



**England
Rugby**

**RFU Men's Leagues
Pre-Season Briefing
2024-25**

Introduction

This document has been produced to update clubs on key information for the upcoming 2024/25 season. It will contain important updates for the 2024-25 season, including information relating to league competition and the Papa Johns Community Cup Competitions, as well as information on Adult Player Registration.

If there is any conflict between this document and Regulation 6 or ROC Admin Instructions, then Regulation 6 or the ROC Admin Instructions will take precedence.

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Enhancing the Adult Male Competition Structure: Changes to RFU Leagues for 2025-26.....	3
Increase in size of Championship/Tier 2 in 2025-26	4
Allocation of Clubs to National 2, Regional 1 and 2 Leagues for Season 2025-26.....	4
Relegation from Counties 1 and below Leagues (Potential Cascade Effect)	5
Adult Player Registration	5
Sanctions related to non-registered players	7
Papa Johns Men’s Community Cups Update	7
Regulation Update Reminder	8

Enhancing the Adult Male Competition Structure: Changes to RFU Leagues for 2025-26

Introduction

Following the implementation of the Future Competition Structure (FCS) in 2022, a review was conducted in early 2024 to evaluate its impact and recommend further enhancements. The review focused on several key areas, including Lower XV (LXV) participation in RFU Leagues, league size and configuration, and the Papa John's Community Cup (PJCC).

Impact of FCS

FCS has brought significant changes to adult male rugby in England, which has delivered the following:

- **Inclusion of LXV Teams:** Over 150 LXV teams joined RFU Leagues in 2022-23, reducing travel time and increasing competitiveness.
- **Boosted Participation:** 1,157 teams participated, including the reintroduction of Lancashire breakaway leagues.
- **Expanded League Structure:** 106 leagues with more localized competition.
- **Increased Matches:** 450+ additional matches in RFU Leagues and 228 in merit leagues for 2023-24.
- **Improved Match Completion:** 92% completion rate in RFU Leagues and 72% in merit leagues in 2023-24.
- **Enhanced Competitiveness:** Narrower victory margins indicated more competitive matches.
- **Reduced Travel:** Travel significantly reduced for between just over 60% of teams playing at Counties 1 and up to 93% for teams playing at National 2.
- **Stable Player Numbers:** Stabilized player numbers ensuring sustainable player bases for clubs.

Changes for the 2025-26 Season

1. Future of Lower XVs in RFU Leagues

- **Reconfirmation Required:** Nine CBs that opted out of including LXV teams must reconfirm their position by mid-October 2024. Information will be sent to clubs and CBs in September.

2. Raising the 'Ceiling' for LXVs

- **New Ceiling:** The ceiling for LXVs will be raised from Counties 1 to Regional 2 to address competitive imbalance and allow fair progression, effective from the 2025-26 season.

3. League Structure

- **No Significant Changes:** The current league structure has shown positive results. Match data and club feedback will continue to be monitored to ensure ongoing success.

4. Papa John's Community Cup (PJCC)

- **Positive Feedback:** The PJCC saw significant interest with 532 clubs entering in 2023-24. Improvements included earlier draw publication and progressive draw visibility last season, which was based on club feedback from 2022-23 and was well received.
- **High Match Completion:** Achieved a 74% match completion rate, demonstrating strong club commitment.

- **Future Monitoring:** No significant changes for next season, but ongoing monitoring will continue.

Summary

The changes to be implemented for the 2025-26 season aim to keep the league structure competitive, sustainable, and aligned with FCS principles. These changes will also aim to enhance the rugby experience for players, clubs, and fans alike. We look forward to continued growth and success in our competitions.

Increase in size of Championship/Tier 2 in 2025-26

The increase of the Championship from 12 to 14 clubs ahead of the commencement of the Tier 2 League in Season 2025-26 means that there will be no relegation from the Championship at the end of Season 2024-25. It also may result in one or more Clubs from the National Leagues being promoted, subject to meeting the Tier 2 Minimum Operating Standards. As a result, this may require in a variation to the principles of relegation set out in Paragraph 4 of Appendix 2 to RFU Regulation 6 (England Rugby Men's League Structure). Any reduction in relegation will be applied in accordance with Regulation 6.108.

