infections.

#### **9.4 SUPPLEMENTS**

Community players should adopt an effective food first and training first approach to optimise performance factors. High-performance athletes may use supplements, after consulting with relevant experts, to optimise their nutrition for performance purposes. Supplements work in addition to a balanced nutritious diet, a good hydration strategy, effective training and plenty of rest. Without these factors there is limited benefits to taking supplements at this level of competition and these may come with unintended consequences to health. The effectiveness of many supplements cannot be effectively proven, and players must also be aware that approximately 45% of positive drug tests have been linked to the use of contaminated supplements. Clubs must remind players of the Strict Liability regulation, and contaminated supplements may result in a Player committing an ADRV.

The RFL advises players to fully assess the need for, the risk and potential consequences of any supplements prior to use. If the Player deems them a necessary risk the informed sport website should be used to check that a supplement is batch tested. <https://sport.wetestyoutrust.com>

#### **9.5 EDUCATION**

It is mandatory that the Chair and Club Welfare Officer at each club has the UKAD Introduction to Clean Sport qualification. This course gives enough knowledge to allow that person to play an essential role in giving players important anti-doping information. It is a basic level of knowledge which will allow support personnel to provide accurate advice about key anti-doping issues and to signpost players to further resources (e.g., Global DRO). The course can be taken online by registering on the UKAD website and is valid for 2 years.

In addition, all Community Players over the age of 18 must be made aware of and undertake the education and awareness for Community players. This will be directly communicated to players; however, it is the Club's responsibility to ensure they are aware of the education and communications at the beginning of each Season. The Club Chair, Club Welfare Officer and Head Coach must also have completed the education module.

All at the Club must be aware of Strict Liability in relation to Anti-Doping. It means that each athlete is strictly liable for the substances found in his or her bodily specimen, whether or not the athlete intentionally or unintentionally used a prohibited substance.

## 10 APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1 – RISK ASSESSMENT

A risk assessment is simply a careful examination of what, in a club, could cause harm to people, so that club officials can weigh up whether they have taken enough precautions or should do more to prevent harm. Workers, volunteers and others have a right to be protected from harm caused by a failure to take reasonable control measures.

In order to create a safe environment, a club must carry out regular risk assessments. A risk assessment is a formal and recorded process to weigh up the suitability and safety of any activity by identifying the hazards that could potentially cause harm and taking the appropriate precautions or actions required to prevent harm or injury.

The following the links below contains useful information on creating an appropriate Risk Assessment:

<https://www.sja.org.uk/course-information/guidance-and-help/completing-a-risk-assessment/>  
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/entertainment/leisure/amateur-sports-club.htm>  
<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/index.htm>

A risk assessment enables a club to:

- Identify an unsafe condition
- Decide what corrective action is required
- Determine who is responsible for correcting it
- Follow up to ensure that it was corrected properly

The frequency of assessment will be determined by a number of factors, such as the nature of the group; experience of volunteers; location or weather. Therefore, risk assessments should be a regular process and not a one-off exercise.

The risk assessment should be undertaken by a competent person, although they do not have to be a health and safety expert. Ask other club members or committee members what they think as they may have noticed things which are not immediately obvious.

#### **Risk assessment process**

The following is a suggested process intended as a guide to undertaking a risk assessment:

- Make an inventory of club activities and tasks.
- Identify the hazards for each of these activities – on and off site – and decide if the hazards are minor or significant.
- Evaluate the risks and decide whether the existing precautions are adequate or whether more should be done.
- Decide if the risk is acceptable and prioritise the significant hazards - identify whether the risk is high, medium or low by deciding which could result in serious harm or affect several people.
- Select method of control – check that all reasonable precautions have been taken to reduce the risk and avoid injury, however, be aware that even after all precautions have been taken, some risk usually remains.
- Record the findings – keep the written record for future reference, it can help if you become involved in any action for civil liability. It can also remind the Club to keep an eye on particular hazards and precautions.
- Implement measures to reduce the risk.
- Record and react to near misses
- Monitor – ensure that the standards are maintained.
- Regularly review – it is good practice to review the assessment to make sure that the precautions are still working effectively.

### **Risk Assessment Resources**

The government's Health and Safety Executive has a useful [risk assessments webpage](#) and there is a downloadable [Risk Assessment Template](#) (PDF 52kB).

Also, to help clubs with risk assessment decisions, there is a [Risk Probability Matrix](#) (PDF 13kB).

**APPENDIX 2 – FIRST AID EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN**

The information in this plan should be shared with all coaches/teachers and relevant volunteers as well as all visiting teams

Club/School/College/University Name:	
EAP for: (Adult matches, youth & junior, training etc)	
Address & Postcode:	
Sat Nav Postcode / Additional location details for Emergency Services, consider <a href="#">what3words</a>	
EAP Lead (main contact):	
First Aider (if different from above):	

**AGE GROUP/TEAM FIRST AIDERS**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Contact Number</b>

<b><u>Ambulance access point</u></b>	
First Aid Kit	
Defibrillator (AED)	
Stretcher (for use by trained individuals only)	
Other Equipment	

**LOCATION OF LOCAL HOSPITALS/SERVICES**

Accident & Emergency	
Minor Injuries	
Pharmacy	

**EAP CHAIN OF COMMAND & PROCEDURES**

**OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION**

**IN THE EVENT OF A MEDICAL EMERGENCY CALL THE EMERGENCY SERVICES AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE ON 999/112 GIVING AS MANY DETAILS AS POSSIBLE**

**APPENDIX 3 – ACCIDENT OR INJURY REPORT FORM**

Date		Time	
Activity	If at a match provide the fixture		
Location			
<b>INJURED PERSON'S DETAILS</b>			
Surname		First Name	
Address			
		Postcode	
DOB		Tel No	
<b>DETAILS OF PERSON(S) INVOLVED IN ACCIDENT OR INJURY</b>			
<b>Full name of person</b>		<b>Contact number</b>	
<b>DETAILS OF WITNESSES WHO ACTUALLY SAW THE ACCIDENT OR INJURY</b>			
<b>Full name of person</b>		<b>Contact number</b>	
<b>INCIDENT DETAILS</b>			
Time		Date	
<b>DESCRIBE THE INCIDENT</b>			
<b>TREATMENT GIVEN</b>			
Did the person attend hospital	Yes by ambulance		No
	Yes, self transfer		
If yes which hospital			

<b>DETAILS OF PERSON GIVING FIRST AID</b>			
Name		Role	
Signed		Date	

## APPENDIX 4 – HEAD INJURY FORM

<b>THE RFL HEAD INJURY CARD</b>			
Name			
Address			
Tel No			
Time of Head Injury		Date of Head Injury	
<b>Emergency Telephone Numbers</b>			
Hospital			
Ambulance			
First Aider			
GP			
<b>I have given a completed Head Injury Card to a parent/guardian/relative/carer of the player</b>			
Name of First Aider			
Date			
<b>IMPORTANT WARNING</b>			
<p>If a player has one or more of the following <b>red flag</b> signs or symptoms after a head injury or they should have an urgent medical assessment in a hospital Accident and Emergency (A&amp;E) Department using emergency ambulance (999) transfer if necessary:</p> <p>They must be accompanied by a responsible adult, and they should not personally drive under any circumstances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Previous history of brain surgery or bleeding disorder</li> <li>- Current 'blood-thinning' therapy</li> <li>- Current drug or alcohol intoxication</li> </ul> <p>Symptoms may include the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Any loss of consciousness because of the injury</li> <li>- Deteriorating consciousness- becoming more drowsy</li> <li>- Develops slow or noisy breathing</li> <li>- Problems with memory, before or after the event.</li> <li>- Confusion following the injury</li> <li>- Unusual behaviour such as restlessness, irritability, aggression</li> <li>- Any changes in neurological function <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Difficulty with understanding speaking, writing, reading</li> <li>o Decreased sensation in part of the body</li> <li>o Weakness in part of the body</li> <li>o Poor balance or coordination</li> <li>o Double or blurry vision</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Seizure/convulsion or limb twitching or lying rigid/ motionless due to muscle spasm</li> <li>- Severe or increasing headache</li> <li>- Repeated vomiting</li> <li>- Severe neck pain</li> <li>- Suspicion of a skull fracture: cut, bruise, swelling, depression, severe pain</li> <li>- Clear runny fluid coming out of ears or nose after injury</li> <li>- Deafness in one or both ears after injury</li> <li>- Symmetrical bleeding around both eyes, or behind the ear</li> </ul>			
<b>FOR THE REST OF TODAY THEY SHOULD:</b>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rest physically and mentally</li> <li>- Not consume alcohol</li> <li>- Not drive a vehicle or ride a bike</li> </ul>			

## APPENDIX 5 – MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID AWARENESS (MHFA)

The RFL, in conjunction with Rugby League Cares, delivers the Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Lite courses.

The course, which lasts for 2-3 hours, is aimed at club welfare officers, coaches, team managers, volunteers and those with an interest in learning about Mental Health issues and who have a role supporting the welfare of players and/or volunteers. The course is certificated by MHFA and is delivered by Rugby League Cares from time to time. [More details about MHFA can be provided by emailing \[info@rlcares.org.uk\]\(mailto:info@rlcares.org.uk\), including the email title name 'MHFA booking'](#).

The course is ideal to allow volunteers to support players or volunteers who have identified that they may have mental health issues. The course aims to enable participants to:

- Gain a wider understanding, for the attendee and others, of some issues surrounding mental health
- Gain a greater understanding of how and why positive and negative mental health affects Rugby League – people and clubs
- Effectively support people experiencing mental health problems
- Communicate with and educate people

By the end of the course, attendees will be able to:

- Identify the discrimination surrounding mental health problems
- Define mental health & some mental health problems
- Relate to people's experiences
- Help support people with mental health problems
- Develop an understanding of managing after their own mental health

The course would also be particularly useful as a foundation for those who would like to go on to become Mental Health First. The courses are limited to 16 people per session.

### CONTACTS

**Rugby League Cares Portal Help Resource** - <https://rlplayersportal.co.uk/need-help>

**Drug Information Line:** +44 (0) 800 528 0004

**Drug Information Email:** [drug-free@ukad.org.uk](mailto:drug-free@ukad.org.uk)

**Confidential TUE Fax:** +44 (0) 800 298 3362

**TUE Email:** [tue@ukad.org.uk](mailto:tue@ukad.org.uk)

**APPENDIX 6 – CONCUSSION RECOGNITION TOOL**

[The Concussion Recognition Tool 6 \(CRT6\) \(rugby-league.com\)](http://rugby-league.com)

**APPENDICES | SECTION F7**

**BLOOD BORNE  
DISEASES REGULATIONS**

**SECTION F7 | BLOOD BORNE DISEASES REGULATIONS**



**BLOOD BORNE DISEASES – POLICIES & PROCEDURES****Blood Borne Infectious Diseases**

This section should be read in conjunction with the relevant Operational Rules relating to Blood Borne Diseases.

The aim of the Policies and Procedures below is to prevent the spread of disease via infected blood and other bodily fluids. The guidelines cover the following:

- 1 Matches and Training – Bleeding Injuries
- 2 Team Areas
- 3 Blood contamination
- 4 Equipment Guidelines
- 5 On and Off Field Treatment of Bleeding Wounds
- 6 Hepatitis B Vaccination

**1 Matches & Training – Bleeding Injuries**

It is the Players' responsibility to report all wounds and injuries in a timely manner, and their responsibility to wear appropriate protective equipment. If a Player suffers a cut at training or during the course of a match, the Player(s) must leave the field as soon as practicable and the following procedures will apply:

**a) During Matches**

In the presence of a clearly visible amount of blood on a Player's jersey or other clothing or on a wound dressing or padding applied to any body part, the Player must leave the field of play for the jersey/dressing to be changed before he can be allowed to return to play to avoid the risk of transfer of infection.

**Blood Bin Procedure**

The following procedure will apply in all cases where a Player is bleeding on his person, clothing or equipment has been contaminated by blood

- If the Referee notices a bleeding or blood contaminated Player they will immediately stop play and call 'time-out' and signal to the Physio to attend to the Player.
- The Physio will immediately enter the field of play to assess whether the Player can be quickly treated on the field or whether he will require treatment off the field.
- If the Physio advises that the Player can be treated on the field, the Referee will instruct the player to drop out behind play for that purpose and the match will immediately recommence.
- If the Physio advises the Referee that they will have to treat the Player off the field, the match will not restart until the player has left the field. The Player may be interchanged, or alternatively the team can elect to temporarily play on with 12 players. (Note: other than for the initial assessment, the match will not be held up while the bleeding player receives treatment or is interchanged).
- If the Referee stops play twice for the same player and the same wound, the Player must be taken from the field for treatment and either interchanged or the team may elect to play on with 12 players until the bleeding player returns.
- If a bleeding player has left the field for treatment and is not interchanged, he may return to the field of play at any time provided he does so from an on-side position. If the bleeding Player has been interchanged, he may only return to the field through the interchange official as a normal interchange player.

- A bleeding player returning to the field of play who has not been interchanged, is not to be regarded as a replacement/interchange player and therefore may take a kick for goal. Conversely, a bleeding player returning to the field of play who has been interchanged may not take a kick for goal at that time.

### **Stitching**

Any Player who is bleeding and requires treatment by way of either stitches, stapling or otherwise, must be taken to the team dressing room or medical room so this procedure can be conducted out of the view of the general public. After the treatment the wound must be bandaged or covered to protect the injury and to eliminate the risk of further bleeding and to prevent the potential risk of transmission of blood-borne infectious diseases.

### **Contaminated Clothing**

In any case where a Player's person, clothing or equipment has been contaminated by blood, whether through a wound to himself or through contact with a wounded player, the Referee shall direct the Team Trainer to enter the field of play to attend to the Player by taking immediate steps to ensure that that player is free of any blood contamination before the Player shall be permitted by the Referee to rejoin play. Until those steps have been taken, the player shall, at the minimum, drop out behind play. Contaminated clothing and / or equipment should be treated with a solution of detergent and bleach, as outlined in the section on Blood Borne Diseases.

#### **b) During Training**

The bleeding Player must be removed from the field immediately by the coach or must voluntarily leave the field and seek medical attention.

If the bleeding cannot be controlled, the Player must cease training for that session.

## **2 Team Areas**

#### **a) Dressing Rooms**

Hand basins (with hot and cold running water), toilets, showers and benches must be cleaned with disinfectant after each training session and game.

- Drains must run freely.
- A liquid antiseptic soap dispenser, disposable hand towels, brooms and wash buckets must be readily available.
- Sponges must not be used at any time.
- Spitting is prohibited in or around the area.
- Urinating, other than in the toilet area, is prohibited.
- Sharing of equipment, including use of another's towel or use of clothing to stand/sit on whilst drying is strongly discouraged.
- Players should have a clean pair of flip flops to wear to and from the shower/toilet.

#### **b) First Aid Room**

- The first aid room must be cleaned after each match.
- The rubbish bin must contain plastic liners, which are to be disposed of after each training session/match.
- Clinical waste must be disposed of in Yellow Clinical Waste bags and disposed of in the correct manner (incineration under controlled situations either hospital or Local GP/ as per local Health Authority guidelines.)

- Needles/syringes must be disposed of after use in a suitable waste disposal kit in a sharps bin, which when full must be incinerated in the proper manner (as per LHA guidelines.)

**c) Gymnasium**

- Flooring should be of an impervious material with a sealed surface that is easily cleaned. Carpet or artificial turf type are discouraged.
- Players must have shoes, shirt and own towel for each session.
- Communal baths are to be discouraged.

**3 Blood Contamination**

**a) Use of Detergent/Bleach Sprays**

- A spray container with 15mls of standard washing up liquid and 32 mls of standard household bleach is to be standard equipment for each team, on the sideline and in the dressing rooms.
- Minor contamination of clothing and equipment must be sprayed and thoroughly soaked, with the solution immediately the player leaves the field.
- The decontamination solution should be in contact with the blood spill for between one and five minutes.
- Prior to return to the field, the area must be thoroughly rinsed off with water.
- All but minor blood contamination of clothing and equipment must result in the contaminated clothing and equipment being replaced prior to the player returning to the field.
- As standard household bleach deteriorates with time, the decontamination solution must be made up on the day of the game. Do not use bleach which has passed its expiry date. A standard medicine glass can be used to insure concentrations of detergent and bleach are correctly added to 250 mls of water. Typically a solution of one part household bleach to ten parts water should be prepared fresh daily and used as a disinfectant for contaminated areas.
- A 0.5% concentration of bleach is not considered hazardous, however care must be taken to avoid contact with eyes or wounds and prolonged contact with the skin. Thorough rinsing with water will further reduce the risk.

