

The  
NATIONAL  
LEAGUE  
SYSTEM

**REGULATIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF  
THE NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM**

1. Introduction

The National League System (NLS) shall comprise a system by which promotion and relegation links shall exist between participating leagues (the “Leagues”) and shall be operated in accordance with these regulations.

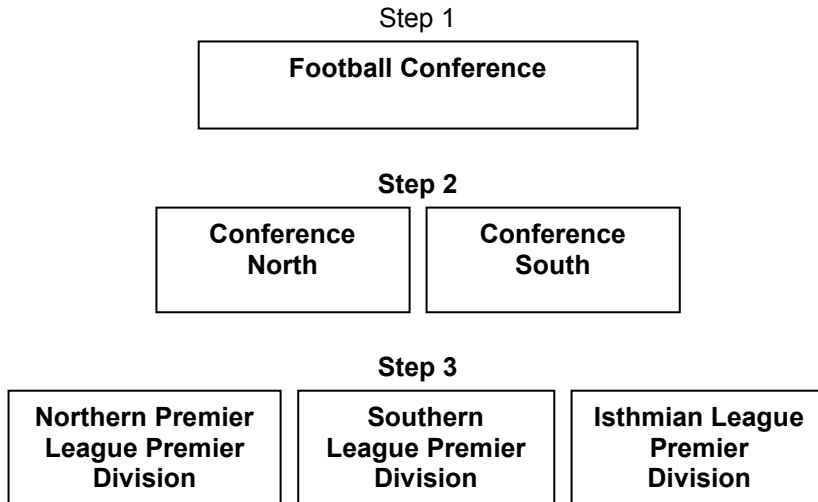
The aims and objectives of the NLS are:

- (a) To provide clubs with a level of competitive football appropriate to their playing ability, stadium/ground facilities, economic means and geographical location.
- (b) To provide a framework for discussion on matters of policy and common interest to leagues and clubs.
- (c) To allow the seasonal movement of clubs.

To be members, all leagues, and clubs (the “Clubs”) participating from time to time in such leagues, shall be bound by these regulations. All member leagues will be required to sign a certificate confirming their agreement to the acceptance of the Regulations on an annual basis.

2. Position of a League in the National League System

2.1 The current structure of the NLS is set out below:



#### **Step 4**

**Northern Premier League Division One North  
Northern Premier League Division One South  
Southern League Division One Midlands  
Southern League Division One South & West  
Isthmian League Division One North  
Isthmian League Division One South**

#### **Step 5/6**

The leagues currently at Step 5, 6 and 7 are set out in the attachment to these regulations, and a review is underway.

- 2.2 Any league wishing to become part of the NLS must advise The Football Association in such form and/or providing such information as shall be required by the Leagues Committee (“LC”) from time to time. The decision as to whether or not a league should be admitted to, and if admitted, their position in the NLS shall be made by the LC.
- 2.3 Any league wishing to propose an adjustment to its position within the NLS must apply in writing to the LC by 31<sup>st</sup> December in any year for such proposal to be determined by the LC in order, if approved, to have effect in the season commencing in the following calendar year.

#### **3. Rules and Regulations for Promotion and Relegation**

- 3.1 The NLS shall provide for the seasonal promotion, relegation or lateral movement of clubs between Steps within the system. A league that signifies its acceptance to be bound by these regulations must be in a position to promote and relegate clubs at the conclusion of each season.

#### **4. Detailed Promotion and Relegation Issues**

- 4.1 Eligibility criteria shall be agreed by the LC. Details of the ground grading requirements at each Step are contained in the National Ground Grading Document as published by The Football Association.
- 4.2 It may be necessary from time to time to move clubs laterally between leagues at the same Step to accommodate the movement of clubs by normal promotion and relegation. Where this is necessary and where possible, no club will be asked to move more than once in every three seasons unless it requests such a move.
- 4.3 At the conclusion of each season, the following procedures will apply

### **Step 1 and Step 2**

The clubs finishing in the bottom four places at Step 1 at the end of the playing season will be relegated to a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 2. They will be replaced by the clubs finishing in 1st position in each of the divisions at Step 2 together with a further two clubs which win a series of play off matches involving those clubs finishing in a play-off position (normally positions 2 to 5) in each of the divisions at Step 2. In exceptional circumstances where a club in positions 2 to 5 does not meet the criteria to enter the play-offs they should be replaced by a club finishing in the next eligible position. Clubs finishing below position 7 would not be considered.