Allocation of Clubs to National 2, Regional 1 and 2 Leagues for Season 2025-26

After promotion and relegation into and between National 2 and Regional 2 has been affected pursuant to Regulation 6 (Appendix 2), Clubs shall be allocated to leagues in line with the principle set down in the Future Competition Review, to minimise the travel burden for Clubs and players.

In the event that a determination has to be made as between two or more clubs to complete the requisite number of clubs in a particular league, the following procedure will be utilised:

- a) Club(s) with the Lowest Total Mileage between it (them) and all the Clubs in the League to be augmented shall be moved.
- b) Where two Clubs have an identical Lowest Total Mileage (see definition) and a choice between those Clubs must be made the following will apply in sequence:
 - i. the Club(s) with the Lowest Total Mileage in the league they would otherwise remain in shall stay in that league and the other Club(s) shall move to the league to be augmented;
 - ii. Where two clubs have an identical Lowest Total Mileage in the league they would otherwise remain in, if one of the Clubs competed at a lower league Level in the previous season then that Club shall be asked if it wishes to move, if not the Club that competed at a higher league level shall be moved; or
 - iii. if both Clubs competed at the same level in the previous season, then the Club with the Best Playing Record shall be asked if it wishes to move and if not, the other Club shall be subject to the move.

Where in exceptional circumstances the strict application of the principles set down above creates a significant disadvantage to a club or clubs, the Committee can affect a variation which removes or reduces the significant disadvantage for the benefit of the game of rugby union overall in the locality and the Committee may in its discretion take such factors as it deems appropriate into account.

Note: This Regulation applies whether a Club has remained at the same level following the Season or has been promoted or relegated into it pursuant to

Relegation from Counties 1 and below Leagues (Potential Cascade Effect)

A total of 32 clubs will usually be relegated from Counties 1 at the end of each season in accordance with *Regulation 6, Appendix 2, Paragraph 4*.

Two factors determine how this regulation is applied:

- i) The number of clubs relegated from Regional Leagues into Counties 1s. Clubs are relegated into the relevant Counties 1 league consistent with their CB affiliation (for league purposes).
- ii) Which of the Counties 1 leagues provide the 6 x promoted runners-up by virtue of finishing in second place to a Lower XV and/or Best Playing Record. This will reduce the relegation from each of those leagues by a single club.

The potential relegation ranges from Counties 1 for the 2024-25 season :

2022-23 Actual Number relegated	2023-24	Counties One Leagues	Potential Relegation 2024-25	
			Max.	Min.
0	1	Tribute Western West	3	0
2	3	Tribute Western North	7	0
3	3	Tribute Southern South	5	0
5	2	Tribute Southern North	7	0
0	2	Herts/Middx	3	0
1	3	Eastern Counties	3	0
1	1	Essex	4	0
2	1	Kent	3	0
0	3	Surrey/Sussex	6	0
0	0	Hampshire	3	0
2	2	Midlands West (North)	3	1
2	2	Midlands West (South)	3	1
3	2	Midlands East (North)	3	1
3	2	Midlands East (South)	3	1
3	2	ADM Lancashire/Cheshire	4	1
0	0	Cumbria	No relegation – bottom league	
3	1	Yorkshire	3	1
2	2	Durham/Northumberland	3	0
32	32			

The number of clubs relegated from a Counties 1 league may not be known until the last day of the season.

The impact of relegation from Counties 1 will impact leagues in the playing levels below.

Adult Player Registration

From the 2024/25 season, all players, in all formats of the game (including non-contact), will be required to register themselves annually to play rugby within RFU member clubs.

Adult Player Registration went live on 16 July 2024.

From this date, adult players will be able to log into [GMS](#) to register themselves to play.

Player registration was previously a club-led process, whereby clubs registered players on their behalf. We are moving from this to a registration process where players will now be required to register themselves to play with a club, using their Game Management System (GMS) account.

