

# Danske Bank Ulster Schools' Cup and related Competitions

## Rules and Regulations 2025-2026

### GENERAL REGULATIONS

1. In these Rules and Regulations: -
  - "Branch" means the Ulster Branch of the Irish Rugby Football Union;
  - "Branch Committee" means the Committee of the Branch as provided for in the Bye-Laws;
  - "Bye-Laws" means the Bye-Laws and Regulations of the Branch;
  - "Laws of the Game" means the Laws of the Game as laid down by World Rugby, formerly known as the International Rugby Board;
  - "Schools' Committee" means the Schools' Committee set up under the Bye-Laws to manage the affairs of Schools' rugby football;
  - "Schools' Committee Officers" means the Chairman and Secretary of the Schools' Committee, the ASCL (Principals') Representative to the Branch Committee and the Schools' Committee representative to the Branch Committee.
2. The Schools' Committee Officers shall perform the functions assigned to them under the provisions of these Rules and Regulations.
3. Please note that the regulations governing these competitions are published in the Bye-laws of the Ulster Branch and the World Rugby Laws of the Game of Rugby Football. Your attention is drawn to the variations applicable to Under 19 Rugby. All schools in entering the Competitions, and signing the Entry Form, must agree to conform to all the Rules and Regulations described herein. Failure to meet any of the Rules and Regulations, in particular, Regulations 43 & 48, may result in sanctions up to and including possible non admittance to competitions in the following year.
4. All participating schools must adhere to the Code of Conduct as set out in the IRFU Safeguarding Policy a copy of which can be found on:-  
<https://d19fc3vd0ojo3m.cloudfront.net/irfu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/03101442/IRFU-Safeguarding-Policy-2023.pdf>
5. All participating schools must adhere to all Ulster Rugby campaigns which promote positive behaviour by players, coaches and spectators and are required to actively share this information on a regular basis. This includes upholding the IRFU Spirit of Rugby, an IRFU initiative which includes practical educational programmes that embody and promote the core values of the game – Respect, Inclusivity, Integrity, Fun and Excellence and promotion of the Respect Our Game campaign.  
<https://ulster.rugby/rugby-in-ulster/rugby-development/resources/respectourgame>
6. Regulation 51 provides an overview of operational arrangements to be followed by schools involved in games at Affidea Stadium. These will be forwarded by the Ulster Branch (IRFU) to Schools involved in games at the Affidea Stadium in due course and participating schools are required to comply.
7. The Schools' Committee, at its regular monthly meeting shall be the final arbiter of any decision of the Schools' Committee Officers which is disputed by a School, provided that where reference to a monthly meeting of the Schools' Committee is impractical, a School may appeal direct to the Branch Committee in writing on School note paper signed by the Principal of the School, and addressed to the Honorary Secretary of the Branch. Any such appeal must be lodged within 96 hours of the school receiving official notification

of the decision, and must be accompanied by a sum of £250 which may, at the discretion of the Branch Committee, be refunded in whole or in part.

8. The IRFU (Ulster Branch)/Ulster Rugby and its partners, will from time to time capture images (photographs and video footage) of pupils who are participating in the Schools' Cup and associated competitions. These images will be used for promotional purposes in relation to the Schools' Cup in a variety of media including websites and or the press. Pupils, Parents and Schools are normally very happy with such coverage but there may some individual circumstances which means that parents do not wish such images of their child to be in the public domain. It would be time consuming and impractical to seek school and parental permission on every occasion that an image of a pupil is to be used for the above purposes. It is therefore assumed that permission to use images of individuals participating in the Schools' Cup has been granted unless otherwise notified by the school. If a school wishes to update this notification at any stage throughout the season it can do so by contacting the Branch IRFU (Ulster Branch)/Ulster Rugby.
9. Use of drones: It is important that the use of drones is carefully managed. Permission must be sought and obtained prior to use at an opposition ground. All drone operators must be appropriately trained, and all relevant regulations governing drone usage must be strictly followed.

