



## **IRFU - GENDER PARTICIPATION POLICY 2023**

Our Gender Participation Policy and associated policies are reviewed every 2-years, or as soon as practicable after there has been a material change in any matter to which the statement refers.

### **1. OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION**

- 1.1. Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU) wishes to ensure that as many people as is safe and practicable get an opportunity to play and participate in the game of rugby. The IRFU seeks to provide an environment that accommodates requests to play the game irrespective of gender identity.
- 1.2. Accordingly, there are a range of considerations that should be considered when transgender and non-binary players are playing the full contact game. The IRFU has a responsibility to regulate the participation of all players in both training and competition and to provide a safe and equitable environment. As the game is physical, where strength, stamina and physique can affect the outcome of a person's safety, the inclusion of transgender and nonbinary players requires guidance to ensure that, whatever a player's declared gender, this is balanced with the safety of all players in training and competition.
- 1.3. The guidance is necessary to ensure, insofar as possible, that transgender and nonbinary players are not excluded from the opportunity to participate in rugby. The overriding objective is and remains the guarantee of fair and safe competition. Restrictions on participation are appropriate to the extent that they are necessary and proportionate to the achievement of that objective.
- 1.4. The IRFU, in conjunction with World Rugby, Sport Ireland, Sport NI and other organisation will continually monitor and review this policy in accordance with the most up to date research, recommendations and advice.

## **2. TRANSGENDER BIOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE RESEARCH**

- 2.1 The table in Appendix 1 sets out the key developments that have informed and impacted the IRFU's discussion and policy for gender participation in rugby.
- 2.2 The IRFU has at all times over the past years endeavoured to prioritise inclusion and diversity when making decisions concerning the administration of the game. There have been significant external developments in this area which have influenced and shaped the IRFU's position for its own gender participation policy, most noticeably the significant research undertaken by World Rugby which ultimately shaped World Rugby's Transgender Guidelines & Sport Councils Equality Group (SCEG) guidelines (see Appendix 2 for links to both guidelines)
- 2.3 Since August 2020, the IRFU along with the other Home Unions have collaborated and shared resources in an attempt to review this area in light of World Rugby's updated guidelines. The IRFU will continue to engage with these bodies, rugby participants and other key stakeholders and specialists to keep this area under review. This includes facilitating, contributing to and/or learning from further research that may be instigated in this area as well as working with World Rugby and other unions to develop other inclusive formats of the game of rugby union.

## **3. IRFU POSITION ON GENDER PARTICIPATION IN RUGBY**

- 3.1 Full details of the IRFU's eligibility requirements for gender participation are set out in section 4 below.
- 3.2 Although the IRFU will always strive to be fully inclusive and to provide equal opportunities for all our participants, we must do so in as safe and as fair a way as possible. As a result, when determining the eligibility criteria set out below, the IRFU have endeavoured to strike the difficult balance between both safety and fairness and inclusion.

## 4. ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR GENDER PARTICIPATION IN RUGBY

### **Non-contact rugby – Tag & Touch**

- 4.1 Non-contact rugby is not a gender-affected sport and as such are mixed-gender and are available for all without any gender-based eligibility criteria. The same is true for age grade rugby up to and including under 12s, please check the specific registration process and eligibility requirements that may apply to those competitions.

### **Contact rugby**

- 4.2 The following eligibility requirements apply with regards to gender participation in contact rugby in Ireland and Northern Ireland and these apply throughout the entire domestic game in Ireland and Northern Ireland (but excludes international rugby which falls under World Rugby Transgender Guidelines).
- 4.3 Although we have endeavoured to find alternative solutions, the IRFU must recognise [World Rugby's position](#) on this area and more recently the [SCEG's guidelines](#). Both sources emphasise that inclusion of transgender and non-binary players assigned male at birth that have experienced the biological effects of testosterone during puberty or adolescence in female contact rugby cannot be balanced against considerations of safety and fairness. This is due to retained advantages in strength, stamina and physique between the average transgender female assigned male at birth (who has passed through puberty and adolescence), and the average female. Research has shown that this advantage cannot be addressed even with testosterone suppression.
- 4.4 As a result, the IRFU are obliged to adopt a precautionary approach with respect to playing and training in contact rugby, an approach which needs to be applied in order to ensure fair competition and the safety of competitors. Therefore, due to developmental changes brought about by male puberty, it is appropriate and necessary to maintain a female only category of contact rugby as well as certain eligibility requirements for

male categories from 12 years old and upwards and continuing into the adult game. The latter is intended to ensure that transgender people wishing to play male contact rugby have the appropriate experience and competence to participate safely.