If a player held an 'Effective Registration' at a club at the end of the 23/24 season, they will be required to renew their registration. Guidance on how to do this is [here](#), which you can also share into things like player WhatsApp groups. Please note that registration renewals DO NOT require Club Registrar approval.

For players registering for the first time, Club Registrars will accept/decline player registrations as they come through. Guidance on how players can register for the first time is [here](#) and guidance for Club Registrars is [here](#) and [here](#).

Note: If a new player joining your club for the 2024/25 season was registered to a different club at the end of 2023/24, they must firstly renew their registration on GMS **at their previous club before you can transfer them on GMS**. Find more information [here](#) and [here](#).

To become more familiar, overall, with the registration types and player eligibility, please take a look at [pyramid illustration](#), our [process overview](#) and our [decision tree](#).

FURTHER SUPPORT

Adult Player Registration **guides for players** can be found [here](#). Video 'how to' guides can also be found [here](#). Players can learn more about the registration processes by watching a recording of a recent [webinar](#).

Support is available [here](#) if players are unable to access their GMS account.

Support and **guides for our Club Registrars** can be found [here](#). Video 'how to' guides can also be found [here](#). Club Registrars can learn more about the registration processes by watching a recording of a recent [webinar](#).

Posters were delivered to every club in the country in the week commencing 15 July for clubs to display in their clubhouse to help encourage players to register. Please get in touch with your Constituent Body if you do not receive yours.

Downloadable digital assets are also available [here](#). Including:

- **Editable digital posters** to print or for use on social media and in communication with players.
- A range of graphics for use on social media and in communication with players.
- Animated to explain the process and encourage players to register.
- Personalised QR codes for clubs that can be found at the bottom of the 'Organisation Profile' dashboard on GMS. Players can scan the codes to be directly taken to a page where they either create an account or register to play. Instructions on how to use these codes to simplify the registration process for players can be found [here](#).

Club administrators can also access personal QR codes at the bottom of their 'Organisation Profile' dashboard on GMS. Players can scan the codes to be directly taken to a page where they either create an account or register to play.

These codes simplify the registration process for players and can be used in digital communication with players or on posters displayed around your clubhouse.

Club administrators can learn more about Adult Player Registration by watching recordings of [recent webinars](#).

Finally, should any of the supporting routes above not solve your query, please contact our GMS Service Desk team [here](#).

FAQ FOR ADULT PLAYER REGISTRATION

Further guidance on adult player registration, including a list of FAQs can be found [here](#) (last modified Monday 5th August).

Sanctions related to non-registered players

The new player registration process requires all players to register prior to the start of the season. For Premiership level to Counties 2 men, and Premiership level to NC2 women, only registered players will be able to be selected on the match card.

1. If there are players who take part in a match at these levels, whilst not being registered, then this may result in them being considered ineligible players and a sanction of 5 match points could be applied to the team.
2. Clubs have informed us that league integrity is essential and therefore sanctions will be applied at these levels from the start of the season. Players **MUST** be registered to their club before the game and correctly added to the match card.
3. For teams that play at levels below this, i.e. below Counties 2 men and NC2 women, there is still a requirement for players to be registered, however, the names may be added to the match card within 48 hours of the match.

The RFU teams are available to provide any support that you may need in registering players (**resources noted in the section above**) so please contact them should you need any assistance.

Papa Johns Men's Community Cups Update

Based on feedback from the Papa John's Community Cup management group, we have opted to remove the two - week withdrawal period for this upcoming season's entry process.

Please therefore be mindful of the entry dates listed below:

Entries opening – 21st October
Entries closing – 24th November
Draw Released – Mid January

Anticipated Fixture Weeks:

12th April
26th April
3rd May
10th May
17th May – Finals

Following a review and feedback from the game, there will be a format change through all Regional 1 competitions and for the Regional 2 Championship. They will remain 16 team competitions but will now be straight knockouts, aside from the quarter finals, which will be held over 2 legs. This will allow more teams to host home games within these competitions. All other competitions will remain the same.

Further information on available travel support, likely final venues will be distributed in due course prior to the closing of entries.