### **Step 2 and Step 3**

The clubs in the bottom three places in each of the two divisions at Step 2 at the end of the playing season will be relegated to a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 3. They will be replaced by the clubs finishing in 1st position in each of the divisions at Step 3 together with a further three clubs determined by a series of play off matches involving those clubs finishing in a play-off position (normally positions 2 to 5) in each of the divisions at Step 3. In exceptional circumstances where a club in positions 2 to 5 does not meet the criteria to enter the play-offs they should be replaced by a club finishing in the next eligible position. Clubs finishing below position 7 would not be considered. The promoted clubs will also be placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 2.

### **Step 3 and Step 4**

The clubs in the bottom four places in each of the three divisions at Step 3 at the end of the playing season will be relegated to a feeder pool and placed in the most geographical appropriate division at Step 4. They will be replaced by the club finishing in 1st position in each of the divisions at Step 4 together with a further six clubs to be determined by a series of play off matches involving those clubs finishing in a play-off position (normally positions 2 to 5) in each of the divisions at Step 4. In exceptional circumstances where a club in positions 2 to 5 does not meet the criteria to enter the play-offs they should be replaced by a club finishing in the next eligible position. Clubs finishing below position 7 would not be considered.

The promoted clubs will also be placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 3.

### **Step 4 and Step 5**

In normal circumstances, the clubs in the bottom two places in each of the six divisions at Step 4 will be replaced by the twelve most suitable clubs from the leagues at Step 5 as determined by the LC. Each of these leagues will nominate the club finishing in 1st position subject to meeting the entry criteria and wishing to be considered for promotion. In the event of the 1st placed club not being nominated, the club finishing in 2nd position can be nominated subject to the same criteria. Both the clubs relegated from Step 4 and the clubs to be promoted from Step 5 will be placed in a feeder pool and allocated to the most geographically appropriate league.

In the event that there are more clubs qualifying for promotion than spaces available, priority will be given to the Champion clubs in Step 5 leagues. If there remains vacancies, clubs finishing in 2nd place in Step 5 leagues will be ranked according to the average number of points gained per games played.

Clubs seeking promotion from Step 5 to Step 4 must make application in writing to The Football Association, copied to their existing league, by 31st December in the relevant year. The application must be accompanied by the agreed grading fee, as determined by the LC, which is non refundable. The Football Association will arrange for ground grading visits to take place before 31st March in the relevant year. A final list of clubs eligible to be considered for promotion will be published by 15th April. Final promotion will be subject to the criteria outlined in the paragraph above.

#### **Step 5 to Step 6 and Step 6 to Step 7**

The movement of clubs between Step 5 and Step 6 will continue as at present. Clubs seeking promotion from Step 7 to Step 6 must make application in writing to The Football Association, copied to their existing league, by 31st December in the relevant year. A final list of clubs eligible to be considered for promotion will be published by 15th April. Final promotion will be subject to the current agreed criteria which will include a club's final league position and their ability to achieve the required ground grading. All member leagues shall include in their constitutional rules and regulations provisions for the movement of clubs as detailed above.

- 4.4 Clubs will not be allowed to enter into a ground share agreement in order to gain promotion or to be saved from relegation.

Only internal changes to the constitution of a league will be allowed following the holding of a league's annual general meeting.