**b) Contaminated clothing/equipment**

- Contaminated clothing/equipment must be sealed in a plastic bag within a clearly marked bin and laundered separately in a hot wash at a minimum temperature of 80 C.

**4 Equipment Guidelines**

**a) Medical/First Aid Kit**

- The kit must contain disposable protective gloves, hibiscrub (or equivalent) and plastic bags for disposal of contaminated equipment/clothing.

**b) Drink Containers**

- Players are to be supplied with and use their own drink containers which they must bring with them and use at every training session

- During matches, Players must drink only from recommended water containers possessing spouts.
- Players should not make contact with or touch the nozzle of squeeze bottles.

WARNING: The potentially life-threatening meningococcal disease can be transmitted by sharing drink containers.

**c) Team Kit Bag**

- Spare jerseys, shorts and socks must be available in the event that blood contaminated clothing needs to be replaced.

**5 On and Off Field Treatment of Bleeding Wounds**

The control of bleeding should be carried out by the Trainer or Physio, it is strongly recommended that he/she wear gloves, or that the Player applies pressure to the wound with his own hands.

The correct medical equipment to deal with bleeding wounds must be present at all times as laid out in RFL guidelines. If a Doctor is not present at training or at a game (in instances below first grade when a Paramedic is present) and a Player requires sutures then the player must be sent to the local Casualty department (the location of which must be made known to both teams) either by car or 999 for the appropriate management of this injury.

**6 Hepatitis B**

It is mandatory for Super League and Full Time clubs to run a Hepatitis B screening session, it is up to the individual player whether he accepts but those that refuse must sign a waiver, a copy of which must be lodged with the RFL Welfare Department. It is Best Practice for Championship and League 1 clubs to offer players Hepatitis B screening.

It is mandatory for Super League and Full Time clubs to offer players and officials vaccination against Hepatitis B. It is up to the individual whether he accepts but those that choose not to be vaccinated must sign a waiver, a standard waiver document is available from the RFL Welfare Department, a copy of which must be lodged with the RFL Welfare Department.

**REGULATIONS RELATING TO PARTICIPANTS WITH BLOOD BORNE DISEASES****1. Definitions and Interpretations**

1.1. The following expressions shall have the following meanings:

“**Participant**” shall mean any Persons subject to the Operational Rules of the Rugby Football League (“RFL”) or participating in any events, competitions, games or other activities organised, convened or authorised by the RFL or any of its member or affiliate organisations, wherever held, and whether or not such member or other Person is a citizen or resident of the United Kingdom.

1.2. These rules shall be interpreted in the following way:

- (a) Should any term of these Regulations be considered void or voidable under any applicable law then such term shall be severed or amended in such a manner as to render the remainder of these Regulations valid or enforceable, unless the whole object is thereby frustrated;
- (b) The legal construction of these Regulations shall not be affected by the clause headings which are for ease of reference only.
- (c) In these Regulations the use of the singular includes the plural and vice versa.

**2. Scope and Application**

2.1. The RFL has adopted these Blood Borne Disease Rules (“the Rules”) to impose controls on blood borne diseases in the sport of rugby league in order to protect the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport. This is done by way of a risk assessment, based on reputable medical opinion, for each individual case brought to the attention of the RFL.

2.2. These rules shall apply to all Participants.

2.3. Any Participant agrees:

- (a) to be bound by and abide strictly by these Rules;
- (b) to comply with the RFL Blood Borne Diseases Policies and Procedures and to acknowledge that a breach of such Policies and Procedures is a breach of the Operational Rules;
- (c) to provide all requested assistance to the RFL in the application and enforcement of these Rules;
- (d) to waive medical confidentiality only in so far as it is necessary to apply and enforce these Rules, including providing express consent to any medical practitioner to advise the RFL, the Person’s employer and any other medical practitioner of the Person’s medical status and/or history in order to protect the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport and in order to allow the RFL to apply and enforce the Rules;
- (e) to the processing of data, including sensitive and personal data, pursuant to the Data Protection Laws in order to protect the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport and in order to allow the RFL to apply and enforce the Rules;
- (f) To make him/herself available to undergo any necessary medical examination and or non-invasive test, including blood test, or sample collection, including blood sample collection;
- (g) To submit to the jurisdiction of the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal;

- (h) To submit to the jurisdiction of any Blood Borne Disease Appeal Tribunal.
- 2.4. Further to each Participant's obligation to comply with these Rules, it is the responsibility of each Participant to:
- (a) To be as fully aware of their medical condition as is reasonable in all of the circumstances;
  - (b) To advise the RFL Blood Borne Disease Officer (BBDO), their medical practitioner, their employer and their employing club's doctor of their medical condition as soon after reasonably that they are aware or ought reasonably to be aware that they have been diagnosed as having contracted and/or have contracted a blood borne disease;
  - (c) To ensure that they protect the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport.
- 2.5. These Rules shall only apply to Blood Borne Diseases, which shall include, but not be limited to, HIV and Hepatitis.
- 2.6. These rules shall come into effect on 6 June 2006 and shall not be retrospective but shall apply any Participant who at the date of the implementation of the Rules has been diagnosed as suffering from or who is suffering from a Blood Borne Disease and to any Participant who is diagnosed as suffering from or who is suffering from a Blood Borne Disease subsequent to the date of implementation.

**3. Notification and Testing of Medical Status**

- 3.1. The RFL shall appoint a Blood Borne Disease Officer ("BBDO"), who shall be the Welfare Director. The responsibility of the BBDO shall include receiving notification of a Participant suffering from a Blood Borne Disease and convening the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal and Blood Borne Appeal Tribunal.
- 3.2. It shall be the responsibility of the BBDO to ensure that the identity of the Participant and any medical information disclosed or produced in accordance with these Rules is kept confidential at all times.
- 3.3. A Participant aware or who ought reasonably to be aware that they have been diagnosed as having contracted and/or have contracted a blood borne disease shall notify the BBDO, club doctor or Club Official of their medical status as soon as reasonably practicable.
- 3.4. Where any medical practitioner, club doctor or Club Official is advised that a Participant has contracted a blood borne disease they shall notify the BBDO of this as soon as reasonably practicable.
- 3.5. Where anyone else subject to the Operational Rules is advised that a Participant has contracted a blood borne disease, and has received that Participant's consent to do so, they shall notify the BBDO of this as soon as reasonably practicable.
- 3.6. The BBDO may on notification request that that Participant undergo any necessary medical examination and or non-invasive test or sample collection in order to verify the diagnosis. Such examination or test shall be carried out by a suitably qualified medical practitioner appointed by the BBDO. The BBDO may also request that a Participant undergo any necessary medical examination and or non-invasive test or sample collection in order to verify the diagnosis if requested to do so by the Chair of either the Blood Borne

Disease Tribunal or Blood Borne Disease Appeal Tribunal at any point prior to the hearing taking place or during any adjournment of the hearing.

- 3.7. Where a Minor is either aged 16 or over or is considered by the medical professional carrying out the examination or test to be 'Gillick' competent, the Minor's consent shall be sufficient. Otherwise, a person with parental responsibility must give prior written consent.
- 3.8. In the event that consent to undergo a medical examination or test is not forthcoming or in the event that a Participant withdraws their consent to waive their right to confidentiality or in the event that a Participant notifies the BBDO that they are no longer willing to be bound by the Rules, then that Participant shall no longer be entitled to participate in any events, competitions, games or other activities organised, convened or authorised by the RFL or any of its member or affiliate organisations, wherever held.

#### **4. Notice of BBDO's Action**

- 4.1. Upon receipt of notification that a Participant is suffering from a Blood Borne Disease, the BBDO shall issue a Provisional Suspension to the Person from participating in events, competitions, games or other activities organised, convened or authorised by the RFL or any of its member or affiliate organisations, wherever held and it shall be misconduct to act in contravention of such Provisional Suspension or to assist a Participant contravene a Provisional Suspension.
- 4.2. In the event that the BBDO concludes that the evidence is sufficient to conclude that the Participant is not suffering from a Blood Borne Disease then the Person shall be notified as soon as reasonably practicable and shall subsequently be permitted to resume participating in events, competitions, games or other activities organised, convened or authorised by the RFL or any of its member or affiliate organisations, wherever held.
- 4.3. In the event that the BBDO concludes that the evidence is sufficient to conclude that the Participant is suffering or may be suffering from a Blood Borne Disease then the Participant shall be notified as soon as reasonably practicable and the BBDO shall convene a Blood Borne Disease Tribunal to carry out a risk assessment as to whether or not the Participant should be permitted to participate in the sport having regard to the need to protect the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport. In the meantime, and until the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal has issued its decision the Provisional Suspension shall continue.

#### **5. Blood Borne Disease Tribunal**

- 5.1. The BBDO shall appoint a Panel of persons suitable to be appointed to the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal or Blood Borne Disease Appeal Tribunal in any particular case. The panel shall be of sufficient size to allow the appointment of any individual tribunal within a reasonable period of time, having regard to the number of cases being notified to the BBDO and having regard to geography and the need to convene the panel as quickly as possible.
- 5.2. The RFL shall be entitled to provide reasonable compensation and reimbursement of expenses to Tribunal or Appeal Tribunal members.
- 5.3. The BBDO shall appoint a legally qualified Chair of the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal once the BBDO concludes that the evidence is sufficient to conclude that the Participant is suffering or may be suffering from a Blood Borne Disease. The Chair shall appoint an additional two members of the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal. Such members shall have sufficient legal, medical

or scientific experience to be competent to resolve the issues to be determined by the Tribunal.

- 5.4. The Chair and Members of the Tribunal shall have no prior involvement in the matter and in addition the RFL and the Respondent shall have a reasonable period in which to raise a legitimate objection to the identity of the Chair or any Member of the Tribunal.
- 5.5. The parties to the Tribunal are the RFL and the Respondent and each, at their own expense, shall be entitled to be represented at the Tribunal and/or to call expert evidence.
- 5.6. The Chair shall convene a preliminary meeting (which may take place by telephone and/or video link) in order to set a hearing date, in order to set a timetable for the exchange of any permitted expert evidence ahead of the hearing and in order to deal with any other relevant preliminary matters ahead of the hearing, provided that these are not matters that ought properly to be adjudicated upon at the hearing.

**6. Hearings before the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal**

- 6.1. The hearing shall be conducted on a private and confidential basis and at a venue provided by and at the cost of the RFL.
- 6.2. The procedure to be followed shall be at the discretion of the Chair provided always that the hearing is conducted in a fair manner with a reasonable opportunity for each party to present evidence, address the Tribunal and present his/her case.
- 6.3. The RFL shall have the burden of establishing that the Respondent is suffering from a Blood Borne Disease on the balance of probabilities.
- 6.4. If the Tribunal is satisfied that the RFL has established that the Respondent is suffering from a Blood Borne Disease, the Tribunal must then carry out a risk assessment to determine on balance whether the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport are prejudiced so as to justify imposing a Permanent or Ongoing Suspension on the Respondent from being entitled to participate in any events, competitions, games or other activities organised, convened or authorised by the RFL or any of its member or affiliate organisations, wherever held.
- 6.5. The Tribunal shall issue a Permanent Suspension where it is satisfied on balance that the Respondent's medical condition is such that the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport will always be prejudiced.
- 6.6. The Tribunal shall issue an Ongoing Suspension where it is satisfied on balance that the Respondent's medical condition is such that the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport are currently prejudiced but that the medical condition is such that they may not always be prejudiced. In that event the Respondent shall be entitled to apply to the BBDO after such Minimum Period of Ongoing Suspension has expired in order for the BBDO to reconvene a Blood Borne Disease Tribunal.
- 6.7. The Tribunal shall determine the risk assessment in private and by a majority vote and shall announce its decision in writing, dated and signed by the Chair of the Tribunal within 14 days of the end of the hearing. Such decision shall be kept confidential save to the extent that any Suspension needs to be publicised in order to give effect to the purpose behind the Rules.

- 6.8. It shall be Off Field Misconduct to act in contravention of a Provisional, Permanent or Ongoing Suspension or to assist a Person contravene a Provisional, Permanent or Ongoing Suspension.

**7. Blood Borne Disease Appeal Tribunal**

- 7.1. The decisions of the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal shall be subject to challenge by appeal to the Blood Borne Disease Appeal Tribunal. An appeal may be lodged by either the RFL or the Respondent. The decision of the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal shall remain in effect while under appeal unless the Chair of the Blood Borne Disease Appeal Tribunal orders otherwise at any time.
- 7.2. Any party who wishes to appeal a decision of the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal must lodge a written notice of appeal with the BBDO, specifying the grounds for appeal, within 14 days of receipt of the written reasoned decision of the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal that is being challenged on appeal.
- 7.3. The Blood Borne Disease Appeal Tribunal shall hear and determine all issues arising from any matter which is appealed anew without being bound in any way by the decision being appealed.
- 7.4. Within a reasonable time of being notified of an appeal, the BBDO shall appoint a legally qualified Chair of the Blood Borne Disease Appeal Tribunal. The Chair shall appoint an additional two members of the Blood Borne Disease Appeal Tribunal. Such members shall have sufficient legal, medical or scientific experience to be competent to resolve the issues to be determined by the Appeal Tribunal.
- 7.5. The Chair and Members of the Appeal Tribunal shall have no prior involvement in the matter and in addition the RFL and Respondent shall have a reasonable period in which to raise a legitimate objection to the identity of the Chair or any Member of the Appeal Tribunal.
- 7.6. The parties to the Appeal Tribunal are the RFL and the Respondent and each, at their own expense, shall be entitled to be represented at the Appeal Tribunal and/or to call expert evidence.
- 7.7. The Chair shall convene a preliminary meeting (which may take place by telephone and/or video link) in order to set an appeal hearing date, in order to set a timetable for the exchange of any permitted expert evidence ahead of the hearing and in order to deal with any other relevant preliminary matters ahead of the appeal hearing, provided that these are not matters that ought properly to be adjudicated upon at the appeal hearing.
- 7.8. The appeal hearing shall be conducted on a private and confidential basis and at a venue provided by and at the cost of the RFL.
- 7.9. The procedure to be followed shall be at the discretion of the Chair provided always that the hearing is conducted in a fair manner with a reasonable opportunity for each party to present evidence, address the Appeal Tribunal and present his/her case.
- 7.10. The RFL shall have the burden of establishing that the Respondent is suffering from a Blood Borne Disease on the balance of probabilities.
- 7.11. If the Appeal Tribunal is satisfied that the RFL has established that the Respondent is suffering from a Blood Borne Disease, the Appeal Tribunal must then carry out a risk assessment to determine on balance whether the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport are prejudiced so as to justify imposing or upholding a Permanent or Ongoing

Suspension on the Respondent from being entitled to participate in any events, competitions, games or other activities organised, convened or authorised by the RFL or any of its member or affiliate organisations, wherever held.

- 7.12. The Appeal Tribunal shall issue or uphold a Permanent Suspension where it is satisfied on balance that the Respondent's medical condition is such that the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport will always be prejudiced.
- 7.13. The Appeal Tribunal shall issue or uphold an Ongoing Suspension where it is satisfied on balance that the Respondent's medical condition is such that the rights and the health and safety of other participants in the sport are currently prejudiced but that the medical condition is such that they may not always be prejudiced. In that event the Respondent shall be entitled to apply to the BBDO after such Minimum Period of Ongoing Suspension has expired in order for the BBDO to reconvene a Blood Borne Disease Tribunal.
- 7.14. The Appeal Tribunal shall determine the risk assessment in private and by a majority vote and shall announce its decision in writing, dated and signed by the Chair of the Tribunal within 14 days of the end of the hearing. Such decision shall be kept confidential save to the extent that any Suspension needs to be publicised in order to give effect to the purpose behind the Rules.
- 7.15. The decision of the Appeal Tribunal shall be final and there shall be no further right of appeal. In the event that any further material evidence is disclosed to the BBDO in accordance with these Rules, the BBDO shall have the discretion to reconvene the Blood Borne Disease Tribunal as above.

