High Schools' Rugby

Handbook

2026/27



High Schools' Committee
Competition Rules and Regulations

COMMITTEE PURPOSE

The High Schools Committee is made up of teachers from across Ulster who are responsible for organising all aspects of High Schools Rugby Union.

The High Schools Committee, with the support from the Ulster Branch, want to promote Rugby in Ulster, increase participation and install the ethos of Rugby Football Union.

Through the High Schools competitions the committee wish to promote an Inclusive Culture for all schools and abilities.

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 Byelaws ;
   - "Byelaws" means the Byelaws 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 ;
   - "High Schools Committee" means the High Schools Committee set up to manage the affairs of High Schools rugby football;
   - "High Schools Committee Officers" means the Chair and Secretary of the High Schools Committee.

2. The High 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, may result in sanctions up to and including possible non admittance to competitions in the following year.

4. All participating schools are requested to adhere to the Code of Conduct as set out in the IRFU Safeguarding Document. (Copies are available from the Ulster Branch or can be accessed through the Ulster Branch website.)

5. The High Schools Committee, at its regular monthly meeting shall be the final arbiter of any decision of the High 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.

6. 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 High Schools Competitions These images will be used for promotional purposes in relation to High Schools Rugby 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 High

Schools Competitions 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.

COMPETITION ENTRY AND FEES

7. Option 1: Affiliate your school to the branch. This will cost £103 for the season (£85 to Ulster Branch, £15 to IRFU + VAT). Option 2: Pay as you Play per Age Grade. If you want to compete in our branch competitions, it will be of a cost of £20 per Competition.

8. Payment can be made to 'IRFU Ulster Branch' via bank transfer. Sort Code: 95-01-14. Account: 40047317. IBAN: GB15 DABA 9501 1440 0473 17. SWIFT: DABA GB2B. For further information please email accountsur@ulsterrugby.com

9. Each school should endeavour to enter competitions as early in the academic year as possible and at least three weeks prior to the start of the respective competition.

10. If a school has to withdraw from a competition, they should notify the High Schools Secretary at the earliest possible opportunity.

11. Entry fees should be paid by the end of December for all competitions, if these fees are not paid the school would be withdrawn from any current competitions they are still involved in that season and they would also not be allowed to enter any competitions the following season. Fees go towards competition administration and ambulance costs.

12. Ulster Branch Development Officers (local club CCROs) can be used to coach in schools which do not have rugby qualified members of staff.

PLAYING SQUADS

13 The number of players in match day squads for each level of cup competition is as follows;

- U14s, U16s & U18s up to 23 per squad

14. In Cup Matches and Qualifying Matches from U14 to U18 the matches are 15 aside. If a team fields with less than 15 players, then the team which fields 15 players is automatically deemed to have won the match.

15. For Branch Competitions each team can have up to a maximum of eight replacements, all of whom may play. A minimum of 3 front row players must be included in each match day squad as replacements.

16. In non-Branch Competitions friendly matches can be played with reduced numbers eg 12 v 12, 13 v 13 etc as long as teachers from both schools agree.

17. All pupils representing a school must be registered pupils of that school.

18. School Amalgamation: To apply to join up with another school for the season ahead, an official request must be sent to the Secretary of the High Schools Committee no later than 1st July prior to the season beginning in September. Each case will be discussed at length within the committee and voted upon. This must be reapplied for every given season.

MEDICAL & PLAYER WELFARE

19 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 3.10 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."

20. 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 U20-U6 players. All concussions must be reported on the IRFU Serious Injury and Concussion Report form and sent to the Branch office c/o graeme.ormiston@ulsterrugby.com
- Please use the link to report any serious injuries throughout the course of the season, whether they occur in training or in matches Irish Rugby | Injury Reporting
- Parents/Guardians must be informed of any injury and made aware of the 'Return to Play' protocol.

21 Teachers should also note that many High Schools players also play club rugby and they MUST be informed of any injury or concussion as soon as possible. s

22. Time gap between matches

- A player may not play at two different age levels within a 48 hour period.
- A player may not play in more than two games at the same age level within a 48 hour period, and in one of those games the player may not play for more than one half.
- The 48 hour period referred to in (a) and (b) above shall be deemed to commence when the player takes the field for the first time.

23. Schools should check with clubs with Saturday games when planning mid-week games themselves.

DISCIPLINARY

24. The USRFR shall (whenever possible) appoint referees for all Cup matches. The Branch Office should be informed of the venue and time of kick-off for each game as soon as possible. The home school should make contact with the referee to confirm arrangements In relation to Law 6 of the Laws of the Game, if a referee has not been duly appointed then it is the responsibility of the home school to appoint a referee, and such referee shall be a USRFR referee, or an affiliate referee from either of the schools participating in the match.

