

# National Rugby Policy

## POLICY #04 DISPENSATIONS

Updated 28 November 2023 and effective immediately.

### POLICY REVIEW

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

### BACKGROUND

Given a strong focus on ensuring rugby is available to as many players as possible, organising bodies have traditionally offered dispensations to players who may not meet grade criteria on either weight or age grounds.

Failing to allow a dispensation may prevent those players from playing and could impact an organisation's ability to field a team in a competition, thereby potentially affecting the meaningfulness of that competition. On the other hand, it could be suggested that allowing dispensation of players may pose a risk to safety and enjoyment of the grade eligible players.

This risk is enhanced further if Exceptional Circumstance Case approvals have been granted for players within the grade in accordance with NZR Participation Policy #9 Age Bands to Play Age Grade Rugby, and accordingly, Player safety and minimising risk will always be the first consideration when deciding whether or not to allow a dispensation in Rugby.

Dispensations must not be allowed in any situation where there is reason to believe the request is motivated by a desire to have players play down in younger age grades in order to influence results or gain an unfair advantage.

### POLICY

This policy applies to all players up to Year 13 or 18 years old on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April of the year in question. This policy also applies to all contact forms of the game, including Sevens, Tens, and Fifteens.

The term 'age window' is defined as the year that caters for any particular playing cohort. This is typically by defining grades by age such as "U11" years or "U19" years. For the purposes of this policy, focus should remain on the age of the respective playing cohort rather than the grade description. To clarify, the absence of an age grade at a level within a competition structure does not mean that players can be automatically considered for the next available age grade.

Dispensations in rugby below U19 may be permissible, subject to the following principles and considerations:

- The safety of all grade eligible players is paramount and must be considered by the competition organisers and the Provincial Union.
- Provincial Unions and their respective organising committees must determine for any age grade competition, the need for an upper weight limit taking into account player safety and local demographics in their region.
- For any weight grade dispensation, an upper age must be nominated.
- Provincial Unions and their respective organising committees must determine the conditions under which dispensations are to be granted and set out the steps for risk mitigation to ensure the safety of the competition's participants.

Dispensations are to be managed in accordance with the Dispensation Process Diagram to ensure:

- Consideration is given to the presence of any approved Exceptional Circumstances Case players in the competition.
- An assessment of the potential safety risk to participants is undertaken for any player requesting dispensation.
- A risk mitigation approach is established and communicated to maintain safety but provide maximum opportunity for inclusion of all players.
- Legal Guardians of players / Schools / Clubs are aware of any dispensed players within the competition.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES**

**New Zealand Rugby will provide:**

- NZR Dispensation Process; and

- Support and guidance to the Provincial Unions in making their decisions in NZR Dispensation Process.

#### **Provincial Unions and their Organising Committees will:**

- Provide support to players / clubs / schools requesting dispensation;
- Provide dispensation application form to players / clubs / schools requesting dispensation;
- Provide support in viewing players to support risk assessment;
- Review applications for dispensation;
- Advise affected players / clubs / schools of dispensation outcomes;
- Record and retain completed dispensation forms for any player; and
- Sanction all parties for knowingly breaching this policy.

#### **Clubs / Schools will:**

- Submit dispensation applications as required; and
- Comply with Provincial Union dispensation decisions

## **SANCTIONS**

Coaches, Managers, Administrators, Clubs and Schools who knowingly play or allow players to play outside of the NZR Dispensation Process may also face Provincial Union disciplinary sanctions. These are to be determined by the Provincial Union.