## **8. Miscellaneous**

- 8.1. Any decision of the BBDO, Tribunal or Appeal Tribunal shall be recognised and respected by the RFL and any of its member or affiliate organisations and all those subject to the Operational Rules of the RFL.
- 8.2. Notice to any Participant shall be delivered by email to the most recently held email address by the RFL and such notice shall be deemed to have been received upon successful delivery.
- 8.3. Notice to the RFL or the BBDO shall be delivered by email to [laura.fairbank@rfl.co.uk](mailto:laura.fairbank@rfl.co.uk) and such notice shall be deemed to have been received upon successful delivery.
- 8.4. Notice to the Chair of any tribunal or appeals tribunal shall be delivered by email to the address provided by the Chair to the BBDO upon appointment and the BBDO shall be obliged to advise the RFL and the Respondent of the email address upon appointment. Such notice to the Chair shall be deemed to have been received upon successful delivery.

**APPENDICES | SECTION F8**

**BETTING AND RELATED  
ACTIVITY CODE OF CONDUCT  
FOR THE COMMUNITY GAME**

**SECTION F8 | BETTING AND RELATED ACTIVITY**



**CODE OF CONDUCT: BETTING AND RELATED ACTIVITY FOR THE COMMUNITY GAME**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 Every Person subject to the Operational Rules (“Person”) is subject to this Code of Conduct on Betting and Related Activity (the “**Betting Code**”) at all times and shall be deemed to have accepted this Betting Code and agreed to be bound by and to comply with its provisions and to abide by all decisions made under the Betting Code.
- 1.2 The RFL may from time to time supplement, amend or vary this Betting Code. Such changes shall be deemed to be effective and binding on each Person on the date of publication of the changes by the RFL.
- 1.3 **Interpretation and application:**
  - 1.3.1 For the purpose of this Betting Code, a Person acts “for reward” if he/she arranges or agrees that he/she or someone else will receive any financial or other benefit for such act, directly or indirectly, and “reward” shall be construed accordingly.
  - 1.3.2 Event means any matter on which a bet may be placed including but not limited to promotion, relegation, man of the match and scoring milestones.
  - 1.3.3 Match and Competition have the meaning set out in the definitions section of these Operational Rules except that they shall also include Matches where a Club plays against a team from a higher tier of competition (e.g. against a professional club in a Match in the Competition currently known as the Challenge Cup.
  - 1.3.4 For the avoidance of doubt Matches and Competitions involving only Clubs from tiers one, two and three are not covered by this Betting Code. This Betting Code shall also not apply to bets on outright competition markets (e.g. winner of the cup) on the competition currently known as the Challenge Cup.

**2 PURPOSE**

- 2.1 This Betting Code shall be interpreted and applied in the light of the following fundamental sporting imperatives:
  - 2.1.1 Sport is unique because it is a contest on a level playing-field, the outcome of which is to be determined solely by the respective merits of the sporting competitors on the day of the contest and therefore cannot be predicted but remains uncertain until the contest is completed.
  - 2.1.2 Public confidence in the authenticity and integrity of that contest is vital. If that confidence is undermined, then the very essence of sport, the unique characteristics that deliver its unique appeal, is shaken to the core. It is the determination to protect that essence of sport that has led the RFL to adopt this Betting Code.

- 2.1.3 Advancing technology and increasing popularity have led to a substantial increase in the amount, and the sophistication, of betting on sports events. The development of new betting products, including betting exchanges that allow people to bet on losing outcomes, as well as internet and phone accounts that allow people to place a bet at any time and from any place, even after a sports event has started, have all increased the potential for the development of corrupt betting practices. That, in turn, increases the risk that attempts will be made to involve the Persons in the sport in such practices. Even where that risk is more theoretical than practical, its consequence is to create a perception that the integrity of the sporting spectacle is under threat.
- 2.1.4 Furthermore, it is of the nature of this type of misconduct that it is carried out under cover and in secret. This creates very significant challenges for a sports governing body seeking to enforce rules of conduct, whose investigative powers are limited. As a consequence, it is necessary to empower the sports governing body to seek and share information with competent authorities and other relevant third parties, and to require Persons to cooperate fully with all investigations and requests for information.
- 2.1.5 The RFL is committed to taking every step in its power to prevent corrupt betting practices undermining the integrity of the game of rugby league, including any efforts to influence improperly the outcome or any other aspect of a Match. This Betting Code has been adopted in order to assist in achieving that objective and should be interpreted and applied accordingly.
- 2.1.6 The conduct prohibited under this Betting Code may also be a criminal offence and/or a breach of other applicable laws or regulations. Reference is made in particular to section 42 of the Gambling Act 2005, which makes it a criminal offence if a person “(a) cheats at gambling, or (b) does anything for the purpose of enabling or assisting another person to cheat at gambling”). This Betting Code is intended to supplement such laws and regulations with further codes of conduct for those involved in the game of rugby league. It is not intended, and may not be interpreted, construed or applied, to prejudice or undermine in any way the application of such laws and regulations. Persons must comply with all applicable laws and regulations at all times.

### 3 MISCONDUCT OFFENCES INVOLVING BETTING OR RELATED ACTIVITY

- 3.1 The following acts or omissions, if committed by or on behalf of a Person, directly or indirectly, shall amount to a breach by such Person of this Betting Code, and therefore shall constitute an offence of Misconduct under Section D.2 of the RFL Operational Rules Tiers 4-6 (the “**RFL Operational Rules**”):

#### 3.1.1 **Betting:**

- 3.1.1.1 Placing, accepting, laying or otherwise entering into any wager, bet or other form of financial speculation (a “**Bet**”) with any individual, company, organisation or other body in relation to the result, progress, conduct or any other aspect of any Match, Competition, Representative Match

or Event in which the Person is participating or in which the Person has any influence, either direct or indirect.

3.1.1.2 Soliciting, inducing, enticing, instructing, persuading, encouraging, facilitating or permitting any other to enter into a Bet for the Person's direct or indirect benefit in relation to the result, progress, conduct or any other aspect of any Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event.

3.1.1.3 Ensuring the occurrence of a particular incident in a Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event, which occurrence is to the Person's knowledge the subject of a Bet and for which he expects to receive or has received any reward (other than contractual payments or prize money and/or contracted payments under endorsement or sponsorship contracts).

**3.1.2 Corruption:**

3.1.2.1 Contriving, or being a party to any effort to contrive, the result, progress, conduct or any other aspect of any Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event.

3.1.2.2 Seeking or accepting or agreeing to accept any bribe or other reward to fix or to contrive in any way or otherwise to influence improperly the result, progress, conduct or any other aspect of any Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event.

3.1.2.3 Failing to perform to one's merits in any Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event, for reward.

3.1.2.4 Soliciting, inducing, enticing, persuading, encouraging or facilitating any Person to breach any of the foregoing provisions of this clause 3.1.2

**3.1.3 Misuse of privileged information**

3.1.3.1 Using in relation to Betting, or providing to any other person for use in relation to Betting, any information relating to any Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event(s) that the Person has in his possession by virtue of his position within the sport and that is not in the public domain or readily accessible by the public without unreasonable restriction, save in the proper performance of that Person's duties including but not limited to providing information to the Compliance Manager.

3.1.3.2 Providing information to any person for reward, before or during any Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event, regarding the competitors in the event, the conditions, tactical considerations or any other aspect of the event, unless such information is already in or will come into the public domain without unreasonable delay or is readily accessible by the public without unreasonable

restriction. For example, it shall not be a breach of this clause to provide such information as opinion to a journalist for immediate publication as part of an article or column in a newspaper.

3.1.3.3 Soliciting, inducing, enticing, persuading, encouraging or facilitating any Person to breach any of the foregoing provisions of this clause 3.1.3.

**3.1.4 General:**

3.1.4.1 Engaging in any other conduct (i.e. beyond that specified in clauses 3.1.1 to 3.1.3, above) that is corrupt or fraudulent, or creates an actual or apparent conflict of interest for the Person, or otherwise risks impairing public confidence in the integrity and/or the honest and orderly conduct of any Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event.

3.1.4.2 Providing or receiving any reward that could bring the Person or the game of rugby league into disrepute.

3.1.4.3 Failing to disclose to the RFL Compliance Manager without delay full details of any approaches or invitations received by the Person to engage in conduct that would amount to a breach of this Betting Code.

3.1.4.4 Failing to disclose to the RFL Compliance Manager without delay full details of any approaches or invitations of which the Person is aware that have been received by any other party to engage in conduct that would amount to a breach of this Betting Code.

3.1.4.5 Failing to cooperate with any investigation by the RFL Compliance Manager in relation to possible breaches of this Betting Code, including failure, without reasonable excuse (and subject to the right of objection set out at clause 4, below) to provide any information requested by the RFL Compliance Manager that is relevant to such investigation.

3.2 An attempt by a Person, or any agreement by a Person with any other person (whether or not also a Person), to act in breach of any provision of this Betting Code shall be treated for purposes of this Betting Code as if a breach of the relevant provision(s) had been committed, whether or not such attempt or agreement in fact resulted in such breach.

3.3 Each Person shall be held directly and personally responsible for any acts or omissions of the type described in clauses 3.1 and 3.2, above, committed by his coach, trainer, manager, agent, family member or other affiliate or associate of his, provided that the Person had knowledge of, or assisted, encouraged, aided, abetted, Match or up or was otherwise complicit in, such acts or omissions. In that event, the Person shall be treated as having committed such acts or omissions himself and shall be liable accordingly under this Betting Code.

- 3.4 The following are not relevant to the determination of a Misconduct Offence under clause 3.1 of this Betting Code (although they may be relevant to the issue of the sanction to be imposed under clause 4.2.3.2 (below) in the event that it is determined that an offence has been committed):
- 3.4.1 Whether or not the Person was participating in the specific Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event in question.
  - 3.4.2 The nature or outcome of any Bet in issue.
  - 3.4.3 The outcome of the Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event(s) on which such Bet was made.
  - 3.4.4 Whether or not the Person's efforts or performance (if any) in the Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event(s) in issue were (or could be expected to be) affected by the acts or omissions in question.
  - 3.4.5 Whether or not any of the results/outcomes in the Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event(s) in issue were (or could be expected to be) affected by the act or omissions in question.
- 3.5 It shall be a valid defence to a charge of breach of this Betting Code to prove that the alleged breach was committed due to the Person's honest and reasonable belief that there was a serious threat to the life or safety of himself or any member of his family.

#### **4 ENFORCEMENT**

- 4.1 A Person shall immediately report to the RFL Compliance Manager any incident, facts or matters (including, without limitation, unsolicited approaches by third parties) that may evidence a breach or attempted breach of, or inducement to breach, this Betting Code. Any failure to make such report may amount to a Misconduct Offence under clause 3.1.4.3 or 3.1.4.4, above.
- 4.2 Any allegation or suspicion of a breach of this Betting Code, whatever the source, shall be referred to the RFL Compliance Manager for investigation and possible charge in accordance with Section D of the RFL Operational Rules, as supplemented by this clause 4; provided that no action may be commenced for alleged breach of this Betting Code more than eight (8) years after the date that the breach allegedly occurred. Such investigation, and any consequent charge, will be governed by, and pursued in accordance with, the provisions of the RFL Operational Rules, as supplemented by this clause 4. The relevant provisions of the RFL Operational Rules include, without limitation:
- 4.2.1 The obligation on all Persons, to cooperate with any investigation conducted by the Compliance Manager, with any failure to cooperate

itself potentially constituting a separate and independent Misconduct Offence;

4.2.2 The right of the RFL Compliance Manager, to seek an interim suspension of the Person charged from any participation in the sport pending adjudication of the charge;

4.2.3 The provisions of Section D1 of the RFL Operational Rules in relation to the sanctions that may be imposed on a Person by a Disciplinary Committee in the event a charge is upheld, provided that:

4.2.3.1 in the event that a charge of breach of this Betting Code is upheld, the recommended maximum fine shall be the greater of (i) £10,000; and (ii) the amount of any profits, winnings or other reward received by the Person, directly or indirectly, as a result of such breach; and

4.2.3.2 in determining whether to impose a period of suspension from participation in one or more Match, Competition, Representative Match or Events or impose a period suspension from the Game of the RFL for a specified period, the Operational Rules Tribunal shall take into account all of the relevant circumstances, including (in the case of a charge under clause 3.1.1, above) treating it as an aggravating factor if the Person personally participated in the Match, Competition, Representative Match or Event in question.

### 4.3 **Demand for information:**

4.3.1 If the RFL Compliance Manager reasonably believes that a Person (or a third party whose actions may be imputed to the Person for this purpose) may have committed a breach of this Betting Code, the Compliance Manager may make a written demand to the Person (a “**Demand**”) to furnish to the Compliance Manager any information that is reasonably related to the alleged breach, including (without limitation) (a) copies of or access to all records relating to the alleged breach (such as telephone records, Internet service records, bank and other financial records and other records stored on computer hard drives and other information storage equipment); and/or (b) a written statement made by the Person, setting out in detail all of the facts and circumstances with respect to the alleged breach.

4.3.2 Subject only to the right to object to the Demand set out at clause 4.3.3, below, the Person shall furnish the information requested in the Demand within seven days of his receipt of the Demand, or by such other deadline as may be specified in the Demand.

4.3.3 If the Person wishes to object to the Demand, he must file a formal objection with the Compliance Manager by the specified response deadline, which objection must set out with specificity the nature and scope of and grounds for the objection. Failure without good reason to make such filing shall constitute an irrevocable waiver of any objection.

- 4.3.4 Any objection duly filed in accordance with clause 4.3.3, above, will be referred by the Compliance Manager, together with any comments that the Compliance Manager may wish to make with respect to the objection, to the Chairman of the Operational Rules Tribunal, who may resolve the objection himself or else may designate another person to resolve the objection. The Chairman or his designee may in his absolute discretion invite further submissions or hold a hearing prior to making his determination, or may simply determine the matter on the basis of the objection itself and the comments of the Compliance Manager, if any, with respect to that objection. If (and to the extent that) the Chairman or his designee determines that the Demand is fair and reasonably tailored to obtain evidence relevant to the alleged breach, and that it is consistent with applicable law, the Chairman or his designee shall direct the Person to produce all (or, if he believes the objection should be sustained to some degree, the remaining part) of the information specified in the Demand.
- 4.3.5 Subject to any ruling made by the Chairman of the Operational Rules Tribunal or his designee pursuant to clause 4.3.4, above, any failure by the Person to produce the information specified in the Demand shall have each of the following consequences, without prejudice to one another:
- 4.3.5.1 during any period in which the Person fails to produce such information, he shall be deemed ineligible to participate in and/or denied credentials for and access to Match, Competition, Representative Match or Events;
  - 4.3.5.2 the Operational Rules Tribunal shall be entitled to draw such adverse inference against the Person as the Tribunal shall reasonably determine; and
  - 4.3.5.3 such failure may be treated as a stand-alone offence under clause 3.1.4.5, above.
- 4.4 A Operational Rules Tribunal convened to consider a charge of breach of this Betting Code may request, at any time prior to issuing a final decision, and having first given the parties an opportunity to make any submissions on the matter, that an additional investigation be conducted into any matter reasonably related to the alleged breach. The Compliance Manager will conduct that investigation in accordance with the Chairman's request and the Person charged and all other Persons must cooperate with that investigation, in accordance with clause 4.2.1, above.
- 4.5 Where a Person is charged with breach of this Betting Code, and other relevant authorities are also conducting investigations or proceedings into the same or related matters, the Operational Rules Tribunal shall have discretion, where it is established to its satisfaction that clear prejudice would otherwise result, to stay the proceedings under this Betting Code pending the outcome of the investigations or proceedings being conducted by the other relevant authorities.

## **5 COOPERATION WITH OTHER COMPETENT AUTHORITIES AND THIRD PARTIES**

- 5.1 Where possible breaches of this Betting Code may also amount to or evidence infringements of other applicable laws or regulations, the RFL may conduct investigations in respect of such breaches in conjunction with, and/or may share information relating thereto with, the competent authorities, such

as the police, HM Revenue & Customs, the Serious Fraud Office, the National Criminal Intelligence Service the Gambling Commission and/or bookmakers and Betting operators, whether pursuant to formal information-sharing information agreements with such authorities or otherwise.