## TOURNAMENT & FORMAT

10. Under the current format there are four competitions at 1<sup>st</sup> XV and Medallion XV Level, three at U16 Level, three at 2<sup>nd</sup> XV Level and two at 3<sup>rd</sup> XV Level. Entry to 2<sup>nd</sup> XV competitions requires entry to the Schools' Cup and entry to the 3<sup>rd</sup> XV competitions requires entry to the 2<sup>nd</sup> XV competition other than in exceptional cases where Schools, which do not compete in the Schools' Cup, may be granted entry to the 2<sup>nd</sup> XV and 3<sup>rd</sup> XV competitions by the Schools' Committee if this entry level is deemed to be more appropriate. (Players involved in provincial U18/U19 Age Grade Squads will not be permitted to play in the 3<sup>rd</sup> XV competition.) eTeamsheets will be monitored in order to ensure the integrity of all Senior competitions. In the event of significant duplication in starting XVs across the competitions, this will be investigated by the Schools' Committee Officers and action taken, if appropriate. If schools have queries in respect of the eligibility of any of their players for a fixture in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> XV competitions, they should seek clarification from the Schools' Committee Officers in advance of the fixture being played.
11. Schools may claim for travel to one away match during either the Schools' Cup **or** the Medallion Shield competitions. A claim form should be requested from [Lesley.mcgaughey@ulsterrugby.com](mailto:Lesley.mcgaughey@ulsterrugby.com)
12. All matches at U18 level shall be 35 minutes each way, and at U16 and U15 level 30 minutes each way. Time may be added for injuries. There will be no extra time played. The U18 and U16 competitions use a size 5 ball. Medallion competitions use size 4 ball.
13. In the event of the referee determining there is a 'clash' of jersey colours, the home team must agree to an alternative strip.
14. A fresh draw will be made after each round. Fixtures should be confirmed (date, time and venue) between schools within three working days of the draw being circulated and the Ulster Branch informed. Any issues about the playing of the fixture should be relayed to the competition secretary within this time frame. (Please note that for Saturday fixtures, the referee appointments committee meet on the Thursday evening 9 days in advance.)
15. Only the semi-finals of the Schools' Cup and Medallion Shield Competitions will be played at neutral venues. All other semi-finals will be played at the venue of the first named school, unless mutually agreed.

16. In the event that two competing schools are in mutual agreement to play their match prior to the date originally arranged, application should be made to the Schools' Committee Officers for approval through initial contact with the competition secretary. Approval will not be given for matches to be played after the arranged date, other than in very exceptional circumstances agreed with the Schools' Committee Officers. For the avoidance of doubt, very exceptional circumstances must be unforeseen and not related to any planned school activities. (see Regulation No 14)
17. Where replays are necessary following a scheduled Saturday match or where games have been postponed in the knock-out stages of each competition, they must be played on/before the following Wednesday unless by agreement through the Schools' Committee Officers. A further replay will be played at one of the school pitches with the venue being decided by a toss of a coin.  
Where games have been postponed in the group stages of the Schools' Cup, they must be played on/before the following Saturday unless by agreement through the Schools' Committee Officers.
18. In the event of a further drawn game, as described in Regulation 17, the winners will be decided as follows:
- i. The team which scores the most tries in the final game.
  - ii. If still level, then the team who scored the most penalties in the final game.
  - iii. If still level, then the team who scored the most drop goals in the final game.
  - iv. If still level, then the team who scored the first try in the final match.
  - v. If still level, then the team who kicked the first penalty goal in the final match.
  - vi. If still level, then the team who scored the first drop goal in the final match.
  - vii. If still level the team who scores the most tries in the 3 games.
  - viii. If the above fail to differentiate then the toss of a coin by the referee will decide who progresses to the next round. The home side in the first game will be 'heads' and will progress if 'heads' is face up.

In the event of a drawn replay, in a competition other than the Schools' Cup or Medallion Shield, and where there is insufficient time for a further replay, the toss of a coin (by the masters-in-charge) should be used.

Qualification from the group stages of the Schools' Cup will be determined as follows –

The four group winners and the four runners-up from the group stages will qualify for the knockout stages of the Schools' Cup and Subsidiary Shield, where they will be joined by the eight seeded teams. The remaining teams will then enter into a knockout competition for the Schools' Trophy and Schools' Bowl.