25. Each school shall appoint a Touch Judge who must be an adult, preferably a teacher at the school.

26. In the event of a player being dismissed the Branch MUST be informed as soon as possible. The Disciplinary Committee set up, in accordance with the provisions of the IRFU Regulations, to hear disciplinary cases relating to sendings-off in High Schools/Youth Rugby will normally consist of the Chairman of the Branch Disciplinary Committee and two members of the High Schools Committee. It should be noted that following such a dismissal the player will be unable to play any form of Rugby until the Disciplinary Committee has met.

27. Schools are asked to ensure that teams and pupil supporters are fully supervised by staff at all times especially when visiting other schools and neutral venues.

ULSTER BRANCH COMPETITION REGULATIONS

28. Eligibility for each age group is as follows

- **U12 -12 a side (IRFU Stage 4 Mini Rugby) Yr8 players only**
- **U14 -15 a side (IRFU U19 laws) Yr9 and Yr10 players**
- **U16 -15 a side (IRFU U19 laws) Yr11 and Yr12 players**
- **U18 -15 a side (IRFU U19 laws) Yr12, 13 and 14 players**

29. Specific regulations for each competition are outlined in the following sections

- U14 Bowl Competition
- U14 High Trophy, Plate & Shield
- U16 Pollock Cup
- U16 Danske Bank High Schools Trophy, Plate & Shield
- U18 High Schools Cup & Plate

AFFILIATED REFEREE COURSE

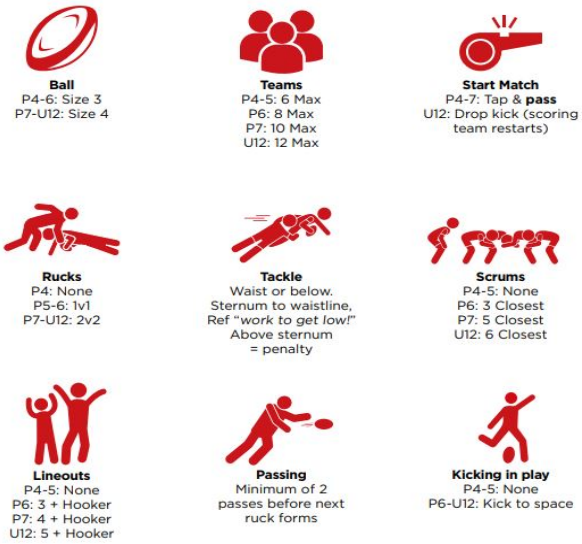
All High Schools are encouraged to have at least 1 staff member who is a qualified affiliate referee, linked to their school.

The course can now be done online, please email Richard Kerr richard.kerr@irfu.ie for further details

U12 RUGBY: PARTICIPATION LET'S PLAY EVENTS

Let's Play Events (Relevant for Players Aged between 1st July 2014-30th June 2015)
These will take every month from September-February. School will be invited to take part through Microsoft Forms. Within this 6-month period Ulster Rugby Domestic Staff will be ranking schools at each event (1,2,3). In March, Festivals will be run with rankings in play so schools can compete at "their level."

Please see diagram below used, in conjunction with Mini Rugby in Clubland.



A player sent off for serious foul play will not be allowed to play in the rest of the event.

Yellow cards WILL NOT be in operation. Teachers are advised to replace players who commit 'yellow card' offences.

U13 RUGBY:

NEW: Format to meet the demands of the schools **(Relevant for Players Aged between 1st July 2013-30th June 2014)**

- Let's Play Format
- 15-a-side
- Full Pitch
- Participation focused

U14 BOWL COMPETITION

(Relevant for Players Aged between 1st July 2012-30th June 2014)

A Competition for Participation Schools

Scrums and Lineout's can be made uncontested at the discretion of the teams playing within the competition.

A player sent off will not be allowed to play in the rest of the competition.

Yellow cards WILL NOT be in operation. Teachers are advised to replace players who commit 'yellow card' offences.

Penalty kicks can be taken at goal.

Format
Regional Qualifier's will be staged and ran in February. Qualifying Schools will compete at a Final's Day

Both will run in a Blitz Format, with multiple "mini-matches" at the same venue.

The top schools from each qualifier will proceed to the Final's Day.

In the case of any ties:
- Result between the two teams
- Points scored
- Points difference
- Toss of a coin

U14 TROPHY, PLATE & SHIELD

(Relevant for Players Aged between 1st July 2012-30th June 2014)
Normal World Rugby Under 19 Laws will apply.