#### **5. The Movement of Clubs within the National League System other than by Promotion or Relegation**

- 5.1 Movement of a club from participation in one league to another is not permitted other than by promotion and relegation save with the approval of the LC.
- 5.2 Any club proposing to move from one league to another must make appropriate applications to resign from and be elected to the relevant leagues in accordance with the rules and regulations of those leagues. Any such notice must in any event, and regardless of any provisions to the contrary in a league's rules and regulations, be given to both leagues and the LC by 1st April in the relevant year in order to be valid in accordance with paragraph 5.1.
- 5.3 If a Club (whether a Members' Club or a Company) is liquidated, ceases to trade or is removed from its league or withdraws from football competition ('the Former Club'), and then wishes to reform ('the Reformed Club') and be placed within the NLS other than as set out in Regulation 4.3, then unless otherwise determined by the LC, it will be allowed to make an application only to join a league/division a minimum of two Steps below the most recent league/division of

which the Former Club was a member when it was liquidated, ceased to trade, or removed from its league or withdrew from football competition.

In order for consideration to be given to the placement in the NLS by the Reformed Club in the following season, an initial application must be received by the LC within twenty-one days of the Former Club ceasing to trade, resigning or being removed from its league or withdrawing from football competition.

The complete application by the Reformed Club must be received by the LC before the second Saturday in May. The application shall be copied to the league of which membership is being requested. The application will be determined by the LC.

In considering any application, the LC will set out at its discretion the requirements to be met by the Reformed Club.

Only one application will be considered for placement in the NLS in accordance with this Regulation. In the event of more than one application being received within twenty-one days of the Former Club ceasing to trade, resigning or being removed from its league or withdrawing from football competition, the LC will consider at its discretion which application will be considered in accordance with this Regulation.

- 5.4 If two or more Clubs (“the Merging Clubs”) are proposing a transaction or series of transactions that result in the merging or consolidation (“the Proposed Merger”) of those Clubs into one Club (“the Merged Club”) then a formal application to do so must be received by the LC and the league(s) of which the Merging Clubs are members by 31 December.

A Deed of Agreement, which shall be legally binding on all parties must be submitted to the LC by the second Saturday in May in the year immediately following receipt of the application. The LC shall determine at its absolute discretion where the Merged Club is to be included in the NLS for the following season subject to the provisions of item (ix) below.

In arriving at its decision the LC may apply the following minimum criteria:

- (i) the shareholders or members of the Merging Clubs have voted to agree to the proposed merger;
- (ii) all Football Creditors (as defined in FA Rules) of the Merging Clubs must be fully satisfied and evidenced as such;
- (iii) all other creditors of the Merging Clubs must be satisfied and evidenced as such;
- (iv) the proposed Merged Club must provide financial forecasts showing its ability to fund itself to the end of the immediately following season;
- (v) evidence of funding sources of the Merged Club will be required;
- (vi) the proposed playing name of the Merged Club must be acceptable to the LC; and
- (vii) the Merged Club must have security of tenure to a ground that meets the relevant ground grading requirements;
- (viii) Any other criteria that the LC may from time to time deem to be appropriate;

- (ix) The Merged Club will ordinarily be placed at the lower of the Steps at which the Merging Clubs ended the season in which the application is made. For the purposes of this Regulation, if one of the Merging Clubs has finished that season in a relegation place, then they will be deemed to have ended the season at the Step to which they would have been relegated without the Proposed Merger proceeding.

Any decision regarding whether a proposed transaction or series of transactions falls to be considered under this Regulation shall be determined by the LC at its absolute discretion

## **6. Election of a Club into a League**

- 6.1 In normal circumstances a club can enter the NLS only at Step 7. However, in exceptional circumstances a league may seek approval from the LC to elect a club not currently in membership of a league within the NLS provided that there is:
  - (a) a vacancy within its constitution
  - (b) the club meets the entry criteria and
  - (c) promotion and relegation issues have been satisfied.
- 6.2 Reserve teams will not be permitted to compete above Step 6 in the NLS. There must be a minimum of Two Steps between a first and reserve team. This does not apply at Steps 6 & 7. Reserve teams currently at Step 5 can remain unless relegated, once relegated they will not be permitted to be promoted back to Step 5.

## **7 National League System Working Groups**

National and Regional Working Groups will be formed comprising of representatives from leagues within the National League System and the LC to consider matters relevant to the development of the game within the System.