Placings within the group winners will be determined by the following criteria in the order listed:

The team with the greatest number of points (using a system of 4 points for a win, 1 point for scoring 4 or more tries in a game, 1 losing point for a loss by less than or equal to 7 and 2 points for a draw)

- i. The team with the greatest points difference in all their group matches (in any game, the maximum points differential which can be accrued is 40). The score is 'set' once the 40 point margin is crossed and the score to be reported to competition conveners (& *press, social media*) should be the score at the 40 point margin. Eg Game crosses 40 point margin at 43-0 reported score is 40-0, Game crosses 40 point margin at 55-12 reported score is 52-12
- ii. In the event that the tie is between two teams within a group, then the placing will be determined by the result in the game between the two teams.
- iii. The team with the greatest number of match points gained against the teams finishing in the first three places in the group
- iv. The team with the greatest points difference in games against the teams finishing in the first three places in the group
- v. The team with the greatest number of match points gained against the teams finishing in the first two places in the group
- vi. The team with the greatest points difference in games against the teams finishing in the first two places in the group

- vii. In the event that the above fails to differentiate, then a game, to which regulation 17 will apply, will be held on the Saturday which follows the final group stage game at a neutral venue, determined by the Schools Committee Officers.

The same process will be used for the group stages of the U16 Cup, Shield and Trophy.

19. At the semi final stage of the Schools' Cup, in the event of the first match ending in a draw, there will only be one replay. If the semi final replay ends in a draw then the winners will be determined as per the provisions of Regulation 17 above. Note that in conjunction with the Branch, the Schools' Committee will agree in advance the date and venue for the semi final replay.
20. In the event that any fixture is postponed on a second occasion, the Schools' Committee Officers may seek to secure an alternative venue to stage the fixture.

#### RELATIONSHIP with COMPETITION SPONSORS – DANSKE BANK

21. Sponsor's branding to be located on either one sleeve of the playing jersey or playing shorts of all schools taking part in the Schools' Cup competitions:
  - i. Ulster Rugby will facilitate the distribution of sleeve patches to all schools
  - ii. Digital artwork of the sponsor's branding will be available on request from Ulster Rugby if schools would prefer to have the branding sublimated into their jersey. If sublimated, the sponsor's branding must be located on one sleeve of the playing jersey.
22. In respect to the Schools' Cup, the sponsor is permitted to brand two host venues for each round (up to and including quarter finals). Any school, upon request, will only be obliged to facilitate branding once in each year of the competition. Each host venue will be given one week's notice prior to the scheduled fixture date. Host venues may be asked to facilitate sponsor's branding more than once, however both parties must be in agreement. Branding can include some or all of the following:
  - i. Post pad protectors
  - ii. Perimeter A Frame and "toblerone" branding
  - iii. A gazebo near to the pitch to distribute promotional material
  - iv. PR staff to distribute promotional material
23. The sponsor's branding team will liaise with schools to determine a time that is suitable for both parties to erect any branding that has been agreed prior to the fixture.
24. All branding costs associated with venue branding are to be borne by the sponsor.
25. All schools are required to make the captain of the 1st XV Senior boys team or appointed representative available for PR at Affidea Stadium or other nominated venue for the Round of 16 and other associated competition draws.
26. All teams involved in the Schools' Cup final are required to make the Director of Rugby/Head Coach and Captain available for media and PR duties prior to the Final. Semi Finalists may also be required for PR duties prior to the games.
27. Additional PR & Media access to be accommodated where possible for Ulster Rugby, Danske Bank and the BBC.
28. If the game is being televised (you will be advised), access must be provided for the camera crews.