5.2 As part of any investigation into possible breaches of this Betting Code, the RFL may seek relevant information from other competent authorities and/or from any third party, including bookmakers and other Betting operators, whether pursuant to formal information-sharing agreements with such authorities or third parties, or otherwise. In accordance with clause 5.3, below, acceptance of this Betting Code shall constitute agreement by a Person to the disclosure of such information by the authority and/or third party to the RFL. Where necessary, the Person shall confirm such consent in writing to or for the benefit of the authority and/or third party. A failure to do so without reasonable excuse shall amount to a breach of this Betting Code, in accordance with clause 3.1.4.5, above.

5.3 Each Person specifically consents, pursuant to the Data Protection Laws and other relevant laws, as applicable, to the sharing of information relating to this Betting Code, including personal information relating to himself and his activities, both by the RFL with the competent authorities and relevant third parties (including without limitation any bookmaker or other Betting operator), and by the competent authorities and/or any relevant third parties (including without limitation any bookmaker or other Betting operator) with the RFL.

## **6 RESPONSIBILITY FOR BETTING INTEGRITY ISSUES**

6.1 The RFL shall designate one or more persons (the “**Compliance Manager**”) to bear special responsibility for betting issues arising in relation to Match, Competition, Representative Match or Events.

6.2 The responsibilities of the Compliance Manager shall include monitoring betting and related activity as it impacts upon the integrity of Matches, Competitions, Representative Matches or Events, and making recommendations to the RFL as to any action that may be necessary or appropriate to take to address the risks arising from that activity, including considering the practical implementation of this Betting Code and any necessary or appropriate amendments thereto.

6.3 The RFL shall have the power to apply the above rules at its own discretion accordingly and as appropriate in the individual circumstances.

*APPENDICES | SECTION F9*

# *ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES*

*SECTION F9 | ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES*



**ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES****1. INTRODUCTION AND UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES****1.1. Introduction**

These procedures and guidelines set out the process that will be followed and the sanctions that should be imposed in relation to any Misconduct. The On Field Sentencing Guidelines are intended to aid consistency and decision-making when applying sanctions for breaches of the Laws of the Game and/or RFL Operational Rules and should be read in addition to the RFL Operational Rules.

In the event of a conflict between these guidelines and the RFL Operational Rules, the Operational Rules take precedence.

Player is used throughout these On Field Sentencing Guidelines; however, for the avoidance of doubt, non-playing personnel can be charged under the On Field Sentencing Guidelines at the discretion of the Competition Officer.

**1.2. Underlying Principles**

- Rugby League is a hard, fast, contact sport.
- In a sport with high-speed collisions, there will always be injuries, and players take part with this knowledge.
- The disciplinary system is not intended to sanitise the sport; however, there is no place in the game for players who jeopardise the safety of others by intentional, dangerous or malicious acts.
- The disciplinary system must support and protect Match Officials.

**2. PENALTY NOTICES****2.1. Purpose / Introduction**

A Penalty Notice means where a Player is charged with On Field Misconduct, the exact sanction will be determined by a Player's previous record in accordance with 2.6.

A Player will be charged with On Field Misconduct following receipt of a Dismissal Report and any Citings whereby the Competition Officer determine such incidents merit a charge, save any incidents which are Reserved Cases, which will be dealt with in line with the Operational Rules.

The Competition Officer may not elect to issue a Penalty Notice and refer a matter to the Competition Disciplinary Panel where they deem appropriate.

**2.2. Process – General**

The RFL has the right to vary the processes set out below, including, but not limited to, Matches which take place over a bank holiday weekend or in later Rounds of the Season. The RFL will notify Clubs of any such variations.

**2.3. Process – Regular Season**

In relation to each round of League and Cup Matches, Penalty Notices for On-Field Misconduct that is charged will be issued on the Thursday following the round of Matches in question.

**2.4. Process – Last round of the Regular Season/Play-Offs/Cup Matches played consecutively**

In relation to each Match in the last round of each of the Regular Season and the Play-Off phase for each of those competitions, where applicable and where Cup matches are played on consecutive weekends, Penalty Notices for On Field Misconduct that are charged will be issued on the Monday following the round of Matches in question.

**2.5. Citing's**

If a Club wishes to bring any incidents of alleged violent On Field Misconduct, they must notify the Competition Officer by:

- a) no later than 12 pm on the Wednesday following the day on which the incident took place.

Citations should include:

- i. A brief description of the incident.
- ii. the players involved.
- iii. the precise time of the incident.
- iv. Unedited footage and other relevant information in relation to the incident, including statements.

For the avoidance of doubt, any non-violent acts or acts that occur unintentionally and/or during normal passage of play cannot be cited. The Competition Officer retains the ultimate discretion in interpreting whether a particular incident amounts to a violent offence.

**2.6. Penalty Notice Sanction**

The sanction for the offence contained within a Penalty Notice will be determined in accordance with the Sentencing Guidelines.

**2.6.1. If a Player has been found guilty of:**

- a) no offences within the preceding 12 months, they will receive the lowest range of the tariff sanction.
- b) one offence within the preceding 12 months, they will receive the middle range of the tariff sanction.
- c) two offences within the preceding 12 months, they will receive the highest range of the tariff sanction.

Should a player be charged with on field misconduct and have been found guilty of three offences within the preceding 12 months; their case will be referred to a Competition Discipline Panel.

An offence within the preceding 12 months will be from the date of the match from which a Penalty Notice was issued.

**2.7. Notice of Charge**

If a Player is charged with an Offence, they will receive a Notice of Charge via their Club, which will include:

- The Law(s) of the Game the Player is alleged to have breached.
- The details of the alleged Offence.
- The sanction in accordance with these guidelines.
- Details of how the Penalty Notice can be challenged.
- In the event of a challenged Penalty Notice, the date of the hearing, the evidence that would be relied upon and a summary of the Player's rights at that hearing.
- In the event of an automatic referral to the Operational Rules Tribunal, the date of the hearing, the evidence that would be relied upon and a summary of the Player's rights at that hearing.

**2.8. Multiple Offences**

In the event that a Player is charged with multiple Offences from the same Match, the Penalty Notice for the first Offence will be issued in line with section 2.6 of these guidelines. Any subsequent Penalty Notices for further Offences in the same Match will consider the first Offence as a relevant matter under 2.6.1(a).

The Player may challenge the Penalty Notices in relation to each Offence. If the Player challenges the Penalty Notice in the first Offence and is found not guilty, then the Penalty Notice for the second Offence will be amended as if the first offence did not take place (subject to the previous disciplinary record of the Player and section 2.6 of these guidelines).

If a Player is found guilty of multiple Offences, any suspensions should ordinarily be served consecutively unless otherwise directed by the Panel.

**2.9. Challenge**

Subject to the other provisions of this clause, a Player who has been issued with a Penalty Notice may challenge the Penalty Notice by informing the Competition Officer of their intention to do so by the deadline specified in the Charge Letter. Any such appeal shall be heard in accordance with Section 4 below.

If such an intention is not lodged with the RFL by the specified deadline, the Penalty Notice will be deemed to have been accepted, and the sanctions specified will be imposed.

**2.10. Sanction**

A Player who does not challenge the Penalty Notice will forfeit the right to any hearing.

**3. MISCONDUCT HEARINGS AND TRIBUNALS**

**3.1. Competition Discipline Panel – Composition and Process**

- Cases where a Player is not eligible for a Penalty Notice, or where the matter is deemed sufficiently serious, may be referred directly to the Competition Discipline Panel.
- The panel shall consist of members appointed by the Competition Management Group.
- The Panel will consider all evidence submitted, apply the On Field Sentencing Guidelines (Section F9), and issue sanctions accordingly.
- Hearings will normally be conducted by video conference but may, at the discretion of the Competition Officer, be held in person.
- A record of the hearing will be taken and retained only for as long as necessary.

**3.2 Operational Rules Tribunal – Reserved Cases**

- Cases which are deemed to be Reserved Cases will be dealt with in line with Section D.
- Where cases are referred to an Operational Rules Tribunal appointments for hearings will be made from the Operational Rules Panel.
- At the Tribunal, an independent chairperson and two independent side members will consider all the evidence, subject to the Sentencing Guidelines and the Operational Rules.
- The RFL will take a recording of the hearing, which will only be retained for as long as is necessary.

**3.3 Burden and Standard of Proof**

- The standard of proof shall be whether Misconduct has occurred to the reasonable satisfaction of the Panel or Tribunal, with due regard given to the seriousness of the allegation.
- This standard of proof is greater than a mere balance of probability but less than proof beyond a reasonable doubt.

**3.4 Submission of Evidence**

- Players are entitled to submit evidence, including witness statements, written evidence, and further footage (in a format of their choice), including photographs, of the incident for which they have been charged.
- Such evidence must be submitted to the Competition Officer by 12 pm on the day prior to the hearing.
- Recordings of other unrelated incidents shall not be permitted.

**3.5 Alternative Charges**

- For the avoidance of doubt, both the Competition Disciplinary Panel and the Operational Rules Tribunal may amend the offence a Player has been charged with, both in terms of sanction and description.

**3.6 Referral to Competitions Officer/Compliance Manager**

- If the Tribunal does not consider that it can reach a decision on the evidence before it, it may refer the incident to the Competition Officer/Compliance Manager for further investigation.

**4. CHALLENGES TO PENALTY NOTICES****4.1. Challenging a Penalty Notice – Submitting a Challenge**

A Player may challenge the imposition of a Penalty Notice by informing the Competition Officer by the time and date specified in the Charge Letter, in which case the matter shall be determined by the Competition Disciplinary Panel. A refundable deposit of £20 must be lodged when submitting a challenge to a Penalty Notice. If the challenge is successful, the deposit shall be returned. In the event that the challenge is unsuccessful, meaning a guilty verdict is reached, the Operational Rules Tribunal shall impose the fine as set out below.

Players can challenge a Penalty Notice on the following grounds only:

- a) Guilt; or
- b) Incorrect Offence by the Referee or Competition Officer.

The Player must confirm in writing at the time of notifying the Competition Officer that they wish to challenge the Penalty Notice and what the grounds for the challenge are. For the avoidance of doubt, the Player can only submit a challenge based on one of the above grounds.

**4.2. Order of Proceedings**

The chairperson will determine the order of proceedings, however usually:

- The chairperson will read the charge;
- The Player or their representative will explain the grounds for challenging the Penalty Notice;
- The evidence in relation to the incident will be specified.
- The Player or their representative will present the Player's case;
- The hearing will conclude and the panel will retire to determine a verdict which will be one of the following;
  - Not guilty
  - Guilty and the chairperson will confirm the sanction with reference to the Penalty Notice and these Guidelines, in particular section 4.3 and the hearing will conclude.

- Change the Offence to what was initially charged, the chairperson will confirm the sanction with reference to the Guidelines.

#### **4.3. Consequences of Challenges**

If the Player is unsuccessful on their ground of challenge, the Panel shall impose the sanction outlined in the Penalty Notice and shall impose a fine as set out in Section 5 and shall increase the suspension by an additional match. As an example, a Penalty Notice which specifies a one (1) Match suspension may be increased to a two (2) Match suspension. The Panel shall have discretion to consider the concept of totality when deciding to issue additional Matches in the event of multiple unsuccessful Penalty Notice challenges.

In the event that a Player is successful in challenging that the Offence was incorrect and they are Guilty of another Offence, the Player will receive the suspension they would have received had the correct Offence been issued in the Penalty Notice. For example, if the Player was originally charged with multiple punching and their previous record meant that the Penalty Notice specified a five (5) Match suspension (pursuant to 2.7.1) and they are successful in their challenge with the Operational Rules Tribunal finding that it is a single punch, the Player will receive a three (3) Match suspension. In the event of a successful challenge to a Penalty Notice no fine shall be imposed.

#### **4.4. Adjudications**

The Competition Disciplinary Panel's adjudications will:

- Summarise the reasons for the decision.
- Confirm the sanction (if any) handed down, including detailing the imposition of the one-match suspension increment if a Player has unsuccessfully challenged a Penalty Notice.

#### **4.5. Right of Appeal**

The respective Management Group, the Player or Club have a right of appeal subject to section D of the Operational Rules. Appeals must be lodged within 7 days of the hearing.

The only grounds for appeal are that the Competition Rules Tribunal:

- came to a decision to which no reasonable body could have come; or
- failed to act fairly in a procedural sense; or
- The sanction imposed was so excessive or lenient (in the case of the Management Group) as to be unreasonable.

Appeal hearings will be conducted by way of review and will not be 'de novo' hearings.

When submitting an appeal, a Player or Club must submit a deposit of £40 and must specify the grounds for the appeal. In the event that the appeal is successful, the deposit shall be returned.

**4.6. Appeal Hearing – Order of Proceedings**

The chairperson will determine the order of proceedings, however usually:

- The chairperson will read the charge;
- The Appellant or their representative will confirm the grounds for appeal and will make relevant submissions
- The respondent will be given the opportunity to respond or ask any questions in relation to the Appellant's submissions;
- The hearing will conclude, and the panel will retire to determine a verdict which will be one of the following;
  - a. dismiss the appeal;
  - b. quash a sanction or finding;
  - c. remit the matter for rehearing;
  - d. substitute an alternative finding or sanction;
  - e. reduce or increase the original sanction; or
  - f. make such orders as it considers appropriate

Fresh evidence shall be only presented to the Panel with its leave. Leave shall only be given if the evidence is both relevant and credible, and if it was not available at the time of the original hearing. Ordinarily leave will only be given for fresh evidence if it is set out and attached to the Notice of Appeal.

**5. CASES REFERRED DIRECTLY TO OPERATIONAL RULES TRIBUNAL**

The provisions in this Section 5 apply to cases where the Competition Officer has determined that the matter should be referred directly to an Operational Rules Tribunal.

**5.1. Order of Proceedings**

The chairperson will determine the order of proceedings; however, usually:

- The chairperson will read the charge;
- The Player, Club or their representative will:
  - admit the Offence
  - deny the Offence but admit Guilt for another Offence.
  - deny the Offence.
- The evidence in relation to the incident will be specified.
- The Player, Club or their representative will present the Player or Club's case;
- The hearing will conclude, and the panel will retire to determine a verdict which will be one of the following:
  - Not guilty
  - Guilty and the chairperson will confirm the sanction with reference to the Penalty Notice and these Guidelines, in particular section 4.3 and the hearing will conclude.
  - Change the Offence to what was initially charged, the chairperson will confirm the sanction with reference to the Guidelines.

**5.2. Normal Suspension Ranges – Guidelines Only**

Players and Clubs should be aware that the normal suspension ranges are guidelines only, and the Operational Rules Tribunal has the discretion to step outside of the normal ranges in the following two circumstances:

- If the Operational Rules Tribunal has previously advised the Player or Club that it will apply a higher sanction next time that Player or Club is found to have committed a Misconduct Offence; or
- If the Operational Rules Tribunal feels that in the light of the aggravating and mitigating factors present it is appropriate to step outside of the normal suspension range subject to section 5.3 of these guidelines and the imposition of any automatic one match suspension increment as a result of a Player challenging the imposition of a Penalty Notice.

**5.3. Aggravating and Mitigating Factors**

In determining the appropriate sanction, the Operational Rules Tribunal will take into account all relevant aggravating and mitigating factors (see below for a non-exhaustive list). For the avoidance of doubt the Operational Rules Tribunal shall apply appropriate weighting to any aggravating and mitigating factors when considering the relevant sanction, however it shall not be the case that each aggravating or mitigating factor invoked equates to a one match enhancement or reduction.

**5.3.1. Aggravating Factors**

**Previous record**  
**Violence**  
**Retaliation**  
**Injury caused**  
**Incident not part of play**  
**Other aggravating factors**

**5.3.1.1. Previous Disciplinary Record**

- Player or Club has a record of the same or a similar Offence in the past - should result in a higher penalty than would otherwise be the case.
- Player or Club has a disciplinary record for dissimilar Offences – not necessarily taken into account unless the record is such that it shows a general disregard for the safety and welfare of other Players.
- Players who regularly commit acts of foul play – should receive ever increasing suspensions which may lead to a period suspension i.e. a Player with a serious record may receive a substantially longer suspension than a Player with no record for an Offence of the same nature.

**5.3.1.2. Violence**

- No place for acts of intentional violence or thuggery.
- Includes head butting, vicious attacks with fists, intentional high tackles, attacks on a prone opponent, an assault on an opponent from behind, gouging.
- Unprovoked violent assaults punished severely, and period suspensions considered.