(a) SCRUM - All schools participating must be able to contest the scrum.
(b) LINE OUT - There will be no lifting in the lineout.

The teams will be split into regional groups (number dependant on the number of entries)

There will be a Premier Pool included, where all teams in this pool will qualify for the Trophy Post-Christmas. To be reviewed annually.

Each team will play each other once in a 50 minute game, 25 minutes per half.

Points system for group matches:
- 4 points for a win
- 2 points for a draw
- 1 bonus point for scoring four or more tries
- 1 bonus point for losing by seven or less points

- -1 point for not fielding (determined by the High School Committee)

In knockout rounds there will be no replays or extra time used, if there is a draw in any round excluding the Final the following criteria will apply to determine the winner:

1. Who scores most tries
2. Who scores first try
3. Who scores first points
4. No score, will result in toss of a coin

For the Final, if a draw occurs the trophy will be **shared**

Please note that a neutral venue will be organised by the High Schools committee for the Trophy, Plate and Shield Finals

U14 High Schools Trophy/Plate/Shield Rounds will be drawn to be completed by a specific date as per competition plan

The home team is responsible for a venue and a qualified referee which may be requested from fixtures@ulsterrugby.com (subject to availability).

The home team **must** confirm fixture date by email with away team.

The away team **must** acknowledge this fixture via email / phone call to home school.

If home team postpones twice, they lose home advantage, this includes reasons such as unplayable pitches. Efforts should be made to move fixture to another local venue.

If the fixture is not played by the deadline, the High Schools committee will make a decision on which team will progress. It is important that you keep all correspondence between schools and this will provide the High Schools Committee information on why the fixture was not played.

Please note that not all schools have the same holidays, controlled assessment dates. Please arrange fixtures early. School Trips is **NOT** a valid reason to postpone.

U16 POLLOCK CUP

(Relevant for Players Aged between 1st July 2010-30th June 2012)

Normal World Rugby Under 19 Laws will apply.

(a) SCRUM - All schools participating must be able to contest the scrum.
(b) LINE OUT - It is the intention of the High Schools Committee that where possible all competing schools should perform lifting in the lineouts.

Should your school be unable to perform this set-piece safely (or if they have not been coached to do so), the teacher in charge **must** inform the High Schools' secretary as soon as possible so other schools' competing can be notified. In this situation the following game conditions will apply:

1/ **All** lineouts awarded to that team will be fully contested with no lifting function.

2/ **All** lineouts awarded to the team who can lift will be uncontested in order to allow them to practice this skill in a match environment.

All teams who qualify for the semi-finals will be expected to fully contest both set-pieces (full scrum & lifting in lineouts)
The teams will be split into regional groups (number of groups dependant on the number of entries)

Each team will play each other once in a 60 minute game, 30 minutes per half.

Points system for group matches:

- 4 points for a win
- 2 points for a draw
- 1 bonus point for scoring four or more tries
- 1 bonus point for losing by seven or less points
- -1 point for not being able to field

The top eight teams across all groups will qualify for the U16 Pollock Cup quarter-finals and the U16 High Schools' Trophy quarter finals. For example, if there are five groups, the five group winners and the three best runners-up will qualify for the U16 Pollock Cup and U16 High Schools' Trophy quarter finals.

In the event of a tie at the end of a group, the following criteria will apply:

- Result between the two teams
- Number of bonus points
- Points scored
- Points difference
- Toss of a coin

In the event of two or more schools from different groups having the same number of points at the end of the group stage, the following criteria will apply:

- Number of bonus points
- Points scored
- Points difference
- Toss of a coin

The home team is responsible for a venue and a qualified referee which may be requested from fixtures@ulsterrugby.com (subject to availability).

The home team **must** confirm fixture date by email with away team.

The away team **must** acknowledge this fixture via email / phone call to home school.

If home team postpones twice, they lose home advantage, this includes reasons such as unplayable pitches. Efforts should be made to move fixture to another local venue.

If the fixture is not played by the deadline, the High Schools committee will make a decision on which team will progress. It is important that you keep all correspondence between schools and this will provide the High Schools Committee information on why the fixture was not played.

Please note that not all schools have the same holidays, controlled assessment dates. Please arrange fixtures early. School Trips is **NOT** a valid reason to postpone.

U16 Pollock Cup Quarter-Finals, Semi-finals and Final

No replays or extra time should be used for knockout matches, if there is a draw in a play-off fixture or semi-final the following criteria will apply to determine the winner:

1. Who scores most tries
2. Who scores first try
3. Who scores first points
4. No score, will result in toss of a coin

For the Final, if a draw occurs the trophy will be **shared**

Please note that a neutral venue will be organised by the High Schools Committee for the final

If any High School is entering any of the SOI U16 competitions, this would mean they are ineligible for the U16 High School Competitions

U16 DANSKE BANK HIGH SCHOOLS' TROPHY/PLATE/SHIELD

(Relevant for Players Aged between 1st July 2010-30th June 2012)

Normal World Rugby Under 19 Laws will apply.