29. All winning schools of the competitions are required to make the captain available for the Schools Competitions launch event in the stadium in September for PR

#### PLAYING SQUADS

30. The age limit for the senior competitions is Under 18 on the 1st July 2025, Under 16 on the 1st July 2025 for the U16 Cup and Under 15 on the 1st July 2025 for the Medallion competition.
31. All players must be registered appropriately on the Branch Player Registration System.
32. All pupils representing a school must be registered pupils of that school. Other than in very exceptional circumstances agreed with the Schools' Committee Officers, only those players who were registered pupils of the school at the date of commencement of the Schools' Cup may participate in that competition.
33. Before the start of the match both teams should supply a team list for the referee/press/photographers with players numbered and 8 replacements identified. This may be done through a match programme. An eteam sheet must also be submitted to the Branch in respect of each fixture in all competitions in order to allow participation in any subsequent fixture in the competition. These should be submitted within two days of the game being played.
34. Each team must have eight, and only eight, toggled out replacements, all of whom may play. A minimum of three Front Row Players must be included in each Match squad as replacements numbered 16 - 18, such that (a) on the first occasion that a replacement hooker is required, (b) on the first occasion that a replacement tight-head prop forward is required, and (c) on the first occasion that a replacement loose-head prop forward is required (in each case whether due to injury or a Player being Temporarily Suspended or sent off), a replacement can be made and the School's team can continue to play safely with contested scrums.

#### MEDICAL

35. Prior to the start of competitions, each school participating in a schools competition must ensure that the relevant head coach attends an IRFU sanctioned concussion seminar.
36. The decision of the extent or seriousness of a player's injury, including concussion, should be taken by the Team Coach or a Medical Officer, if present. However, Schools should be reminded of Law 3.23 which states *"If the referee decides – with or without the advice of a doctor or other medically qualified person – that a player is so injured that the player should stop playing, the referee may order that player to leave the playing area. The referee may also order an injured player to leave the field in order to be medically examined."*
37. All schools must comply with the IRFU protocols in relation to the management of concussion.
- It should be noted that there is no Head Injury Assessment (HIA), pitch side concussion assessment (PSCA) or concussion bin in the amateur game in Ireland.
  - Players with suspected concussion cannot be temporarily replaced by a substitute and may not return to the playing area.
  - Any player with suspected or confirmed concussion, MUST be removed immediately from training/play and not return. They should be medically assessed and MUST not be left alone or MUST not drive a vehicle. They are required to follow the IRFU Graduated Return to Play protocol, which is a minimum of 23 days for players who are U20 and below. All concussions must be reported on the IRFU Serious Injury and Concussion Report form and sent to the Branch office.

- There are no circumstances under which a player who has suffered concussion can return to rugby before the minimum 23 day GRTP protocol. (Please note the Schools' agreed at the 2025 AGM that the would adopt the IRFU minimum 23 day GRTP protocol and not the 21 days in the DE Circular.)

## DISCIPLINARY

38. Referees for all 1<sup>st</sup> XV competitions will be appointed by the USRFR and, when possible, for other competitions. The Branch Office should be informed of the venue and time of kick-off for each game as soon as possible, preferably 10 days in advance. The home school should make contact with the referee to confirm arrangements.

It is IRFU policy that all rugby matches played under the Laws of the Game (including U19 Variations) are refereed by:

- Members of the Branch Referee Associations/Society *or*
- IRFU Affiliate Referees (appointed by their club / school).

In the event of USRFR being unable to appoint a referee, it is up to the home club to ensure that a suitably qualified Affiliate Referee is available. They can of course consult with the visiting team as to who referees the game but the referee must be affiliated to one of the clubs/schools playing in the match or blitz competition.

The Affiliate Referee policy can also be found at: <https://ulster.rugby/rugby-in-ulster/referees/affiliated-club-and-school-referees>

39. Each school shall appoint a Touch Judge who must be an adult, preferably a teacher at the school. Neutral touch judges and/or fourth officials may be appointed at the discretion of the Schools' Committee Officers.

40. Player Dismissals

In the event of a red card being issued by a member of USRFR, the school will be contacted by Ulster Rugby and provided with guidance on how the disciplinary process will work.