**5.3.1.3. Retaliation**

- When retaliation is calculated and/or intentional it is an aggravating factor.

**5.3.1.4. Injury caused**

- If the Misconduct has caused injury to an opponent, this may result in a higher penalty than if no injury had occurred.
- For the avoidance of doubt, if an incident has caused a Player to receive a concussive injury, the Operational Rules Tribunal should consider it as an aggravating factor.

- The Operational Rules Tribunal may consider the length of time an injured opponent is likely to be out of the game when passing sentence.

**5.3.1.5. Incident not part of play**

- Where an incident is not part of play, i.e., off the ball or in back play then this may be an aggravating factor.

**5.3.2. Mitigating Factors**

**Previous good record**

**Provocation**

**Technique or fitness in some cases**

**Genuine remorse**

**Other mitigating factors**

NB: the fact that no injury was caused is not usually a mitigating factor.

Mitigating factors are not ordinarily sufficient to go below the minimum of the range of suspensions of the charge the Player is found guilty of, other than in truly exceptional circumstances.

**5.3.2.1. Previous Good Disciplinary Record**

- Where a Player or Club has a good previous record, this may be treated as a mitigating factor.
- Where a Player or Club has a previous record but has not committed a Similar Offence for a period of at least five years, their previous record may be discounted.

**5.3.2.2. Provocation**

- An immediate reaction to foul play by an opponent may be a mitigating factor, as it may be seen as self-defence.
- Due consideration must be given to the distinction between self-defence, provocation, and retaliation.

**5.3.2.3. Technique or Fitness (*in some cases*)**

- A Player who does not have the appropriate technique or fitness levels may be a danger to other Players.

**5.3.2.4. Genuine Remorse**

- Genuine remorse for the Offence and formal apologies to the opponent may be mitigating pleas.

**5.3.2.5. Dismissal**

- The Operational Rules Tribunal, when sanctioning a Player, may consider whether that Player was dismissed from the field and the time of dismissal.

**5.3.2.6. Other Mitigating Factors**

- Credit will not be given for a guilty plea at the appeal stage if the charge was contested at first instance.

**5.4. Fines**

**5.4.1 Player Fines**

5.4.1.1 Where a Player is participating in an Open Age Competition, the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal may impose a fine in addition to any suspension, irrespective of the Player's age, in accordance with the following maximum levels:

- Tier 3 Adult Competitions: up to £20 per match suspension
- Tier 4 Adult Competitions: up to £10 per match suspension

5.4.2.1 Where a Player is participating in a Youth or Junior Competition (Under 18), no fine shall be imposed on the Player personally. Where appropriate, the Tribunal may impose a fine on the Team in accordance with the Competition Rules.

5.4.3.2 Fines must be paid before the Player is eligible to return to play, and in any event within 28 days of the decision, unless otherwise directed.

**5.4.2 Team Fines**

5.4.2.1 Where a Team, Spectator or Club Official commits an Offence, the Competition Disciplinary Tribunal may impose a fine in accordance with the Team Fines Table set out below.

The Tribunal may impose a fine within the stated range, taking into account:

- the seriousness of the incident
- any aggravating or mitigating factors
- the Club's previous record
- the steps taken by the Club to prevent or address the behaviour

5.4.2.2 If the Tribunal imposes a fine outside the stated range, it must provide written reasons for doing so.

**5.5. Adjudications**

The Operational Rules Tribunal's adjudications will:

- Be published in full;
- Include all aggravating and/or mitigating factors taken into consideration;
- Give clear and full reasons for the decision;

- Summarise the cases of the Competitions Officer and Player or Club respectively.
- Confirm the sanction (if any) handed down, including all aggravating and/or mitigating factors taken into consideration;
- Explain any deviation from the On-Field Sentencing Guidelines.
- Give clear and full reasons for the decision.

#### **5.6. Right of Appeal**

Both the Player or Club have a right of appeal subject to section D of the Operational Rules.

Appeals must be lodged within 7 days of the hearing

The only grounds for appeal are that the Operational Rules Tribunal:

- came to a decision to which no reasonable body could have come; or
- made an error of law in reaching its decision; or
- failed to act fairly in a procedural sense; or
- the sanction imposed was so excessive or lenient as to be unreasonable.

Appeal hearings will be conducted by way of review and will not be 'de novo' hearings.

When submitting an appeal, a Player or Club must submit a refundable deposit of £40 and must specify the grounds for the appeal. In the event that the appeal is successful, the deposit shall be returned.

Appeals are to be conducted in accordance with the procedure specified in section 4.6.

#### **5.7. Appeal Hearing – Order of Proceedings**

The chairperson will determine the order of proceedings, usually:

- The chairperson will read the charge;
- The Appellant or their representative will confirm the grounds for appeal and will make relevant submissions
- The respondent will be given the opportunity to respond or ask any questions in relation to the Appellant's submissions;
- The hearing will conclude, and the panel will retire to determine a verdict which will be one of the following;
  - a. dismiss the appeal;
  - b. quash a sanction or finding;

---

**ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES**

- c. remit the matter for rehearing;
- a. substitute an alternative finding or sanction;
- b. reduce or increase the original sanction; or
- c. make such orders as it considers appropriate

Fresh evidence shall be only presented to the Panel with its leave. Leave shall only be given if the evidence is both relevant and credible, and if it was not available at the time of the original hearing. Ordinarily, leave will only be given for fresh evidence if it is set out and attached to the Notice of Appeal.

## ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES

The table below references 'Warning / Advice', which means that the offence will be recorded on the Player's record, but rather than suspending, the emphasis will be on advising the Player how to avoid a similar offence occurring in the future (such advice might be delivered by the Club).

Where there is a reference to 8+ in the table below, the Competition Disciplinary Panel shall have the discretion to impose either a ban for a number of matches or a term of suspension (i.e., a suspension that will run until a stated date).

Law No	Charge	Recommended Ranges – Depending on the Fixture			Guideline Description
		Under 11 – Under 14	Under 15 – Under 18	Open age (irrespective of the age of the player)	
<b>15.1(a)</b>	<b>Trips, kicks or strikes another player</b>				
	<b>Trips</b>	SOS - 2	SOS - 2	1 - 3	Intentional tripping
	<b>Kicks</b>	1 - 3	2 - 4	3 - 5	Kicking – makes contact not with the head
		3 – 5	4 – 6	4 - 6	Kicking – makes contact with the head
		4 - 6	5 - 7	7 - 9	Kicking – sustained and/or violent
		SOS - 2	SOS - 2	1 – 3	Trampling
		1 – 3	2 – 4	3 - 5	Stamping
	<b>Strikes</b>	SOS – 2	1 – 3	2 – 4	Strikes with hand, arm, elbow or shoulder – ball carrier
		SOS – 2	1 – 3	2 – 4	Strikes with hand, arm, elbow, or shoulder – tackling player
		1 – 3	2 – 4	3 – 5	Strikes with hand, arm, elbow, or shoulder – off the ball
	<b>Strikes – knee</b>	SOS – 2	1 – 3	2 – 4	Raising knee in tackle
	<b>Strikes - Head Butting</b>	1 - 3	2 - 4	3 - 5	Head butting – makes contact not with head
		3 - 5	4 - 6	4 - 6	Head butting – makes contact with head
		4 - 6	5 - 7	7 - 9	Head butting - sustained and/or violent
	<b>Strikes Punching</b>	1 - 3	2 - 4	3 - 5	Punching– makes contact not with the head
		3 – 5	4 – 6	4 - 6	Punching –makes contact with the head

**ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES**

		4 - 6	5 - 7	7 - 9	Punching – sustained and/ or violent
	<b>Running In</b>	SOS – 2	SOS – 2	SOS – 2	Running In
<b>15.1(b)</b>	<b>When tackling or attempting to tackle make contact with the head or neck of an opponent</b>				
		SOS – 2	1 – 3	1 – 3	Contact to head or neck
<b>15.1(c)</b>	<b>Drops knees first on an opponent on the ground</b>				
		SOS – 2	1 – 3	1 – 3	Drops Knees
<b>15.1(d)</b>	<b>Uses a dangerous throw</b>				
		SOS - 2	2 - 4	2 - 4	Dangerous Throw
		1 – 3	3 – 5	4 - 6	Spear Tackle
<b>15.1(e)</b>	<b>Intentionally and/or continuously breaks the Laws of the Game</b>				
		SOS	SOS	SOS	
<b>15.1(f)</b>	<b>Uses offensive or obscene language</b>				
		SOS - 2	SOS - 2	SOS - 2	Foul and/or abusive language
		3 – 5 (REFER To RFL)	4 – 6 (REFER To RFL)	5 – 7 (REFER To RFL)	Verbal abuse based on race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, national or ethnic origin or any other form of Unacceptable Language and/or Behaviour
<b>15.1(g)</b>	<b>Disputes a decision of the Referee or Touch Judge</b>				
		SOS - 2	SOS – 2	SOS – 2	Disputes decision
		1 - 3	2 – 4	3 - 5	Disputes using any foul and abusive or aggressive language and/or body language
		1 – 3	2 – 4	3 – 5	Questioning the integrity of a Match Official
<b>15.1(h)</b>	<b>Re-enters the field of play without the permission of the Referee or Touch Judge</b>				
		SOS - 2	SOS - 2	1 - 3	
<b>15.1(i)</b>	<b>Behaves in any way contrary to the true spirit of the game (includes Dangerous Contact*)</b>				
		SOS – 2	SOS – 2	1 - 3	Attempted strike
		1 – 3	2 – 4	3 – 5	Makes unnecessary contact with a Player who is or may be injured.
		2 – 4	3 – 5	4 - 6	Gouging
		2 – 4	3 – 5	4 - 6	Biting
		2 – 4	3 – 5	4 - 6	Spitting
		2 – 4	3 – 5	4 - 6	Genitals – attacking
		2 – 4	3 – 5	4 - 6	Raking with studs
		2 - 4	4 - 6	6 - 8	Threatening words or actions towards match officials

**ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES**

		SOS – 2	SOS – 2	1 - 3	Unnecessary contact with a match official (e.g. placing hand on arm to attract attention)
		3 - 5	4 - 6	5 - 7	Intentional contact with a match official (e.g. pushing/shoving)
		Sine Die (REFER TO RFL)	Sine Die (REFER TO RFL)	Sine Die (REFER TO RFL)	Violent and aggressive physical assault of match officials (e.g. punching)
		Discretion of the Competition Disciplinary Panel	Discretion of the Competition Disciplinary Panel	Discretion of the Competition Disciplinary Panel	Other contrary behaviour
<b>15.1(j)</b>	<b>Intentional obstruction of opponent not in possession</b>				
		SOS	SOS	SOS	
<b>15.1(k)</b>	<b>Shoulder Charge</b>				
		SOS – 2	SOS – 2	1 - 3	Indirect or secondary contact with the head of an attacking player.
		SOS - 2	1 – 3	2 - 4	Direct initial contact with the head of an attacking player.
		SOS - 2	1 – 3	2 - 4	Other dangerous Shoulder Charge

\*Dangerous Contact includes:

- Applying forceful and unnecessary pressure to the head, neck, or spinal column of a tackled player so as to keep that player at a disadvantage in or after a tackle.
- Forcefully and unnecessarily grasping (or jerking or pinning or twisting) the head or neck of a tackled player.
- Contact with the legs (either direct or indirect) or using a technique which is likely to make dangerous contact (either direct or indirect) with the supporting leg(s) of an attacking player who is held in a vulnerable position, in a way that involves an unacceptable risk of injury.
- Forcefully twisting, bending, or otherwise applying pressure to the limb(s) of an opposing player in a way that involves an unacceptable risk of injury.
- Making contact with the leg(s) of an attacking player who has kicked the ball in a way that involves an unacceptable risk of injury.
- Endangering the safety of an opponent by making contact to the lower limb(s) of the opponent in an uncontrolled manner in a situation where there is no genuine attempt to make a tackle, and which involves an unacceptable risk of injury to the opponent.

**ON FIELD SENTENCING GUIDELINES**

<b>Recommended Ranges – Depending on the Fixture</b>					
<b>Team Fines</b>					
		<b>Under 11 – Under 14</b>	<b>Under 15 – Under 18</b>	<b>Open age (irrespective of the age of player)</b>	
	Brawling	£100.00 plus discretionary suspended fine	£100.00 plus discretionary suspended fine	£100.00 plus discretionary suspended fine	
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Brawl	£200.00 plus discretionary suspended fine	£200.00 plus discretionary suspended fine	£200.00 plus discretionary suspended fine	
	3 <sup>rd</sup> and subsequent Brawl	£200–£500, depending on aggravating/mitigating factors	£200–£500, depending on aggravating/mitigating factors	£200–£500, depending on aggravating/mitigating factors	
	Abandonment of game	£100–£500, depending on responsibility and circumstances	£100–£500, depending on responsibility and circumstances	£100–£500, depending on responsibility and circumstances	
<b>Spectator or Club officials not listed on the team sheet entering the field of play</b>					
		£50–£300, and consideration to Operational Rule D5:10:1	£50–£300, and consideration to Operational Rule D5:10:1	£50–£300, and consideration to Operational Rule D5:10:1	
<b>Spectator or Club official's usage of foul and abusive language</b>					
		£50–£300, and consideration to Operational Rule D5:10:1	£50–£300, and consideration to Operational Rule D5:10:1	£50–£300, and consideration to Operational Rule D5:10:1	
<b>Breach of the Respect Code of Conduct</b>					
		£50–£250, depending on severity and previous record	£50–£250, depending on severity and previous record	£50–£250, depending on severity and previous record	
<b>Unacceptable Language and/or Behaviour</b>					
		Refer to the RFL	Refer to the RFL	Refer to the RFL	

*APPENDICES | SECTION F10*

**PRIMARY  
RUGBY LEAGUE RULES**

**SECTION F10 | PRIMARY RUGBY LEAGUE RULES**



### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Purpose of this Document

This document sets out the full participation, registration, eligibility, coaching, safeguarding, fixture, and playing rules for Primary Rugby League (U6–U11) for the 2026 season. It brings together all expectations for clubs, coaches, volunteers, festival hosts, and parents into one clear, nationally consistent rulebook.

#### 1.2. Why Primary Rugby League Has Its Own Rules

Primary Rugby League is a developmental, non-competitive environment designed specifically for children aged 6 to 11. The needs of this age group are fundamentally different from those of older players, and therefore the standard RFL Operational Rules, which govern competitive Rugby League, are not appropriate for this stage of the game.

To ensure that Primary Rugby League remains:

- Child centred
- Safe
- Inclusive
- Development focused
- Enjoyable for all participants

A separate set of rules is required.

The RFL (Rugby Football League) have become the first governing body and sport in the UK to partner with national campaign Play Their Way to transform the way children and young people are coached and take part in rugby league.

The Play Their Way campaign was launched in 2023 to transform the way children and young people are coached by prioritising their rights, needs and enjoyment in a 'child-first' approach.

#### 1.3. Relationship to the RFL Operational Rules

Primary Rugby League sits outside the RFL Operational Rules because:

- There are no leagues, league tables, or competition points.
- There are no disciplinary sanctions, sin bins, or match official reports.
- Fixtures are festival-based and flexible.
- Player movement follows simple, development-led rules.
- Coaches may be on the field at younger age groups.
- Coaches often officiate matches.
- The Safe Play Code replaces the full contact laws used in competitive Rugby League.
- Eligibility checks at U9–U11 use ID Cards.

However, Primary Rugby League remains fully aligned with the RFL's wider governance framework, including:

- Safeguarding
- DBS requirements
- Coaching qualifications
- Concussion protocols

- Codes of Conduct
- GameDay registration
- Player Dispensation Policy
- Respect and Tackle It policies

These requirements apply equally to all clubs and volunteers involved in Primary Rugby League activity.

### 1.4. **Status of this Document**

This document is the authoritative source for all Primary Rugby League activity in 2026. It replaces any previous local variations, informal practices, or historic interpretations. All clubs, coaches, volunteers, and festival hosts must follow the rules and guidance set out here.

### 1.5. **Annual Review**

Primary Rugby League rules are reviewed annually to ensure they remain developmentally appropriate, safe, and aligned with best practice. Any updates will be communicated to clubs before the start of each season. The RFL reserves the right to amend these rules during the season where required for safeguarding, welfare, or legal reasons.