A Working Group may refer a matter to the LC for determination

**8. Procedures for the Determination of any Matter, Dispute or Difference by the Leagues Committee**

- 8.1 The LC may adopt such procedures for the determination of any matter, dispute or difference as it considers appropriate and expedient, having regard to the aims and objectives set out at Regulation 1. The LC may require the attendance at a meeting or the written observations of any league or club, as it considers appropriate to assist its determination.
- 8.2 Any decision of the LC shall be subject to the right of appeal and the decision of an Appeal Board shall be final and binding on all parties.
- 8.3 The LC may, at its discretion, delegate the resolution of any matter, dispute or difference arising under these Regulations to any body it considers to be appropriate (including a sub-committee or commission which may include members of council not on the LC or a body constituted by a County Football Association).

**9. Dispute Procedure**

- 9.1 Any dispute or difference between a league and a club relating to promotion and relegation issues and/or other eligibility criteria should be referred for determination to the LC; such determination shall be final and binding. Any referral must be carried out in accordance with The Football Association's appeal procedure and be submitted at the offices of The Football Association, 25 Soho Square, London W1D 4FA within 14 days of the posting of the relevant decision and must be accompanied by the appropriate fee as set out at 9.2.
- 9.2 The fees will be as follows:  
Step 1 clubs - £250  
Step 2 clubs - £200  
Step 3 clubs - £150  
Step 4 clubs - £100  
Other clubs - £50

**10. Arbitration**

The fact of participation in the National League System and signifying agreement to be bound by these Regulations shall constitute an agreement between each league and club to refer to Arbitration any challenge in law arising out of, or in relation to, these Regulations in accordance with the provisions of the Rules of The Football Association.

**LEAGUES/DIVISIONS AT STEPS 5, 6 & 7 OF**  
**THE NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM**  
(as from season 2007/2008)

**Step 5**

Combined Counties League Premier Div  
Eastern Counties League Div 1  
Essex Senior League  
Hellenic League Premier Div  
Kent League  
Midland Football Alliance  
North West Counties League Div 1  
Northern Counties East League Premier Div  
Northern League Div 1  
Spartan South Midlands League Premier Div  
Sussex County League Div 1  
United Counties League Premier Div  
Wessex League Premier Div  
Western League Premier Div

**Step 6**

Combined Counties League Div 1  
East Midlands County League  
Eastern Counties League Div 2  
Hellenic League Div 1 East  
Hellenic League Div 1 West  
Midland Combination Premier Div  
North West Counties League Div 2  
Northern Counties East Div 1  
Northern League Div 2  
Spartan South Midlands League Div 1  
South West Peninsular League Premier Division  
Sussex County League Div 2  
United Counties League Div 1  
Wessex League Div 1  
West Midlands (Regional) League Premier Div  
Western League Div 1

## Step 7

Anglian Combination  
Bedford & District League  
Brighton Hove & District League  
Cambridgeshire County League  
Central Midlands League  
Cheshire Association League Div 1  
Crawley & District League  
Dorset Premier League  
East Berkshire League  
East Sussex League  
Essex Olympian League  
Essex & Suffolk Border League  
Gloucestershire County League  
Hertfordshire County Senior League  
Kent County League  
Leicestershire Senior League  
Liverpool County Premier League  
Manchester League  
Mid Sussex League  
Middlesex County League  
Midland Combination Div 1

North Berkshire League  
Northampton Town League  
Northamptonshire Combination  
Northern Football Alliance  
Oxfordshire Senior League  
Peterborough & District League  
Reading League  
Somerset County League  
South West peninsular League Div 1 E  
South West peninsular League Div 1 W  
Spartan South Midlands League Div 2  
Staffordshire County Senior League  
Suffolk & Ipswich League  
Sussex County League Div 3  
Wearside League  
West Cheshire League  
West Lancashire League  
West Midlands (Regional) League Div 1  
West Sussex League  
Wiltshire Football League  
Worthing & District League Premier Div