In the event of a player being dismissed in any other match, the Branch MUST be informed as soon as possible via the Principals' Representative, Stephen Black, Ballymena Academy. (028 2565 2782 or 07808401543). Normal Schools' protocol, as detailed below, will apply:

- i. the dismissal should be reported to the Principals' Representative within two days of the game taking place. Following such a dismissal the player will be unable to play until the appropriate sanction has been agreed as per (ii) and (iii) below.
- ii. Principals of the schools participating in the fixture should discuss the incident, following consultation with their respective Master i/c Rugby as appropriate, and seek to reach agreement on a suitable sanction, **in line with World Rugby's Age Grade Specific Sanction Recommendations** for the player. If such agreement is reached, the proposed sanction shall be reported to the Principals' Representative who will then consider if the sanction appears to be appropriate. If so no further action will need to be taken and the sanction, as agreed, will apply.
- iii. In the event that there is no agreement reached between the Principals or in the event that the Principals' Representative, in consultation with Schools' Committee Officers, deems that the sanction is inappropriate, a Disciplinary Meeting will take place in the School as defined in the IRFU Framework Document and subsequent protocols within the Framework will be followed.
- iv. In the event that a red card is contested then this will automatically follow the IRFU Framework and a Disciplinary Panel will be convened to address this as shown.
- v. In the event that serious foul play has been alleged to have taken place, and where no red card has been issued, such an allegation should be reported on the IRFU Rugby Citing Form within 72 hours of the alleged incident to the Principals' Representative. If the allegation is supported by a letter signed by the School Principal and the Master i/c Rugby, then the alleged incident will be addressed using the protocols above and a sanction implemented as appropriate.

41. The 'sin bin' or 'yellow card' is operative in Ulster Schools' Rugby for U18, U16 and Medallion Shield competitions (7 mins for U18 and 5 mins for U16 and Medallion (U15)).
42. Schools are required to ensure that teams and pupil supporters are fully supervised by staff at all times both at home or when visiting other schools and neutral venues. Additionally, schools are required to remind all affiliated supporters of the expected standards of behaviour in relation to fixtures.
43. Off Field Disciplinary Committee: In the event that a school is referred to the Off Field Disciplinary Committee and subsequently found guilty, the Off Field Disciplinary Committee has the power to remove a team from the relevant competition and to deny entry to the same competition in the following season. It should be noted that any decision of the Off Field Disciplinary Committee is subject to the right of appeal.

#### ORGANISATIONAL GUIDELINES

44. Referee Liaison Officer: Both schools MUST appoint a Referee Liaison Officer (RLO) for every match to deal with any issues that arise before, during or immediately following a match. (PS: RLOs MUST actually be appointed for all matches.) If an RLO is not appointed then the Head Coach of the team becomes the RLO be default.  
In the case of neutral venues, both schools MUST appoint a Liaison Officer who should make themselves known to the lead person hosting the match well in advance of kick-off and provide support for the referee and the host to deal with any issues that arise before, during or immediately following a match.
45. The visiting Team should advise their hosts of the number of buses expected i.e., team and supporters' buses. The hosts should arrange parking for the buses and, if necessary, notify the local police. Health and safety is paramount. Hosts should also designate an official to meet and greet visiting schools.
46. Both schools should ensure that all pupil supporters are supervised by Staff at all times for fixtures played at school venues. In respect of fixtures at Affidea Stadium, please refer to Regulation 51.
47. A rope to keep spectators away from the touchline should be set up on both sides of the pitch and, if necessary the ends, for all four 1<sup>st</sup> XV competitions and any high profile Medallion Shield games. In advance of the fixture participating schools should agree the location of each set of supporters and communicate this to spectators in advance of the match. On match day staff should direct spectators to the appropriate location.
48. Spectators should respect the opposition and behave accordingly especially during kicks at goal. Verbal abuse should not be directed at opposition players, coaches or spectators and supervising staff should take action to deal with any examples of this behaviour. In the event that there has been an allegation of poor spectator abuse, this should be brought to the attention of a member of staff who in turn will report this to the school principal. The following items are prohibited/banned at all fixtures. Flares or Fireworks - it should be noted that it is illegal to use flares for anything other than a genuine emergency. Megaphones - as these have been used to target individual players and coaches. Flags and or banners which are deemed to be inappropriate and or derogatory.
49. Technical areas should be marked out for coaching teams and replacements. These should be 9 metres long and 3 metres wide and not less than 2 metres from the touchline. In the absence of such areas replacements must remain behind the roped off area. All coaches must remain inside the designated Technical Zone for the duration of the game. The only exception is when a coach may have to go onto the field of play to attend to an injured player. Other than replacement players, a maximum of four persons should be within the technical zone. If coaches wish to stand behind a dead ball area they cannot be within the playing enclosure.