### 1.6. **How to Use This Document**

These Primary Rugby League Rules are organised into clear sections so that clubs, coaches, volunteers, and festival hosts can quickly find the information they need. The document is structured as follows:

- Introduction & Purpose
- Registration & Eligibility
- Coaching Requirements
- Safeguarding & Welfare Requirements
- Fixtures, Festivals & Match Administration
- Cubs/Tots Activity
- Safe Play Code
- Under-7 Rules
- Under-8 Rules
- Under-9 Rules
- Under-10 Rules
- Under-11 Rules

## 2. **Registration & Eligibility**

### 2.1 **General Requirements**

All Players must be registered on GameDay before taking part in any training, festivals, matches, or club activities. Registration ensures compliance with safeguarding, insurance, and welfare requirements.

### 2.2 **Registration System**

Clubs must ensure that all Players are correctly registered on GameDay with accurate personal details, including date of birth, school year, and emergency contact information. Only registered Players may participate in Primary Rugby League activity.

**2.3 Age Ranges**

- 2.3.1 Primary Rugby League is open to children in academic Years 1 to 6.
- 2.3.2 Mixed-gender Rugby League is permitted up to and including Under-11s.
- 2.3.3 Each team's age band is determined at the start of the season and remains fixed for the full season, even if matches are played after children move into the next school year.

Age group	School Year	True age range
Under 6's	Year 1	1.09.19 - 31.08.20
Under 7's	Year 2	1.09.18 - 31.08.19
Under 8's	Year 3	1.09.17 – 31.08.18
Under 9's	Year 4	1.09.16 - 31.08.17
Under 10's	Year 5	1.09.15 - 31.08.16
Under 11s	Year 6	1.09.14 - 31.08.15

- 2.3.4 Players must play within their designated age group, based on their school year and date of birth.
- 2.3.5 **Flexibility at U6–U8 (Tag Rugby)**  
U6s may participate with U7s, and U7s may participate with U8s where this supports inclusion, team numbers, or festival delivery.

The RFL's strong preference is that children play within their true age group, and any movement between U6–U8 should be used sparingly and only for practical reasons, not selection or competitive advantage.

For the avoidance of doubt, flexibility between U6–U8 applies only within the non-contact Primary Rugby League environment; it does not permit players to move together into a contact age group, and U7 players who participate with U8s in one season must return to their true age group the following season and will not be eligible to move into U9s and full contact.

**2.3.6 Registration to the Club and Age Group**

At Primary Rugby League age groups, players register to the Club and to the age group, not to an individual team. Coaches are responsible for organising players within that age group and may move children between teams to support inclusion, development, and playing numbers.

Movement between teams within the same age group does not require a transfer and must not be used for selection, competitive advantage, or the creation of "A/B teams".

**2.4 Playing Up (U9–U11 Only)**

From Under 9s upward, players may play up one age group if:

- They fall within the permitted extra age range
- Parents/carers agree
- Clubs/coaches agree
- The arrangement supports the child's development and well-being

**2.5 Playing Down (Not Permitted)**

Players must not play down into a younger age group under any circumstances.

The only exception is through the formal dispensation process, which is available [HERE](#).

**2.6 ID Cards (U9–U11)**

ID Cards consist of the player's GameDay profile and photograph. They must be available on request at festivals and fixtures.

ID cards are not required for the U6 – U8 age groups. Although players must still register as per 2.2.

**2.7 Transfer to another Club**

In line with the RFL Operational Rules, a maximum of three incoming transfers per age group is permitted within a season. This limit is designed to support balanced team numbers and prevent unnecessary accumulation of players. The Management Group may approve additional incoming transfers for an age group to support player welfare and team viability.

**2.8 Responsibility for Compliance**

Clubs are responsible for ensuring that all registration and eligibility rules are followed. Coaches and team managers must check that all players are correctly registered before any activity begins.

**3. Coaching Requirements**

All Primary Rugby League activity must be led by a Level 1 Licensed Coach. Volunteers and Game Coaches may support delivery but cannot lead activity independently. A Level 1 Licensed Coach must be present and responsible for all training, festivals, and matches.

**3.1 Minimum Coaching Standards**

Every team participating in Primary Rugby League must be led by a minimum Level 1 Licensed Coach. A Level 1 Licensed Coach is an individual who has completed the RFL Level 1 Coaching Qualification, holds a valid Enhanced DBS, has completed the Safeguarding and Protecting Children (SPC) course, and has completed the Primary Coach Confident online course. Coaches must maintain their licence in line with RFL requirements and may not coach or assist with any Primary Rugby League activity until all elements of the licence are in place.

For U6–U8 (Tag Rugby League), clubs may also use volunteers who have completed the Introduction to Tag Rugby League course to support delivery. These volunteers may assist with coaching and festival activity under the supervision and direction of a Level 1 Licensed Coach. They are not permitted to lead activity independently.

To ensure safe and effective delivery, clubs must maintain appropriate adult-to-child ratios at all Primary Rugby League sessions. As a minimum standard, there must be one adult to six children for ages 4–8, and one adult to eight children for ages 9–12, with at least one Level 1 Licensed Coach present at all times. Where younger age groups or players with additional needs are involved, clubs should increase staffing levels to ensure the activity remains safe, well-managed, and developmentally appropriate. Volunteers and Game Coaches may count towards supervision ratios, but only Level 1 Licensed Coaches count towards coaching leadership requirements.

Game Coaches are volunteers who support the management of games and festivals. They do not require formal coaching qualifications but must operate under the supervision of a Level 1 Licensed Coach and must not lead activity independently. Game Coaches must have a basic understanding of the age-group rules and the Safe Play Code.

**3.2 Coach Registration**

All coaches must be registered on GameDay. This ensures compliance with safeguarding, insurance, and governance requirements.

**3.3 Coaches' Code of Conduct**

Coaches must:

- Prioritise player safety and wellbeing
- Promote enjoyment, learning, and inclusion
- Model respectful behaviour at all times
- Support match officials and festival hosts
- Ensure all players receive equal playing opportunities

Coaches must not:

- Prioritise winning
- Encourage aggressive or unsafe play
- Use negative, intimidating, or punitive coaching methods

**3.4 Coach Presence on the Field**

At younger age groups, coaches may be permitted on the field to support learning and guide players. The specific rules for coach involvement are set out in the age group playing rules.

**3.5 Training Sessions**

Training sessions must:

- Be planned and purposeful
- Include appropriate warm-ups and cool-downs
- Follow the Safe Play Code
- Use age appropriate equipment
- Use age appropriate games and activities
- Ensure all players are actively involved
- Be fun

**3.6 Managing Playing Time**

Coaches must ensure that all players receive fair and meaningful playing time at festivals and matches. No child should be left out or marginalised. Age group playing rules stipulate playing times.

**3.7 Communication with Parents and Carers**

Coaches should maintain positive, respectful communication with parents and carers, ensuring they understand:

- The purpose and spirit of Primary Rugby League
- The non-competitive nature of the programme
- Expectations around behaviour and support
- Any relevant safety or welfare information

3.8 **Responsibility for Compliance**

Coaches are responsible for ensuring that all coaching activity complies with:

- These Primary Rugby League Rules
- The Safe Play Code
- RFL safeguarding and welfare policies
- Club policies and procedures
- RESPECT Code of Conduct

4. **Safeguarding & Welfare Requirements**

4.1 Commitment to Safeguarding is central to all Primary Rugby League activity. Every club, coach, volunteer, parent, and festival host shares responsibility for ensuring that children are safe, supported, and treated with respect at all times.

4.2 Safeguarding Standards All Primary Rugby League activity must comply with:

- [The RFL Safeguarding Policy](#)
- The RFL Code of Conduct
- The RFL Anti-Bullying Policy
- The RFL Social Media and Communications Guidance
- All relevant legislation and best practice guidance

These standards apply equally to training, festivals, matches, club events, and online communication.

4.3 **DBS Requirements**

Any adult working with or around children in a coaching, team manager, first aider, or regular volunteer role must hold a valid Enhanced DBS with the appropriate workforce category.

No adult may be involved in Primary Rugby League activity until their DBS status is confirmed.

4.4 **Safeguarding Training**

All coaches and volunteers must complete the required safeguarding training and keep it up to date. Clubs are responsible for ensuring that all relevant individuals complete refresher training when required.

4.5 **Club Welfare Officer (CWO)**

Every club must have at least one trained and active Club Welfare Officer who:

- Acts as the first point of contact for safeguarding concerns
- Supports coaches and volunteers
- Ensures compliance with RFL safeguarding standards
- Maintains accurate safeguarding records

The CWO must be visible, accessible, and known to parents and volunteers.

4.6 **Reporting Concerns**

Any safeguarding concern — no matter how small — must be reported immediately to:

- The Club Welfare Officer
- The RFL Safeguarding Team (where appropriate)

Concerns must never be ignored, dismissed, or handled informally.

4.7 **Supervision & Ratios**

Clubs must ensure appropriate adult to child ratios at all training sessions, festivals, and matches. Children must never be left unsupervised.

4.8 **Photography & Video**

Clubs must follow the [RFL's photography and video guidance](#). This includes:

- Gaining appropriate consent
- Avoiding images that identify children individually
- Ensuring images are used safely and appropriately

Festival hosts must communicate their photography policy clearly to all attending clubs.

4.9 **Changing Rooms & Toilets**

Adults must not change or shower with children. Clubs must follow the RFL's guidance on [supervising changing areas](#), ensuring privacy, safety, and appropriate boundaries.

4.10 **First Aid & Medical Welfare**

Every team must have access to a trained first aider and an appropriate first aid kit. Festival hosts must ensure that first aid provision is available throughout the event.

4.11 **Concussion & Head Injuries**

All concussion incidents must be managed in line with the RFL's concussion protocols. Any child suspected of having a concussion must be removed from play immediately and must not return until medically cleared.

4.12 **Behaviour & Conduct**

All adults must model positive behaviour. This includes:

- Respecting match officials/coaches
- Supporting all children, not just their own team
- Avoiding aggressive or confrontational behaviour
- Encouraging enjoyment, effort, and teamwork

Poor behaviour from adults will not be tolerated and may result in removal from the activity.

4.13 **Online Conduct**

All communication with children must be appropriate, transparent, and in line with RFL guidance. Coaches must not communicate privately with children via personal messaging apps or social media.

5. **Fixtures, Festivals & Match Administration**

5.1 **Purpose of Fixtures and Festivals**

Primary Rugby League fixtures and festivals exist to provide children with enjoyable, developmentally appropriate playing opportunities. They are not competitive events and must be delivered in a way that prioritises safety, inclusion, and fun.

5.2 **Fixture Structure**

5.2.1 Under 6–8 (Tag Rugby)

Under 6 to Under 8 fixtures are delivered through Tag Rugby, using small sided games in localised multiteam activity formats (sometimes referred to as “festivals,” though terminology may be updated). Clubs are grouped geographically to reduce travel while still allowing occasional cross area fixtures, with teams rotating across short games, typically three 10-minute matches per session—and hosting responsibilities shared between clubs every few weeks. The purpose of this format is to provide a fun, safe introduction to Rugby League with maximum ball in hand time, high engagement, and a strong focus on enjoyment and movement skills. Whilst reducing time and travel requirements at younger ages.

Teams will be allocated groups and venues by the league, these will be confirmed closer to the season when a more accurate gauge of playing numbers can be established to ensure a good number of children attend each venue.

5.2.2 Under 9

Under 9 fixtures continue to use activity based, multiteam formats, but with a wider range of opponents than at U6–U8. Teams take part in short, rotated games against clubs from a broader geographical area—for example, Wigan teams playing Warrington teams, or Wakefield teams playing Leeds teams—while still operating without league tables or rankings. This structure provides a smooth transition from purely local activity to slightly broader competition, maintaining the core ethos of fun, inclusion, and development.

Teams will be allocated groups and venues by the league, these will be confirmed closer to the season when a more accurate gauge of playing numbers can be established to ensure a good number of children attend each venue.

5.2.3 Under 10–11

Under 10 and Under 11 fixtures move into a traditional home and away format, with fixtures scheduled by the league and delivered in a development focused, non-competitive manner. Games follow clear rules, safeguarding expectations, and behavioural standards, providing players and clubs with a structured environment that prepares them for entry into Youth & Junior competitions (U12+) while ensuring that enjoyment, respect, and player development remain central.

5.3 **Festival Hosting Requirements**

Festival hosts must ensure:

- A safe, well organised environment
- Adequate first aid provision
- Clear communication with attending clubs in the week leading up to the day
- Age appropriate pitch layouts
- Sufficient space between pitches
- A welcoming, child centred atmosphere

Hosts must also ensure that all coaches, volunteers, and spectators follow the Codes of Conduct.

**5.4 Team Organisation at Festivals**

5.4.1 Teams should be grouped by age and, where possible, by similar experience or ability to support balanced, enjoyable games.

5.4.2 Teams may be mixed or rebalanced on the day to ensure fairness and inclusion.

**5.5 Match Duration & Format**

Match duration, pitch size, ball size, and playing format are set out in the age group--specific playing rules/ Festival hosts must follow these formats without alteration.

**5.6 Match Officials**

5.6.1 Match officials may be used at festivals, but they are not mandatory at all age groups.

5.6.2 Where match officials are used, they must be treated with respect at all times.

5.6.3 At younger age groups, coaches may support officiating from the field in line with the age-group rules.

**5.7 Behaviour & Sideline Management**

5.7.1 All adults must model positive behaviour. This includes:

- Encouraging effort and teamwork
- Supporting all children
- Avoiding negative or confrontational behaviour
- Respecting match officials and festival hosts

5.7.2 Shouting instructions aggressively, disputing decisions, or creating a hostile environment is not acceptable.

5.7.3 Festival hosts may remove individuals whose behaviour breaches the Code of Conduct.

**5.8 Cancellations & Weather**

5.8.1 Safety is the priority. Festivals or fixtures must be cancelled or paused if:

- The playing surface becomes unsafe
- Weather conditions pose a risk
- Visibility is significantly reduced
- Lightning is present

5.8.2 Hosts must communicate cancellations promptly to all attending clubs.

**5.9 Player Welfare During Festivals**

5.9.1 Clubs must ensure that players receive adequate rest between games.

For weekly festivals at U6–U9, the standard playing times set out in the Playing Rules must be followed.

For day-long summer festivals involving multiple teams and extended schedules, players may exceed the usual age-group playing time only if they are given significantly longer

rest periods between fixtures. However, no player should exceed a total of one hour of playing time across the entire day.

5.9.2 Children must have access to drinking water at all times.

5.9.3 Coaches must monitor players for signs of fatigue, injury, or distress and act immediately if concerns arise.

5.9.4 These requirements are in place to protect children's health, safety, and enjoyment. Younger players fatigue more quickly, are still developing physically and cognitively, and are more vulnerable to heat, dehydration, and overexertion. Longer rest periods and a maximum total playing time help reduce the risk of injury, ensuring all players can participate safely throughout the day.

5.10 **Recording of Results**

5.10.1 Results must not be recorded, published, or used to rank teams.

5.10.2 Festivals may recognise positive values such as teamwork, effort, or sportsmanship, but not competitive outcomes.

5.11 **Responsibility for Compliance**

Festival hosts, coaches, and clubs share responsibility for ensuring that all fixtures and festivals comply with these rules and uphold the spirit of Primary Rugby League.

5.12 **Support & Resources**

To support clubs and volunteers in delivering high-quality Primary Rugby League activity, the following resources will be provided:

- Festival/Activity Guides: Templates for pitch layouts, formats, and hosting responsibilities.
- Coaching Workshops: Regional conferences and online modules to train new and existing coaches in Primary Rugby League delivery.

**CUB/TOTS ACTIVITY**

1. A child can register to participate in cub/tot activity rugby league from the age of 4 and can play until they finish reception.
2. The purpose of this activity is to introduce children to Rugby League in a non-contact, fun, safe, and developmentally appropriate manner.
3. The focus of the session should be to develop children's movement skills to prepare them for a life in sport and physical activity.
4. The UKCC Level 1 qualification offers a range of activities that are suitable for participants.
5. Clubs are not permitted to arrange fixtures. Children develop at different rates and may not be psychologically, physically and socially ready to enter a competitive environment. A poor experience of Rugby League could put them off sport for life.
6. Coach Qualification - A minimum of a valid UKCC Level 1 is required to coach at this level.

