

Age Banding Guidance and Support

Playing Above an Age Band

In the interest of fair and enjoyable participation in netball, it is recognised that the development of players, may make it desirable for them to train and/or play above their age band. England Netball has developed this Guidance for use in considering the appropriateness of a young person taking part in activities above their age band, with the welfare of that young person being paramount in that decision. This Guidance applies to requests for any young person to be allowed to take part in activities with others above their age band at England Netball national events and it is recommended for Regional and County activities.

The following Age Banding restrictions for all competitions as follows:

- Any athlete competing in Adult competition must be over the age of 14
- Any athlete competing in U19 competition must be over the age of 14 and Under 19
- Any athlete competing in U16 competition must be over the age of 14 and Under 16
- Any athlete competing in U14 competition must be over the age of 11 and Under 14

(All ages are taken at 11.59pm on the 31st August immediately prior to the competition)

(These are recommended Age Banding guidelines, please refer to specific competition regulations to confirm eligibility)

These restrictions are in place to ensure that all teams apply the same age limits and to ensure the protection of potentially vulnerable players. In some exceptional circumstances, a player may demonstrate a level of skill and maturity that suggests they may be more suited to taking part in an activity at a higher age band. In these circumstances, representatives from the club/school (Coach and Club/School Safeguarding Officer) along with the parent should complete an assessment that will assist them in making the decision about that young person's suitability to play outside of their age Band.

The Process

A Level 2 Coach, Club/School Safeguarding Officer and the parent(s) or carer(s) of the player, must complete an Age Banding form, available from the England Netball website. This form should be used by all of the above individuals and if agreed between all parties, the form should be signed by all parties and sent through to the relevant Competition Organiser for the competition the player is being requested age banding permission to play in, alongside any other required registration forms or entry sheets. Upon receipt of this form by the Competition Organiser, the player is eligible to compete in the competition.

This process must be repeated for each season and individual competition. Where a form has been completed for a player at a certain round of a competition (e.g., County Round of National Schools) and the team progress to the next level (e.g., Regional Round), the form must be resubmitted to the competition organiser of that round to ensure the player is eligible.

Safeguarding Considerations

England Netball supports player development at every level and aims to ensure that through guidance and provision, opportunities for this can be made available for all. Young netballers develop at different rates and therefore the opportunities they require, or request may not always be based on their chronological age. England Netball have therefore developed this Guidance to assist schools, clubs, parents, and players in making informed decisions about the suitability of individuals to "play up" from their age band.

Those closest to a player are best placed to make judgements on their emotional, social, and physical development and maturity and, their readiness to "play up". For this reason, England Netball has determined that the only meaningful way for decisions to be made on the appropriateness of a player playing above their age group, is by these people. The list below shows those that should work together to assess the suitability of a player to "play up".

- Parent
- Level 2 Coach
- Club/School Safeguarding Officer

The coach is best placed to judge the young person's physical development and skills level. They should consider: -

- The position within the team which the young person usually plays and the one which they would be playing in if they played up.
- The young person's physical development in comparison to the other team members, including opposition.
- The potential impact on the team mates and opposition on the young person.
- The young person's social and personal development, particularly in regard to their resilience for coping with new environments and greater demands.
- The benefits for the young person's development (physiological, physical, tactical, technical etc)

In all decisions, the welfare of the young person is paramount. This means their personal development and enjoyment of an activity are key determinants in reaching the decision, not the needs of a team or the attainment of results.

When considering whether an individual is suitable to play above their age band, a risk assessment of the playing environment in which it is suggested the young person play, should be carried out. The whole event should be assessed including the training and any game environment, transport arrangements and changing facilities, to ensure that a safe environment for that young person exists. Where any identified risks are noted, consideration should be given to whether and how those risks can be minimised. Where the risks cannot be minimised, the decision should side toward caution.

The risk assessment and risk management measures should be shared and discussed with the player, parent(s)/carers, and the Club/School Safeguarding Officer.

As the Club/School Safeguarding Officer is responsible for ensuring that local arrangements for the safeguarding of young people are adequate, this person has an independent role in assessing the decisions of the coach. Their opinion must be sought and considered.

Playing Below an Age Band (National Schools Competition Only)

In some very exceptional circumstances within the National Schools Competition, it may be appropriate for an over-aged player to compete in a competition (i.e., a player whose date of birth mean that under normal circumstances they would be too old to play in the competition according to the regulations).

These circumstances are due to legitimate reasons why it would not be appropriate for a player to play in their own age group. As a result, if exceptional circumstances occur, a request will granted to waive the date of birth regulation for a player.

A school can submit a request directly to England Netball to waive the date of birth regulation for a player by emailing compevents@englandnetball.co.uk with the following information:

- The players name.
- The players Date of Birth
- A letter from the player's parent/carer detailing their circumstances.
- A letter from the schools Head Teacher or Safeguarding/Welfare lead giving details of the players circumstances.
- A letter from the player's GP or other medical professional (if relevant).
- A letter from any other agency or organisation that is relevant to the request.
- The email address of the parent/carer

Following receipt of a request, England Netball will consider the case and respond within 21 days of receiving all of the necessary information.

Should a request to waive the date of birth regulation for a player be granted, England Netball will issue an 'Exceptional Circumstances' letter to the parent of the player and the school.

The school should submit the Exceptional Circumstances letter alongside their registration form to the relevant organiser (County, Regional, National). National Schools Competition Organisers are asked to note that this information is confidential and whilst may be shared with a Competition Referee, it should not be shared by either party. This is in the interest of the players welfare.

The Exceptional Circumstances letter shall remain valid until the player turns 19 years old. England Netball reserves the right to withdraw the letter at any time.

Should a request be declined, England Netball will communicate a decision to the parent and school along with the rationale behind the decision.

In the event that a request to waive the date of birth regulation is declined, the school may appeal the decision of England Netball in line with the appeals process set out in the Competition Regulations. The outcome of the appeal shall be final.