4.5

<b>AGE GRADE CONTACT RUGBY (TRAINING AND PLAYING)</b>		
No.	Rugby category	Eligibility requirements
(a)	Under 12s and below – mixed categories of rugby (tag & touch)	Mixed gender contact rugby is permitted. Players can play without additional approval irrespective of the gender with which they identify.
(b)	12 to 18 years old – female category	Players are only permitted to play in the gender category if the sex that was originally recorded at birth is female.
(c)	12 to 18 years old male category	<p>Players are permitted to play in this category if the player's sex recorded at birth is male.</p> <p>If the player's sex recorded at birth is female and the player identifies as transgender male, non-binary or gender fluid, the player may play if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) their parent or guardian (or such other appropriate adult) provides their written consent, in the form prescribed by the IRFU, to the relevant club or school and copy to IRFU; and</li> <li>(ii) an appropriate risk assessment has been carried out by IRFU staff member with input from player and coach; and</li> <li>(iii) the IRFU is notified prior to the player participating in the contact rugby activity</li> </ul>

		(iv)the player obtains a therapeutic use exemption <b>if required</b> by IRFU Regulation 8
<b>ADULT CONTACT RUGBY (TRAINING AND PLAYING)</b>		
(e)	Adult male category	<p>Players are permitted to play in this category if the player's sex recorded at birth is male.</p> <p>If the player's sex recorded at birth is female and the player identifies as transgender male, non-binary or gender fluid, the player may play if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) the player completed IRFU player registration process; and</li> <li>(ii) an appropriate risk assessment has been carried out by IRFU staff member with input from player and coach; and</li> <li>(iii) the IRFU is notified prior to the player participating in the contact rugby activity, and</li> <li>(iv)the player obtains a therapeutic use exemption <b>if required</b> by IRFU Regulation 8.</li> </ul>
(f)	Adult female category	<p>Players are only permitted to play in the women's category if the sex that was originally recorded at birth was female and hormone treatment has not commenced (for example, a transgender man may continue to play female rugby provided no hormone treatment has commenced).</p>
<b>Notifications</b>		

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Unless specifically required and stipulated in this policy, no additional notifications are required to be made to the constituent body or opposition club. The player (and parent/guardian in respect of an age grade player) may choose whom they notify.

### **Risk assessments**

A risk assessment should be carried out in respect of all players participating in contact rugby. In respect of transmen (age grade and adult) wanting to participate in the category that is different to the sex recorded at birth, a risk assessment must be undertaken to determine that they are able to compete safely in the male category and factors such as physical development, technical ability and rugby competency should all be taken into consideration.

### **Compliance with IRFU Regulations and this policy**

Should there be any questions or concerns with regards to any application of this policy, please contact IRFU Disability & Inclusion Officer who will advise accordingly.

The IRFU has the power to undertake its own analysis and investigation into any application of this policy (including any potential breach) and may, in its absolute discretion determine that a player is not eligible to or should not participate in their selected gender category due to reasons of player welfare, non-compliance with the process or such other reasons as determined by the IRFU. This applies regardless of whether or not the IRFU has received the requisite notification set out above.

In addition to complying with this policy, all participation in rugby is also subject to such other rules, regulations and policies that may apply in respect of a person's participation. For more information on our regulations [click here](#), Non-compliance with this policy and any other regulations may constitute a breach of regulations and may be dealt with in accordance with Regulation 6.

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- 4.6 The IRFU has considered alternatives as part of its review (including the wholly case by case model) but having considered such alternatives along with the guidelines of other organisations published during the last few years, the IRFU believes that the eligibility criteria set out in this policy are the most appropriate for domestic rugby union in Ireland and Northern Ireland at this time. The IRFU remains committed to making rugby union a sport for all and will continue to review its policy on an ongoing basis as well as work with World Rugby and other stakeholders to develop further knowledge in this area.

## 5. CONFIDENTIALITY

All personal information provided to the IRFU under this policy will be dealt with in strict confidence at all times and will be handled in accordance with the IRFU's Regulatory and Governance Privacy Policy which is [available here](#).

## 6. CONTACT INFORMATION

For any questions on the policy, please contact IRFU Disability & Inclusion Officer [click here](#)

## APPENDIX 1

### OVERVIEW OF KEY DEVELOPMENTS

Pre-May 2019	IRFU transgender position materially mirrors that of the IOC which includes the application of the 10 nmol testosterone criteria for transwomen players and 'case by case' approval.
January 2019	World Rugby launches an updated policy which includes reducing the 10 nmol testosterone criteria to 5 nmol.
May 2019	After considering its position, IRFU did not amend its policy to materially adopt and mirror the new World Rugby policy and continued to adopt a testosterone criteria of 10nmol and the 'case by case' approval model.
October 2020	World Rugby launches updated guidelines which includes transwomen not being eligible to participate in women's contact rugby.
Autumn 2020	IRFU launches its own review of its domestic

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	policy which included discussions with World Rugby, the Rugby Development, Medical, Legal, Safeguarding and Communications Departments. There has also been continuous engagement with all of the other Home Unions.
September 2021	The Sports Councils' Equality Group (SCEG), made up of representatives from each of the UK's sports councils (UK Sport, Sport England, Sport Wales, Sport Scotland, and Sport Northern Ireland) launches its new guidance on transgender inclusion in domestic sport. The guidance includes detailed guiding principles for sports to consider. IRFU have contacted Sport Ireland but have been advised that Sport Ireland have only recently begun consultations on this issue.
November 2021	IOC issue new guidelines which state (amongst other things) that in respect of transwomen inclusion restriction on eligibility should be based on peer-reviewed research and it is 'within the remit of each sport and its governing body to determine how an athlete may be at a disproportionate advantage compared with their peers'.

## APPENDIX 2

Link to World Rugby Transgender Guidelines:

[click here](#)

Link to Equality in sport Guidelines:

[click here](#)

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