Coaches must hold an RFL enhanced DBS and hold the Safeguarding and Protecting Children Certificate.

## **SAFE PLAY CODE**

This Safe Play Code has been written in order to promote safety and good conduct within the Primary Rugby League versions of the game. It will provide the best possible on-field environment for the development of young Rugby League players, particularly in the areas of actively controlling undesirable actions and behaviour.

### **Section 1 - The Tackle Zone**

#### **The Code: Tackles above the armpits**

When a ball carrier is advancing in an upright posture, any tackle by the defender in which contact is made above the armpits is deemed to be an infringement.

### **Section 2 - Dangerous Tackles**

#### **The Code: Tripping or throwing an opponent**

It is an infringement if the tackler trips or uses his or her legs in any way during a tackle. This applies even if the defender already has a hand on the ball carrier (i.e., the Cumberland throw).

#### **The Code: Lifting 1**

Adopting a crotch hold is not permitted. Placing either the hand or arm in the crotch region at any time is an infringement.

#### **The Code: Lifting 2**

Vertical lifting is an infringement. Should a referee anticipate this is going to happen in a tackle he or she should blow the whistle immediately to prevent it from occurring.

#### **The Code: Lifting 3**

The ball carrier cannot be lifted and driven. A tackle in which the ball carrier is lifted and remains off the ground for two or more steps is an infringement. However, this should not be confused with a driving tackle when the ball carrier is knocked off their feet.

#### **The Code: Shoulder charge**

Defenders are not allowed to shoulder charge the ball carrier to affect a tackle. A defender who runs at a ball carrier and makes no attempt to tackle, grab or hold the ball carrier, but merely attempts to affect the tackle by the use of the shoulder shall be deemed to have committed an infringement.

#### **The Code: Flopping**

A defender cannot drop or fall on a prone player. If the ball carrier is prone or stationary on the ground it is an infringement to drop, dive or fall on that player. The tackle will be deemed complete by the defender simply putting a hand on the ball carrier.

#### **The Code: Slinging**

The use of the ball carrier's arm or jersey to sling a player to the ground is not permitted. Any defender who uses the arm or jersey of the ball carrier to complete a tackle is committing an infringement.

### **Section 3 - Hand-off or Fend**

#### **The Code: Dangerous use of the hand**

An attacking player cannot thrust out his or her arm and contact a defender above the shoulder. Any player that hands off or fends above the shoulder will be deemed to have infringed.

In Tag formats at U6 – U8 attackers cannot hand off/fend or protect their tag from defenders, they should use evasion skills to beat players.

### **Section 4 – Verbal abuse and foul language**

#### **The Code: Unacceptable language**

The use of obscene, threatening, racist, denigrating, and abusive language is not permitted. There is a zero-tolerance approach to unacceptable language and behaviour based on individual's gender identity, race, age, disability, faith or sexual orientation. Any form of verbal abuse, threatening language or sledging will be deemed an infringement.

### **Section 5 – Tackle Shields & Tackle Bags**

Under no circumstances must a coach, volunteer or parent hold a tackle shield for a child to tackle. An adult can hold the top of a tackle bag for a child to tackle.

**Playing Rules & Regulations: Common Across All PRL Age Groups**

These rules apply to every Primary Rugby League age group. To make them easier for coaches, players, and parents to understand, they have been taken directly from the 2026 age-group rules and set out here in one place.

- The game is to be called Primary Rugby League and is a modified version of Rugby League, and must be played under the Safe Play Code rules.
- The game will be played with a size three standard Rugby League ball.
- Try Scoring: A try is scored in the normal way by placing the ball down over the opponent's try line.
- There are no scrums in Primary RL.
- There is no ball-stealing permitted in Primary RL.
- Any errors in Primary RL (knock on, forward pass, player in touch) are dealt with by the ruling of the age group – and will restart via a PTB.
- Foul Play: Any act of foul play that contravenes the Safe Play Code will result in the coach stopping the game and explaining the offence to all players. Following this, play will continue.
- Sin Bin does not apply. However, coaches are encouraged to give players guilty of foul play a timeout where required.

Coach Qualification – A minimum of a valid UKCC Rugby League Level 1 is required to be an assistant or head coach at this level. They must have a valid licence which requires an RFL enhanced DBS and hold the Safeguarding and Protecting Children Certificate.

Games Coaches may manage games under the supervision of a Level 1 Licensed Coach. They do not need to be qualified but must have a basic understanding of the rules and the Safe Play Code. For full coaching requirements, including supervision and leadership expectations, see Section 3 (Coaching Requirements).

NB. These rules recognise the custom and practice of some playing leagues to allow coaches on the field of play during games to facilitate the development of inexperienced players.

**Coach to Develop not to Win**

UNDER 6s RULES 2026

1. Every child plays all the time. There should be no substitutes. (The only time a player should not be on the field of play is if they are injured or choose not to be on the field.)
2. The recommended number of players per team shall be four, with a maximum of five and a minimum of three. To ensure every child plays, teams can be flexible, for example, two teams of four and one of five.
3. No player should be allowed to play for more than a total of 30 minutes in any one day. The recommended playing time is three games of 10 minutes.
4. Size of the playing area is 25m x 12-15m.
5. Tag is the mandatory format for this age group.
  - When playing Tag Rugby, all players wear a tag belt, which has two ribbons (tags) attached to it with Velcro.
  - The belt is worn around the waist and on the outside of the clothing. Shirts should be tucked in.
  - The tags are positioned on either side of the hips.
6. The six-play rule applies. This means that every team must complete a full set of six plays, including errors or a Try being scored. The coaching ethos behind this rule is to allow players to execute the skills of the game without experiencing any fear of failure and to give every team the opportunity to play a full set of six each time. This rule also allows for each player to get an equal amount of time attacking and defending.
7. At the beginning of each game and at the start of each attacking set, the game will commence with a Play the ball (PTB) 5m from the attacking teams try line.
8. The 'Tackle' (Tag)
  - Only the player with the ball can be 'tackled' (tagged), and a tag is simply the removal by a defender of one of the two ribbons from the ball carrier.
  - Ball carriers can run or dodge potential taggers, but **cannot fend them off or guard or shield their tags in any way.**
  - The defender then holds the tag above their head and shouts "tag" for all to hear.
  - Once tagged, the player in possession of the ball must attempt to stop as soon as possible and then must replace their tag before playing the ball.
9. After each tag all defending players must retire four metres before the PTB restart. The defending side cannot move until the ball is passed by the acting halfback and the Games Coach shouts 'GO'.

There are no markers.

The acting halfback must pass the ball after each PTB. (They cannot run)

The minimum distance the ball is played from the try line is 5m (i.e. if a tag is made closer to the opponent's try line, then move the player back 5m mark to PTB, this is to give the attacking team more space).
10. If the ball goes into touch, the restart will take place opposite the entry point, 5m from the sideline and 5m from the try line with a PTB.
11. When an attacking player has their tag removed before they place the ball down in the opponents in goal area, play will be restarted by a PTB restart 5m from the try line in line with where the player had their tag removed, unless it is on the 5<sup>th</sup> play where the restart will be a PTB, 5m from the try line, for the side that has just defended.

UNDER 7s RULES 2026

1. Every child plays all the time. There should be no substitutes. (The only time a player should not be on the field of play is if they are injured or choose not to be on the field.)
2. The recommended number of players per team shall be four, with a maximum of five and a minimum of three. To ensure every child plays, teams can be flexible, for example, two teams of four and one of five.
3. No player should be allowed to play for more than a total of 30 minutes in any one day. The recommended playing time is three games of 10 minutes.
4. Size of the playing area is 25m x 12-15m.
5. Tag is the mandatory format for this age group.
  - When playing Tag Rugby, all players wear a tag belt, which has two ribbons (tags), attached to it with Velcro.
  - The belt is worn around the waist and on the outside of the clothing. Shirts should be tucked in.
  - The tags are positioned on either side of the hips.
6. The six-play rule applies. This means that every team must complete a full set of six plays, including errors or a Try being scored. The coaching ethos behind this rule is to allow players to execute the skills of the game without experiencing any fear of failure and to give every team the opportunity to play a full set of six each time. This rule also allows for each player to get an equal amount of time attacking and defending.
7. At the beginning of each game and at the start of each attacking set, the game will commence with a Play the ball (PTB) 5m from the attacking teams try line.
8. The 'Tackle' (Tag)
  - Only the player with the ball can be 'tackled' (tagged), and a tag is simply the removal by a defender of one of the two ribbons from the ball carrier.
  - Ball carriers can run or dodge potential taggers **but cannot fend them off or guard or shield their tags in any way.**
  - The defender then holds the tag above their head and shouts "tag" for all to hear.
  - Once tagged, the player in possession of the ball must attempt to stop as soon as possible and then must replace their tag before playing the ball.
9. After each tag, all defending players must retire four metres before the PTB restart. The defending side cannot move until the ball is passed by the acting halfback and the Games Coach shouts 'GO'.

There are no markers.

The acting halfback must pass the ball after each PTB. (They cannot run)

The minimum distance the ball is played from the try line is 5m (i.e. If a tag is made closer to the opponent's try line, then move the player back 5m mark to PTB, this is to give the attacking team more space).
10. If the ball goes into touch, the restart will take place opposite the entry point, 5m from the sideline and 5m from the try line with a PTB.
11. When an attacking player has their tag removed before they place the ball down in the opponents in goal area, play will be restarted by a PTB restart 5m from the try line in line with where the player had their tag removed, unless it is on the 5<sup>th</sup> play where the restart will be a PTB, 5m from the try line, for the side that has just defended.

UNDER 8s RULES 2026

1. Every child plays all the time. There should be no substitutes. (The only time a player should not be on the field of play is if they are injured or choose not to be on the field.)
2. The recommended number of players per team shall be five, with a maximum of six and a minimum of three. To ensure every child plays, teams can be flexible, for example, two teams of five and one of six.
3. No player should be allowed to play for more than a total of 30 minutes in any one day. The recommended playing time is three games of 10 minutes.
4. Size of the playing area is 25m x 15-18m.
5. Tag is the mandatory format for this age group.
  - When playing Tag Rugby, all players wear a tag belt, which has two ribbons (tags) attached to it with Velcro.
  - The belt is worn around the waist and on the outside of the clothing. Shirts should be tucked in.
  - The tags are positioned on either side of the hips.
6. The six-play rule applies. This means that every team must complete a full set of six plays, including errors or a Try being scored. The coaching ethos behind this rule is to allow players to execute the skills of the game without experiencing any fear of failure and to give every team the opportunity to play a full set of six each time. This rule also allows for each player to get an equal amount of time attacking and defending.
7. At the beginning of each game and at the start of each attacking set, the game will commence with a Play the ball (PTB) 5m from the attacking team's try line.
8. The 'Tackle' (Tag)
  - Only the player with the ball can be 'tackled' (tagged), and a tag is simply the removal by a defender of one of the two ribbons from the ball carrier.
  - Ball carriers can run or dodge potential taggers, **but cannot fend them off or guard or shield their tags in any way.**
  - The defender then holds the tag above their head and shouts "tag" for all to hear.
  - Once tagged, the player in possession of the ball must attempt to stop as soon as possible and then must replace their tag before playing the ball.
9. After each tag, all defending players must retire four metres before the PTB restart. The tagged player should restart the game by a PTB. The defending side cannot move until the ball is passed by the acting halfback and the Games Coach shouts 'GO'. There are no markers.

The acting halfback must pass the ball after each PTB. (They cannot run)  
The minimum distance the ball is played from the try line is 5m (i.e. if a tackle is made closer to the opponent's try line, then move the player back 5m mark to PTB, this is to give the attacking team more space).
10. If the ball goes into touch, the restart will take place opposite the entry point, 5m from the side line and 5m from the try line with a PTB.
11. a) When an attacking player is held up in their opponents in goal area, play will be restarted by a PTB restart 5m from the try line in line with where the player was held up, unless it is on the handover tackle where the restart will be a PTB, 5m from the try line, for the side that has just defended.  
b) Any player tackled and forced into their own in-goal area will result in a PTB restart 5m infield from the try line opposite to where the player was tackled, and it is counted as one of the six tackles.

UNDER 9s RULES 2026

1. Every child plays all the time. There should be no substitutes. (The only time a player should not be on the field of play is if they are injured or choose not to be on the field.)
2. The recommended number of players per team shall be six, with a maximum of seven and a minimum of three. To ensure every child plays, teams can be flexible, for example, two teams of six and one of seven.
3. No player should be allowed to play for more than a total of 30 minutes in any one day. The recommended playing time is three games of 10 minutes.
4. Size of the playing area is 35m x 20m.
5. Tackle is the recommended format for this age group.
6. The two-error rule applies. Teams still retain the ball for a set of 6 when a try is scored. The coaching ethos behind this rule is to start to introduce players to the consequence of losing possession when an error is made. Retaining the ball when a try is scored should still provide an equal balance of attacking and defending during the game.
7. At the beginning of each game and at the start of each attacking set, the game will commence with a Play the ball (PTB) 5m from the attacking team's try line.
8. After each tackle, all defending players must retire four metres before the PTB restart. The tackled player should restart the game by a PTB. The defending side cannot move until the ball is passed by the acting halfback and the Games Coach shouts 'GO'.  
No markers.  
The acting halfback must pass the ball after each PTB. (They cannot run)  
The minimum distance the ball is played from the try line is 5m (i.e. if a tackle is made closer to the opponent's try line, then move the player back 5m mark to PTB, this is to give the attacking team more space).
9. Grubber kicks only, are allowed only on the last tackle. No fly kicking or secondary kicks are permitted.
10. If the ball goes into touch, the restart will take place opposite the entry point, 5m from the sideline and 5m from the try line with a PTB.
11. a) When an attacking player is held up in their opponents in goal area, play will be restarted by a PTB restart 5m from the try line in line with where the player was held up, unless it is on the handover tackle where the restart will be a PTB, 5m from the try line, for the side that has just defended.  
b) Any player tackled and forced into their own in-goal area will result in a PTB restart 5m infield from the try line opposite to where the player was tackled, and it is counted as one of the six tackles.

UNDER 10s RULES 2026

1. As many children as possible should be given an opportunity to play all the time. Try to limit the number of substitutes by modifying numbers, e.g. if both teams have 16 players, play 2 games of 8 a side, instead of 1 game of 9 a side with 7 substitutes.
2. The maximum number of players per team shall be nine, with a minimum of four. Teams can be flexible, for example, one team of seven and one of nine, or two teams of eight.
3. No player should be allowed to play for more than a total of 40 minutes in any one day. The recommended playing time is 2 games of 20 minutes.
4. Size of the playing area is 50m x 30m. (Based on 9 players, the width should be reduced by roughly 3m per player when playing lower numbers)
5. Tackle is the recommended format for this age group.
6. The two-error rule applies. Teams hand over possession once they have made a second error in a set of 6. The coaching ethos behind this rule is to start to introduce players to the consequence of losing possession when an error is made. Once a team has scored, they hand over possession. The opposition starts with a play the ball 10m from their own line after conceding a try.
7. At the beginning of each game and at the start of each attacking set, the game will commence with a Play the ball (PTB) 10m from the attacking team's try line.
8. After a tackle, all defending players must retire five metres before the PTB restart. The tackled player should restart the game with a PTB. The defending side cannot move until the ball is passed by the acting halfback or the dummy half chooses to run with the ball (scoot).  
No marker.  
The minimum distance the ball is played from the try line is 5m (i.e. if a tackle is made closer to the opponent's try line, then move the player back 5m mark to PTB, this is to give the attacking team more space).
9. Teams are allowed one scoot from dummy half per set of 6 tackles; the dummy half can't score, but they can be tackled, which encourages players to push with the ball player and develop their support play.
10. Kicking out of hand (grubber, chip, cross field) is allowed on the last tackle only. No fly kicking or secondary kicks are permitted.
11. If the ball goes into touch, the restart will take place opposite the entry point, 5m from the sideline and 5m from the try line with a PTB.
12. a) When an attacking player is held up in their opponents in goal area, play will be restarted by a PTB restart 5m from the try line in line with where the player was held up, unless it is on the handover tackle where the restart will be a PTB, 5m from the try line, for the side that has just defended.  
b) Any player tackled and forced into their own in-goal area will result in a PTB restart 5m infield from the try line opposite to where the player was tackled, and it is counted as one of the six tackles.

