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Policy Name:

HKCR Play Up / Play Down & U18-to-Senior Rugby Dispensation Policy

Status:

Updated from:

- *Player Dispensation Form 2025/26 (Play Up/Play Down)*
- *Player Dispensation Form – 17-Year-Old Youth to Senior Rugby*

Date of Issue:

1st September 2026

Key Reasons for Adoption / Amendment:

To extend the “form submission” based approach to include eligibility, timelines, decision making steps, duration and review and specific step-by-step process for U18 to Senior Rugby with assessment criteria and contact preparation requirements

Reference Documents:

- World Rugby Player Welfare Guidelines – Age Grade Rugby
- Rugby Australia Participation Policy
- Rugby Australia Player Dispensation Policy
- Rugby Australia Age Grade Dispensation Procedure
- Scottish Rugby Age Banding Policies and Player Welfare in age Grade Rugby
- Scottish Rugby Union Policy on Male Under 18s Playing Adult Rugby
- SARU Regulations for Under-aged Rugby
- RFU Regulation 15 – Age Grade Rugby (Rugby Football Union, England)

Policy Owner:

Hong Kong China Rugby Domestic Rugby Department

Review Cadence:

Annual Review

Approved By:

Hong Kong China Rugby Governance Committee

Approval Date:

TBC

Applicability:

Youth Club Rugby Players

Classification:

Mandatory

Supporting Materials:

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- HKCR U18-Senior Rugby Dispensation Process
- Form A – Player Dispensation for Senior Rugby
- Form B – Player Dispensation for Senior Rugby

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HKCR Play Up / Play Down & U18-to-Senior Rugby Dispensation Policy

1. Scope and principles

- Applies to all age-grade rugby (U6-U18) and any U18 player seeking to play Senior Rugby (Men's and Women's).
- Safety and welfare are the overriding considerations; competitive needs can never outweigh player welfare.
- Players normally participate in their designated age group; any variation (play up or play down) requires a formal dispensation under this policy.

2. Play up / play down exceptional circumstance – general process

This section covers all age-grade requests except U18-to-Senior (see section 3).

2.1 Eligibility

- **Play up:** A player may play up a maximum of one age band without dispensation (e.g. U13 into U14) with parent/guardian sign off and a level 2 coach's sign off. These play ups must still be communicated in writing with HKCR, who have the right to ask for a formal dispensation to be submitted if they have reasonable concern.
 - Any player who has communicated that they will 'play up' into the age group above cannot 'play down' into their chronological age group without written communication with HKCR, who have the right to ask for a formal dispensation to be submitted if they have reasonable concern.
- **Play down:** A player may play down a maximum of one age band only once granted Age Dispensation for clear welfare needs (e.g. late maturation or medical related reasons) and must not confer unfair advantage.

Age Turning In Calendar Year	Actual Age Grade	Eligible Age Grade (Without Dispensation)	With Age Dispensation (1 Age Grade Down)
5	U5	U6 or U7 (non-contact)	N/A
6	U6	U7	N/A
7	U7	U8	N/A
8	U8	N/A*	U7
9	U9	N/A*	U8
10	U10	U11	U9
11	U11	U12	U10
12	U12	N/A*	U11
13	U13	U14	U12
14	U14	N/A	U13
15	U15	N/A	U14
16	U16	N/A	U15
17	U17	N/A	U16

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18	U18	Senior Rugby**	U17
19	Senior Rugby	Senior Rugby	N/A***
20	Senior Rugby	Senior Rugby	N/A

**U8 and U9 Age Grade player requires a dispensation before playing contact U9 and U10 rugby as these are progressively designed programs to introduce contact rugby, U12 requires dispensation for U13 having only played 10-a-side rugby*

*** U18 player who is not yet 18 years of age requires Senior Rugby dispensation before playing Senior Rugby*

****Dispensation must be submitted for a 19 year old player to play U18 rugby*

2.2 Required information

Please see the dispensation application form collecting:

- Objective data: height, weight, growth/maturation status, injury history, positional history.
- Rugby profile: playing experience, game time, training load, and primary playing position (especially front row).
- Coach input: assessment of technical competence, contact skills, decision-making, and emotional readiness.
- Parent/guardian consent for all players under 18.