Regulation Update Reminder

In the 22-23 season the RFU put in place a regulation review strategy (the “Strategy”), the objective of which is to develop and implement regulations which: (a) are necessary, proportionate and pragmatic; (b) achieve the agreed upon objectives of the relevant regulation; (c) by adopting a structured, targeted and periodic review of regulations. This Strategy is a rolling 3 year strategy to ensure the RFU (i) plans its’ meetings and focus accordingly, to ensure it identifies and prioritise certain regulations based on an ongoing assessment; and (ii) allows sufficient planning and time within meetings to discuss the relevant regulations.

The table below sets out an executive summary of the key changes which have the more material impact on the Game and on volunteer burden. The below provides a summary but for more detail, please also refer to the full regulations which will be on the website from 1 August 2024: <https://www.englandrugby.com/governance/rules-and-regulations>

Regulations 6 (Adult Competitions)	<p>The majority of changes proposed are for clarity and to aid league administration. These include stating that replayed matches should be played on the Next Available Weekend (unless exceptionally agreed otherwise), the ability for an Organising Committee to expunge results of a team who fails to fulfil 25% or 4 games (which is higher) of its League Programme, and the reinstatement of provisions relating to the reduction in the number of Clubs (and the consequent impact as it moves down the pyramid).</p> <p>As a result of the approval of the FCS Recommendations by RFU Council, the following changes have additionally been made to Regulation 6:</p> <p>The key changes are to Appendix 2 of Regulation 6 (principally to raise the ceiling for Lower XVs from Counties 1 to Regional 2), and we have also added a new Appendix 5 to Regulation 6 which provides for; (a) the eligibility of Lower XVs; (b) the mechanics for any CB vote on entry of Lower XVs; (c) the ability to enter Lower XVs in the league structure at a higher level than the bottom of the pyramid (if considered appropriate to do so); and (d) the position in leagues which span multiple CBs. The promotion mechanic out of Counties 1 into Regulation 2 at the end of the 2024-25 season envisages that, in the event a First XV club comes second to a Lower XV club, that First XV club should be promoted regardless of Best Playing Record.</p>
Regulation 13 (Club Registration) and Regulation 14 (RFU Registration)	<p>As a result of the launch of Adult Player Registration on 15 July 2024, Regulation 13 (previously vacant in Season 2022/23) and Regulation 14 have undergone a thorough review to reflect the new digitalised, player-led process.</p> <p>Regulation 13 and Regulation 14 were launched on 15 July 2024 to coincide with the launch of the system. The key features of each are as follows. The principle is that all adults, playing across all levels Adult Player Registration at our member clubs, will register to play rugby. All registrations will be instigated by the player (rather than the Club as previously). The two main categories of registration will be what is termed ‘RFU Registration’ and ‘Club Registration’:</p> <p><u>RFU Registration (Regulation 14) – key summarised features</u></p>