UNDER 11s RULES 2026

1. As many children as possible should be given an opportunity to play all the time. Try to limit the number of substitutes by modifying numbers, e.g. if both teams have 18 players, play 2 games of 9 a side instead of 1 game of 11 a side with 7 substitutes.
2. The maximum number of players per team shall be eleven, with a minimum of six. Teams can be flexible, for example, one team of 9 and one of eleven.
3. No player should be allowed to play for more than a total of 40 minutes in any one day. The recommended playing time is 2 games of 20 minutes.
4. Size of the playing area is 50-60m x 40m. (Based on 11 players, the width should be reduced by roughly 3m per player when playing lower numbers)
5. Tackle is the recommended format for this age group.
6. Teams hand over possession once they have made an error in a set of 6. The opposition receives the ball where the error was made. Once a team has scored, it also hands over possession. The opposition starts with a play the ball 10m from their own line after conceding a try.
7. At the beginning of each game, the game will commence with a Play the ball (PTB) 10m from the attacking team's try line.
8. After each tackle, defending players must retire seven metres before the PTB restart. The ball must be played backwards with the foot. The team in possession must retire behind the acting half-back. One active marker can be present at the PTB restarts. The ball is in play once it is played backwards (there should be no delay in playing the ball backwards once the player has placed the ball on the ground). Dummy half can run - without forfeiting possession if tackled but cannot score. This encourages players to push with the ball player and develop their support play. The minimum distance the ball is played from the try line is 5m (i.e. if a tackle is made closer to the opponent's try line, then move the player back 5m mark to PTB, this is to give the attacking team more space).
9. Kicking out of hand (grubber, chip, cross field) is allowed. No fly kicking or secondary kicks are permitted.
10. If the ball goes into touch, the restart will take place opposite the entry point, 5m from the sideline and 5m from the try line with a PTB.
11. a) When an attacking player is held up in their opponents in goal area, play will be restarted by a PTB restart 5m from the try line in line with where the player was held up, unless it is on the handover tackle where the restart will be a PTB, 5m from the try line, for the side that has just defended.  
b) Any player tackled and forced into their own in-goal area will result in a PTB restart 5m infield from the try line opposite to where the player was tackled, and it is counted as one of the six tackles.

**APPENDICES | SECTION F11**

**RFL SCHOLARSHIP AND  
COMMUNITY GAME TRAINING  
AND PLAYING POLICY**

**SECTION F11 | RFL SCHOLARSHIP & COMMUNITY GAME TRAINING**



## RFL Scholarship and Community Game Training and Playing Policy

---

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Licenced Academies are allowed a maximum of 200 registered players drawn from the Under-16 & Under-15 cohorts for the 2025-2026 season. They can have additional players above this number classified as Talent Transfer players.

### 2.0 CALENDAR POLICY FOR 2026

- 2.1 Players must not play 2 days before any scholarship U16 game.  
2.2 If a player plays any part in a scholarship U16 game, they ideally must not play any further game for 48 hours.

Most U16 scholarship games will take place on a Wednesday evening and below are the days the player could play that week. Players must not play a competition game on "No" Days.

Sat	Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Yes	Yes	No	No	<b>Game Day</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes

- 2.3 Players must not play 2 games in any same mid-week programme.  
2.4 It is recommended that school games are played mid-week when there are no Scholarship games.

### 3.0 SCHOLARSHIP U16 GAME DATES FOR 2026

Environments entitled to participate are the 11 Licenced Academies

1	Wednesday 25th March
2	Wednesday 1 <sup>st</sup> April
3	Wednesday 8th April
4	Wednesday 15th April
5	Wednesday 29th April
6	Wednesday 24th June
7	Wednesday 8 <sup>th</sup> July
8	Wednesday 15 <sup>th</sup> July

*APPENDICES | SECTION F12*

# *OVERSEAS TOURING POLICY*

*SECTION F12 | OVERSEAS TOURING POLICY*



### INTRODUCTION

The RFL Overseas Touring Policy ensures clubs understand their responsibilities when organising overseas tours. Touring is an excellent opportunity to strengthen team spirit and morale, allowing players and coaches to connect on and off the pitch.

To guarantee a positive experience, clubs must follow established protocols when touring abroad. All participants, including players and coaches, remain bound by the RFL's codes of conduct, regulations, rules, and policies.

For tours involving children, it is essential to review the following documents:

- [Community Game Trips, Tours, and Overnight Stays Guidance](#)
- [Travelling Overseas Code of Conduct](#)
- [RFL Safeguarding Policy](#)

### Applying for Permission to Tour Overseas

- 1) **Complete the Application Form**
  - Download and fully complete the **Outgoing Tour Application Form**.
  - Obtain approval from the host country's National Governing Body (NGB). Assistance can be sought from the host club or by directly contacting the NGB.
- 2) **Include Supporting Documents**
  - Attach a letter of invitation or support from the overseas NGB.
- 3) **Ensure Compliance**
  - Clubs must adhere to the RFL Safeguarding Policy and Operational Rules (specifically, Operational Rule C3:2:4).
- 4) **Insurance Requirements**
  - Clubs approved by the RFL are covered by its **Personal Accident and Public Liability Policies** while playing rugby league on tour.
  - The RFL's insurance **does not cover** temporary injury, loss of earnings, medical/legal expenses, or other types of injuries.
  - Clubs must secure additional travel insurance, covering repatriation costs if a player is injured and requires specialist transport home.
  - Bartlett's Insurance is recommended for additional coverage. Contact them at:
    - Phone: **0113 258 5711**
    - Email: [mail@bartlettgroup.com](mailto:mail@bartlettgroup.com)
- 5) **Submit the Application**
  - Once complete, send the signed form and supporting documents to [touring@rfl.uk.com](mailto:touring@rfl.uk.com).

### Important Notes

- If a club does not comply with this policy or does not secure RFL approval, RFL insurance policies will not cover the tour.
- Clubs should provide all participants with confirmation of the insurance cover in place before the tour.

**APPENDICES | SECTION F13**

# **AGE RANGES**

**SECTION F13 | AGE RANGES**



**INTRODUCTION**

To play Rugby League, a player must be within specific age ranges to participate in their respective age group.

In accordance with Operational Rule C2:7:7, *Once a Player has attained the age of 16 and they are registered to play in the Under 16's Competition, they are also eligible to play for the Club's Under 17's or 18's team but can only do so if the age group for which the Player is eligible can fulfil its obligations.*

**AGE RANGES - SEASON 2026**

Age group	School Year	True age range	Plus extra age range
Cubs/Minis/Tots	<b>From 4 to 6 (Reception Age in 2025-26 School Year)</b>		
Under 6's	Year 1	1.09.19 - 31.08.20	
Under 7's	Year 2	1.09.18 - 31.08.19	
Under 8's	Year 3	1.09.17 – 31.08.18	
Under 9's	Year 4	1.09.16 - 31.08.17	
Under 10's	Year 5	1.09.15 - 31.08.16	1.09.16 - 31.08.17
Under 11s	Year 6	1.09.14 - 31.08.15	1.09.15 - 31.08.16
Under 12s	Year 7	1.09.13 - 31.08.14	1.09.14 - 31.08.15
Under 13s	Year 8	1.09.12 - 31.08.13	1.09.13 - 31.08.14
Under 14s	Year 9	1.09.11 - 31.08.12	1.09.12 - 31.08.13
Under 15s	Year 10	1.09.10 - 31.08.11	1.09.11 - 31.08.12
Under 16s	Year 11	1.09.09 - 31.08.10	1.09.10 - 31.08.11
Under 17s	Year 12	1.09.08 - 31.08.09	1.09.09 - 31.08.10
Under 18s	Year 13	1.09.07 - 31.08.08	1.09.08 - 31.08.09
Open Age	To play open age RL a player must have either a) reached their 17th birthday or b) be recognised as a true age Under 17 player (see the age ranges) and are only permitted to play from the March in a Season.		
Masters Men	From the age of 35		
Masters Women	From the age of 30		

**APPENDICES | SECTION F14**

# **PLAYER DISPENSATION POLICY**

**SECTION F14 | PLAYER DISPENSATION POLICY**





---

## RUGBY LEAGUE PLAYER DISPENSATION POLICY

---

### 1. Purpose

The primary objective of this policy is to ensure all players, particularly children and young people, have access to a safe, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate playing environment that supports their continued participation, progression, and well-being within the game.

This policy provides a clear framework for:

- Granting player dispensations to participate outside their standard [age group](#) (The age band a player is eligible to compete in under the Operational Rules, based on their date of birth and any applicable seasonal cut-off).
- Allowing the use of medical devices or personal protective equipment (PPE) during Rugby League activity.

**Important:** This policy applies only to Youth and Junior Rugby League and does not apply to Open Age competitions. This aligns with the RFL's safeguarding principles.

Dispensations are granted to support welfare, inclusion, and access. They will not be granted where the primary effect would be to create a competitive advantage.

### 2. Scope

Applies to all players registered with the RFL in community Rugby League clubs and competitions, covering both training and competitive play, and all genders (male, female, mixed).

### 3. Eligibility Criteria for Playing Outside a Standard Age Group

Dispensation may be considered and granted under one or more of the following eligibility criteria. Applications may reference more than one category where appropriate.

- a. Disability**  
A player has a diagnosed physical or mental impairment that significantly affects their ability to safely or equitably compete with peers in their chronological age group.
- b. Significant Physical Development Delay (SPDD)**  
The player's physical development (e.g. height, weight, coordination) is demonstrably below the typical range for their age, creating safety or confidence concerns when playing with same-age peers.
- c. Chronic Physical or Mental Health Condition**  
A player has a clinically diagnosed chronic mental health issue or a chronic medical condition that negatively impacts their ability to train or play within their designated age group.
- d. Cognitive or Educational Delay**  
The player is being educated in a year group below their chronological age. Playing with peers in their school year group may be more beneficial for their learning, development, and social integration.
- e. Access or Pathway Restrictions**  
Dispensation may be granted where a player encounters significant barriers to participation due to structural, geographical, or gender-based limitations beyond the player's or club's immediate control.

**Examples of valid scenarios include:**

1. **Geographical Isolation** – the player lives in a remote or rural area where no team exists within their chronological age group, and reasonable travel to alternative clubs is not feasible.
2. **Club Structural Limitations** – the player’s registered club does not field a team in their age group, and transitioning to another club is impractical due to transportation, safeguarding concerns, or local availability.
3. **Gender-Specific Barriers** – particularly in female or non-binary categories, where no single-gender team exists locally, or mixed-gender participation is not permitted beyond a certain age.
4. **Educational Cohort Alignment** – the player is educated in a school year below their chronological age (e.g., due to developmental delay or deferment) and would benefit socially and developmentally from playing with peers in their school year.

These scenarios require supporting evidence, as set out below. More than one scenario may apply, and all relevant evidence should be submitted

**f. Individual Needs**

In exceptional circumstances, a dispensation may be granted based on a holistic assessment of the player’s needs. This includes considerations such as:

- Return from elite pathway or prolonged absence from the sport,
- Social or emotional development challenges,
- Unique family or living arrangements that impact participation.

The existence of an eligibility criterion does not guarantee approval of a dispensation; all applications will be assessed on the basis of evidence, safeguarding considerations, and competition integrity.

**4. Supporting Evidence Requirements**

For this section, references to eligibility criteria (a–f) correspond to the categories set out in Section 3 (Eligibility Criteria for Playing Outside a Standard Age Group).

<b>Supporting Evidence</b>	<b>Applicable Eligibility Criteria</b>	<b>Approval by</b>
Parental/guardian statement explaining the access issue and the need for dispensation	a-f	-
Club letter confirming the structural or team limitation, supporting the player’s request, and noting any mitigations	a-f	-
Medical report (from GP or relevant specialist within the last 12 months) that:	a-d	RFL Medical Officer

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. identifies the child's disability, impairment, developmental delay or mental or physical chronic illness;</li> <li>2. identifies any characteristics of the child's situation which are relevant to the request to play in an age group other than the child's standard age group;</li> <li>3. explains how the characteristics which would place the child at a substantial disadvantage compared to his/her peers if he/she were required to play rugby league in his/her standard age group;</li> <li>4. explains how playing in an age group other than his/her standard age group would neutralise or reduce the disadvantage caused by the child's disability or impairment;</li> <li>5. identifies any increased or reduced risk to the child and/or his/her peers by allowing the child to play outside his/her standard age group;</li> <li>6. explains why allowing the child to play outside his/her standard age group will not endanger the health and safety of the child or any other person.</li> </ol>		
<p>Confirmation from the League or Competition Administrator verifying the lack of available teams in the appropriate age group within a reasonable area (if appropriate)</p>	e	-
<p>Additional supporting documents, where applicable (e.g., detailing travel constraints, educational placement).</p>	a-f	-
<p><b><u>Educational Cohort Alignment</u></b> The parent/ carer must provide:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the year the child is schooled in;</li> <li>2. why it was deemed appropriate for the child to delay a year of education;</li> </ol>		-



<p>3. how playing in his/her standard age group would place the child at a substantial disadvantage; and</p> <p>4. how playing in an age group other than his/her standard age group would neutralise or reduce disadvantage</p> <p>School/LEA letter confirming year, dated within the last 12 months, including name, job title, signature, and school details.</p>		
---	--	--

<p><b>Medical Device and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) evidence:</b></p>	
<p>A medical report from the player's GP or a relevant other specialist dated within the last 12 months, which:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. identifies the child's medical condition and required medical device or PPE requirement while undertaking RL activity</li> <li>2. identifies how the device is to be worn for safe use and any potential risks to undertaking RL activity with the medical device or PPE to the participant or opponent.</li> <li>3. Considers any modifications or adjustments such as position, taping, strapping or padding that could be used to optimise the safety of the device or PPE to the participant or opposition, without jeopardising function.</li> </ol>	-
<p>A parental guardian statement accepting any potential risks to the player as identified in the medical report, and to support the player to make any reasonable modifications or adjustments to optimise player safety.</p>	-
<p>A club letter supporting the medical device or PPE dispensation request, and to provide support where relevant to make any reasonable modifications or adjustments to optimise player safety.</p>	

**Optional (but encouraged):**

Clubs may also submit supporting video footage, player development records, or other relevant evidence that supports the application. Previous application outcomes may also be included to demonstrate validity and continuity.

**5. Application Process**

- i. **Initial Step:**  
The Parent/Carer initiates the process by arranging to discuss with the Club Welfare Officer potential dispensation options. Parent/Carer to bring supporting evidence to this meeting, which demonstrates the possible need for dispensation.
- ii. **Club Review:**  
The Club Welfare Officer reviews the documentation against the policy to ensure the application would meet the criteria and documentation is valid and appropriate.
- iii. **Submission:**  
The Club Welfare Officer submits the completed application to the RFL Dispensation Panel



(the Panel) via the [Dispensation Request Form](#), including copies of supporting evidence for appropriate distribution for consideration.

iv. **Panel Review:**

A multi-disciplinary panel, which may consist of representatives from Safeguarding, Medical, and Competitions, will assess each application within 14 working days.

v. **Decision Notification:**

Outcomes will be shared in writing with the club and recorded in the GameDay system. If approved, the dispensation will be valid for:

- a. The current season, or
- b. Until the next designated review period.

## 6. Review and Monitoring

- Clubs are expected to:
  - Monitor ongoing suitability and compliance,
  - Inform the RFL of any change in circumstances,
  - Maintain transparency in competition fairness.
- The RFL retains the right to amend or withdraw any dispensation at any time if the conditions under which it was granted are no longer met.
- Dispensations are subject to review before the start of each season, unless otherwise specified, or sooner if the player's circumstances change significantly.
- Applications must be resubmitted annually.

## 7. Safeguarding and Welfare

The welfare and safety of all players is the foremost consideration in any dispensation decision. Dispensations will not be approved if:

- They pose a safeguarding risk to the player or others,
- There is a potential risk for the safety and well-being of other participants
- They would create a competitive imbalance or are likely to be exploited for strategic or performance gain,
- They compromise the integrity of the competition.

## 8. Appeals Process

Applicants who wish to appeal the decision of the Panel must submit their appeal in writing to the RFL within 7 days of receiving the decision.

An appeal may only be lodged on one of the following grounds:

- New evidence is available that was not provided to, and therefore not considered by, the Panel during the initial assessment.