50. All replacements should have bibs of a neutral colour (not track suit tops). Replacements may only warm up between the 15 metre lines in the in goal area that their team is attacking and must not stay static. Replacements must not follow play up and down the touchline during the game. They must remain in the technical area throughout the game unless warming up.

51. In respect of fixtures played at Affidea Stadium the following will apply;

- Tickets will only be sold to schools in advance on the basis that pupils will be bused to and from the ground from pre-selected locations i.e., either from the school or another location. Such pupils must be fully supervised at all times;
- An appropriate number of staff must be provided by schools, the numbers and stadium location to be agreed and approved in advance by the Branch, to steward pupils and supporters;
- There is a strict be a policy of no pitch encroachment by any supporters whatsoever; The tunnel, technical zone and pitch is restricted to accredited personnel only.
- The Branch and School Stewards should seek to deter any pitch invasion. Should this happen, every effort should be made by both the School and the Branch to identify those responsible and ensure that they are appropriately dealt with.
- At the end of the game, the winning School may bring the cup to their supporters around the ground;
- A “cordon sanitaire” will be established around the Players’ Tunnel, with no supporters allowed in that area;
- Only five personnel from each school will be permitted within the enclosed pitch area and must remain within the designated technical zone except when attending to injuries. Further information will be provided by Ulster Rugby as part of the Team Manager’s Brief which is issued in advance of any games at the stadium.
- Each team’s 8 replacement players must occupy the seats in the dugout directly behind the allocated technical zone. No other non-playing players will be permitted in the dugout.
- The President’s Suite will continue to be used, as before, for Boards of Governors, senior staff, senior Branch members and sponsors.
- The Event Manager will, in advance of each game, check to ensure full communication between all partners responsible for managing and stewarding the game; this will include communication with the PSNI.
- Before each game at the Stadium, every school must commit to read out an agreed script at School Assembly, reminding pupils of the requirements above, the presence of CCTV within the stadium and warning that any breach e.g., invasion of the pitch, will result in serious sanctions;
- Branch staff must ensure that any breaches of pre-match protocols are immediately brought to the attention of the offending team’s nominated school contact or the head coach and that the team conforms to the protocols. The Schools’ Committee will be notified accordingly.

# Danske Bank Ulster Schools' Cup and related Competitions

## Rules and Regulations 2025-2026

- Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_
- We acknowledge receipt of the Rules and Regulations 2025-2026 and our commitment to honour the terms and conditions of the Rules and Regulations.
- We acknowledge that all dates are on or before dates and it is possible to bring the dates of matches forward with the permission of the competition organiser. In situations where schools cannot agree a date for a fixture, even with the involvement of the schools' Principals, then the Committee will set the "on date" as the date for the fixture.
- We will disseminate the Rules and Regulations to the relevant staff within this school.
- We will complete eteamsheets as required. (requirements currently being reviewed and will likely increase)

Entries for the Danske Bank Schools' Cup and U16 have already been completed.

- We wish to entry the following competitions:

2<sup>nd</sup> XV Cup

3<sup>rd</sup> XV Cup

Medallion Shield

Other Entries (eg 4<sup>th</sup> XV in 3<sup>rd</sup> XV Cup, etc) \_\_\_\_\_

Competition organisers will be in touch with schools about tiers of entry after the closing date for returns.

Signatures:

\_\_\_\_\_ School Principal

\_\_\_\_\_ 1<sup>st</sup> XV Coach/Teacher i/c Rugby

Please return this acknowledgement by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2025 to: -

Raymond Pattison ([raymondpattison1@gmail.com](mailto:raymondpattison1@gmail.com)),  
Honorary Secretary, Ulster Schools' Committee, Ulster Branch (IRFU)