2.3 Timeline

- Player registers in their correct age grade in the HKCR registration system at the start of the season.
- Any play up / play down request should be lodged at least 14 days before the match in which the dispensation is required

2.4 Decision-making steps

1. Club completes online Dispensation Request Form (Play Up / Play Down) with all required data and signed consents.
2. HKCR Dispensation Panel (HKCR Executive Director Domestic Rugby, HKCR General Manager Club Development & Sustainability, HKCR Head of Development) checks completeness
3. If required, HKCR may complete an on-field and physical assessment (skills, contact proficiency, game understanding, physical profile).
4. HKCR Dispensation Panel reviews the assessment and:
 - approves,
 - declines, or
5. Club, player, and parents/guardians are notified in writing.

2.5 Duration and review

- Dispensations apply for one season only and must be re-applied for annually.
- HKCR may review or revoke a dispensation at any time if:
 - player's physical profile changes significantly,
 - there are serious welfare concerns, or
 - competition structures change.

3. U18 to Senior Rugby – specific policy

3.1 Fundamental rule

- No U18 player may train or compete in Senior Rugby from the start of the season, except in truly exceptional circumstances, such as representative team selection, professional contracting, or other HKCR-approved high-performance pathways aligned with World Rugby guidance on U18s in adult rugby.
- All U18 players must be fully registered and active in U18 competition for the 15s season.
- No U18 player may play front row in Senior Rugby.

3.2 Registration of interest (start-of-season)

- Any U18 player who may wish to play Senior Rugby having completed their U18 15s season must:
 - Indicate their interest to HKCR in writing prior to November 1
 - Obtain written parent/guardian consent and club endorsement.
- This step does not grant permission to play Senior Rugby; it only enables them to enter the later assessment process.

3.3 Trigger point: Post Grand Final

After the Grand Final of that player's primary U18 15s league, the club may submit a formal U18 to Senior Play Up Request for that player.

No U18 player may take part in a Senior Rugby match until 1st January of that season, except in the exceptional circumstances pathway mentioned in 3.1. Dispensation must be granted to begin the contact preparation block in lead up to the targeted first match.

If 3.2 or 3.3 submissions are missed for reasons outside of the players control, an application may still be considered.

3.4 Dual traffic-light assessment

Each candidate is evaluated on two separate traffic-light ratings:

A. Developmental readiness traffic light

Assesses whether the player can safely and effectively participate in Senior Rugby.

Inputs where possible:

- Height, weight, and maturity status.
- Strength and power benchmarks, conditioning test results and speed scores.
- Previous match experience, position-specific demands, and injury history (with medical clearance where necessary).
- In game assessment where possible
- Coach and S&C/medical staff opinion.

Ratings:

- Green - demonstrated physical robustness and technical competence to play Senior Rugby (position-specific).
- Amber - partially ready; gaps identified that require further development before safe participation.



- Red - not suitable for Senior Rugby this season on welfare grounds.

B. Long-term development traffic light

Assesses whether playing Senior Rugby now is beneficial in the player's long-term development plan.

Ratings:

- Green - Senior Rugby supports the player's long-term plan, with clear rationale.
- Amber - mixed; benefits and risks balanced, or unclear long-term rationale.
- Red - Senior Rugby would compromise long-term development (e.g. overload, missed skill development, different format of the game).

Decision table

Readiness (A)	LT Development (B)	Outcome
Green	Green	Proceed to senior contact preparation block
Green	Amber	Development reasoning worked through with player/parent/coach to reach final decision
Amber or Red	Any	Decline dispensation for Senior Rugby this season

3.5 Contact preparation block

For players given dispensation to play:

- They enter a structured Senior Contact Preparation Block administered by club coaches.
- Typical duration: 2-4 weeks, with emphasis on:
 - increased intensity and physicality of contact scenarios,
 - set-piece demands (particularly scrum and maul),
 - on-field communication and decision-making under pressure,
 - recovery, nutrition, and load management education.
- Attendance and progression are logged; any red-flag (e.g. repeated injuries, poor adaptation) can halt the process and trigger re-assessment.

3.6 Final dispensation to Senior Rugby

- On successful completion of the contact block, the club submits a short Senior Rugby Clearance Form confirming attendance, no welfare concerns, and preferred positions.
- The HKCR Dispensation panel then:
 - confirms Senior Rugby dispensation for the remainder of that season,
 - specifies position or game-time restrictions if needed (e.g. managed minutes), or
 - declines and provides written reasons and development recommendations.
- Dispensation is valid only for:
 - the current season, and
 - the club/competition specified in the approval.

4. Restrictions and interaction with other competitions

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- Any U18 player granted Senior Rugby dispensation under section 3 cannot participate in U18 7s, including showcase finals at the Hong Kong 7s, for that season.