	<p>There have been relatively few changes made to Regulation 14, save for aligning terminology and updating references to the new system.</p> <p>The principals of registration applying to these levels remain largely unchanged:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Applies to Levels 1-4 in the men’s game and level 1 in the women’s game; b. Level 5-8 in the men’s game and level 2-4 of the women’s game for certain categories of players (i.e. contracted players, loan players etc.); c. The player instigates a registration; d. The Club accepts the registration and completes any additional steps; e. Players can play for one club only at any one time – subject to the usual provisions around student/service pass players and loan players; f. The Transfer deadline will remain; g. Loan player, service pass players, student pass players and overseas player provisions will remain; h. The restrictions below will remain: i. not hold Effective Registration with more than one Club at any one time; and ii. not hold Effective Registration with more than three (3) Clubs in any Season; and i. The sanctions in respect of ineligible players will remain. <p><u>Club Registration (Regulation 13) – key summarised features</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Applies to Regional 1 to Counties 2 in the men’s game and level 2-4 in the women’s game if those players are not contracted or loan players, etc.; b. Also applies to Counties 3 and below (including merit leagues/tables) in the men’s game and levels 5 and below (including Inner Warrior Series) in the women’s game; c. The Player instigates a registration; d. The Club accepts registration and player is available to play immediately; e. Players can dual-register for and play for up to two clubs at a time (at the levels set out in (b) above); f. There is a retrospective registration option – i.e. players who become available ‘late in the day’ can play and then register post-match (at the levels set out in (b) above); g. Players can instigate the change of clubs (within the prescribed limit of two) throughout the season; h. There will be no transfer deadline at Counties 3 and below (including merit leagues/tables) in the men’s game and levels 5 and below (including Inner Warrior Series) in the women’s game.
<p>Regulation 15 (Age Grade Rugby)</p>	<p>As was the case last season, Regulation 15 was released to the game earlier than the other RFU Regulations, and the present version was effective from 14 May 2024. The key changes are summarised below:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. All “Playing Out of Age Grade” applications are to be made using the online Smartsheet forms. Paper forms will no longer be accepted. Approval of Competitive Activity, Rugby Camps and Tours to also move to an online form;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. For combining age grades, the number of players permitted in the combined team from the older age group will be reduced from 50% to 30%; c. Increasing the definition of the ability for U19s to play down in schools and colleges, and to also include ERFSSU approval (in the case of schools); and d. Creating consistency in the assessments required in all “Playing Out of Age Grade” scenarios.
<p>Regulation 19 (Discipline)</p>	<p>Regulation 19 (Discipline) was identified as a priority for wholesale review in the 23-24 season as part of the Strategy, and has been substantially revised in consultation with the Game.</p> <p>The principles of the review were to ensure “Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity” (ABC) of the regulation. The scope of the review has been on the main body of Regulation 19. The appendices (for example, the Age Grade discipline regulations), will be reviewed and subject to their own consultation process in the 24-25 season in line with the Strategy.</p> <p>A number of significant changes have been made to the regulation. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The introduction of explanatory notes alongside the regulations to provide further assistance to persons not overly familiar with the discipline process; b. Introduction of an alternate resolution provision for dealing with cases; c. Strengthening of compliance measures available for dealing with non-fulfilment of education and alternate sanctions; d. Introduction of protection for whistle-blowers reporting incidents in good faith to the discipline, Speakup or Safeguarding teams; e. The ability for CB’s to use an expediated discipline process for certain cases, when agreement has been given to that CB (with the agreed process to be set out in a new appendix); and f. The ability for the Head of Discipline to review appeals to determine if there are valid grounds for appeal and then to dismiss prior to a hearing if there are hopeless grounds
<p>Regulation 21 (Safeguarding)</p>	<p>The changes include the removal of fixed term bars, the removal of references to Safeguarding Panels, and clarifying that individuals who have had their DBS Certificate requested by the RFU Safeguarding Team must not engage in unsupervised regulated activity until they have been cleared to do so by the RFU.</p>
<p>Academy, Colleges and Education League (ACE), Girls Competition</p>	<p>For Season 2024/25, the ACE Girls Competition is to be managed and administered by the RFU Professional Rugby Competitions Department (as is the case for the ACE Boys competition), which has required a new set of regulations for this competition to be introduced this season. The regulations are based as far as possible on the ACE Boys regulations.</p>
<p>Premiership Women’s Rugby Regulations</p>	<p>Changes have been proposed to the EQP framework this season following agreement of the PWR Board and the PWR Clubs, including the introduction of an injury credit system and the abolition of the mid-season points deduction. There is also the requirement for each PWR Club to nominate a secondary ground to aid with the fulfilment of fixtures in the event a Club’s principal ground is unavailable (such as due to weather conditions).</p>
<p>Championship Regulations</p>	<p>The one key change relates to promotion and relegation from National 1, which provides that, given Tier 2 will comprise a 14-team league in the 25-26 season, there will therefore be no relegation from the</p>

	Championship in the 24-25 season. There will still be promotion from National 1 at the end of the 24-25 season, subject to that Club meeting the Tier 2 Minimum Operating standards.
Papa John's Cup/County Championship Regulations	Any changes to these regulations will be presented to Governance and Council in the Autumn and will be communicated thereafter.