U16 High Schools Trophy/Plate Rounds will be drawn to be completed by a specific date as per competition plan

The eight qualifiers from the Pollock Cup **only** will compete in the U16 High Schools Trophy, starting from the quarter final stage.

The home team is responsible for a venue and a qualified referee which may be requested from fixtures@ulsterrugby.com (subject to availability).

The home team **must** confirm fixture date by email with away team.

The away team **must** acknowledge this fixture via email / phone call to home school.

If home team postpones twice, they lose home advantage, this includes reasons such as unplayable pitches. Efforts should be made to move fixture to another local venue.

If the fixture is not played by the deadline, the High Schools committee will make a decision on which team will progress. It is important that you keep all correspondence between schools and this will provide the High Schools Committee information on why the fixture was not played.

Please note that not all schools have the same holidays, controlled assessment dates. Please arrange fixtures early. School Trips is **NOT** a valid reason to postpone.

High Schools Trophy / Plate / Shield

No replays or extra time should be used for cup matches, if there is a draw in any round excluding the Final the following criteria will apply to determine the winner:

1. Who scores most tries
2. Who scores first try
3. Who scores first points
4. No score, will result in toss of a coin

For the Final, if a draw occurs the trophy will be **shared**

Please note that a neutral venue will be organised by the High Schools committee for both semi finals.

U18 HIGH SCHOOLS' CUP & PLATE

(Relevant for Players Aged between 1st July 2008-30th June 2012)

Normal World Rugby Under 19 Laws will apply. *In the latter rounds of our competitions Scrum & Lineout must be contested*

U18 High Schools Cup Rounds will be drawn to be completed by a specific date as per competition plan

The number of entries will dictate the number of rounds.

The home team is responsible for a venue and a qualified referee which may be requested from fixtures@ulsterrugby.com (subject to availability).

The home team **must** confirm fixture date by email with away team.

The away team **must** acknowledge this fixture via email / phone call to home school.

If home team postpones twice, they lose home advantage, this includes reasons such as unplayable pitches. Efforts should be made to move fixture to another local venue.

If the fixture is not played by the deadline, the High Schools committee will make a decision on which team will progress. It is important that you keep all correspondence between schools and this will provide the High Schools Committee information on why the fixture was not played.

Please note that not all schools have the same holidays, controlled assessment dates. Please arrange fixtures early. School Trips is **NOT** a valid reason to postpone.

U18 High Schools Cup & Plate

No replays or extra time should be used for cup matches, if there is a draw in any round excluding the Final the following criteria will apply to determine the winner:

1. Who scores most tries
2. Who scores first try
3. Who scores first points
4. No score, will result in toss of a coin

For the Final, if a draw occurs the trophy will be **shared**

Please note that a neutral venue will be organised by the High Schools committee for the final.

If a school is entering the 1st XV Schools Cup, they are prohibited from entering the U18 High School Cup. If a school enters the 2nd or 3rd XV Schools Cup, they will be eligible to enter the U18 High School Cup

RUGBY DEVELOPMENT OFFICERS

If you would like information or assistance in developing rugby in your school please contact your Rugby Development Officer.

North Region
Peter Wilson
07955634687
peter.wilson@ulsterrugby.com

South East Region
Neal Johnston
07767115764
neal.johnston@ulsterrugby.com

North East Region
Aaron Playfair
07565502654
aaron.playfair@ulsterrugby.com

South Region
Jordan Robinson
07539523654
Jordan.robinson@ulsterrugby.com

Office Admin Staff

Jill McCullough	fixtures@ulsterrugby.com	(Referees/Fixtures)
Paula Parker	paula.parker@ulsterrugby.com	(Ambulances)

HIGH SCHOOLS COMMITTEE CONTACTS

Chairman
Andrew Cowden
acowden838@c2kni.net

Secretary
John Percy
jpercy131@rathfrilandhigh.rathfriland.ni.sch.uk

Committee Members
Andrew Cowden (Chairman, Ballyclare Secondary)
John Percy (Secretary, Rathfriland High School)
Matthew Irvine (Member, Ashfield Boys High School)
Stephen Montgomery (Member, Bangor Academy)
Andrew Scott (Member, Cullybackey College)
David Burns (Member, Castlederg High School)
Simon Crooks (Member, Ballymoney High School)
Michael Ferguson (Member, Ballyclare Secondary School)