

# Regulations for the establishment and operation of the national league system



## 1. Definitions

In the interpretation of these Regulations: any words and expressions, unless otherwise defined herein, shall be words and expressions as defined as follows:-

- “AC” means the Alliance Committee appointed by FA Council to deal with matters appertaining to Steps 1 to 4 of the National League System.
- “Association” means The Football Association.
- “Club” means a football club in a league in membership of the NLS.
- “League” means any competition sanctioned by the Association and/or an Affiliated Association.
- “LC” means the Leagues Committee appointed by FA Council to deal with all matters appertaining to the National League System.
- “NLS” means the National League System by which promotion and relegation links exist between participating Leagues and shall be operated in accordance with these Regulations.
- “Playing Season” means the period between the date on which the first League fixture in the League is played each year until the date on which the last League fixture in the League is played. For Clubs participating in play-off matches this does include the period when play-off matches are played.
- “Play off Position” means the position of a Club in the League table at the end of each Playing Season which enables a Club to take part in a play off match to qualify for promotion to the next Step in the National League System for the next Playing Season.
- “Regulations” means these regulations.
- “Step” means the level at which a Club participates in the National League System.

## 2. The National League System (“NLS”) shall be operated in accordance with these regulations (“the Regulations”).

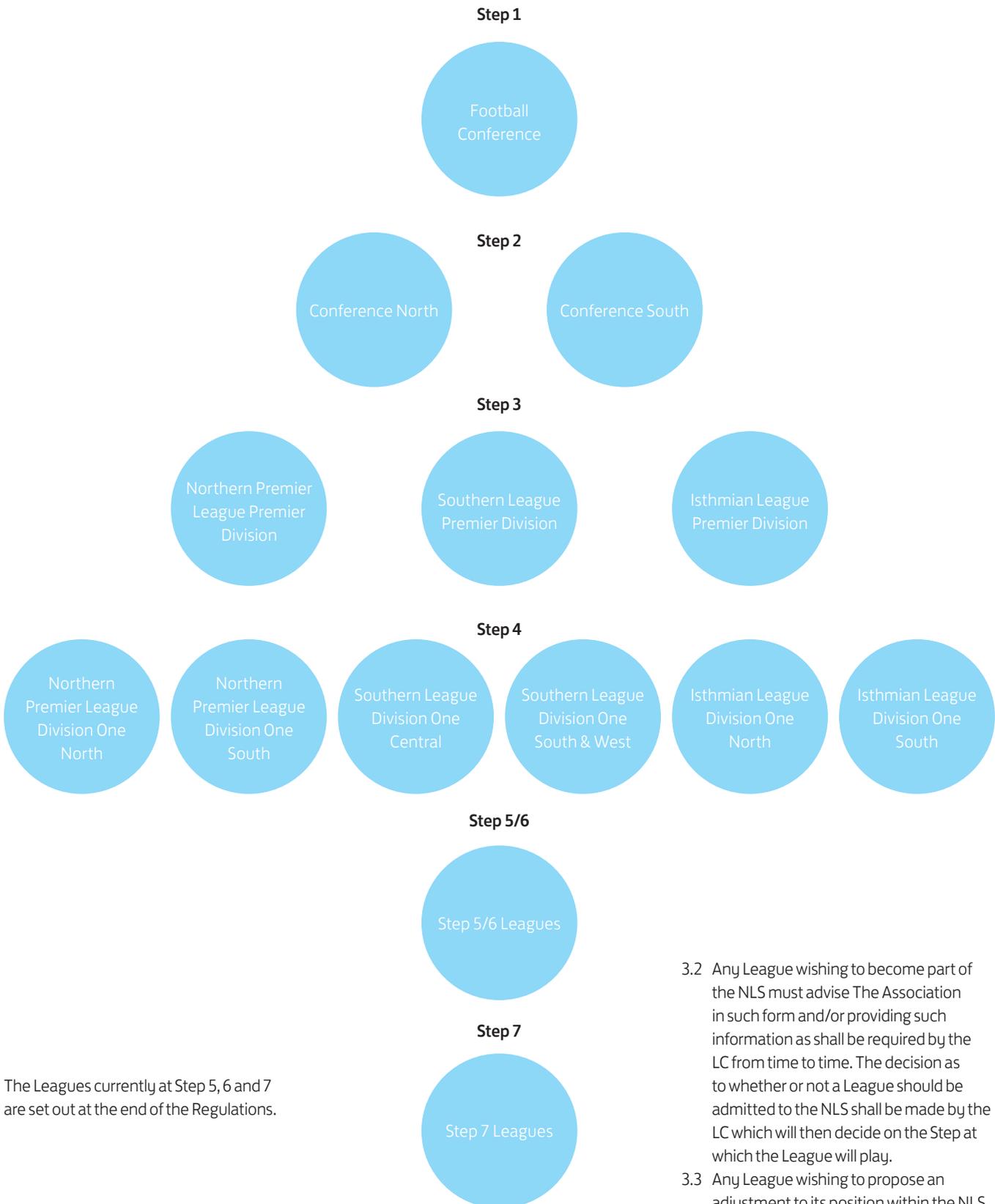
The aims and objectives of the NLS are:

- 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 shall be bound by the Regulations. All Leagues will be required to sign a certificate confirming their agreement to the acceptance of the Regulations.

### 3. Position of a League in the National League System

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



The Leagues currently at Step 5, 6 and 7 are set out at the end of the Regulations.

3.2 Any League wishing to become part of the NLS must advise The Association in such form and/or providing such information as shall be required by the LC from time to time. The decision as to whether or not a League should be admitted to the NLS shall be made by the LC which will then decide on the Step at which the League will play.

3.3 Any League wishing to propose an adjustment to its position within the NLS must apply in writing to the LC by 31st December in any year for such proposal to be determined by the LC in order, if approved, to have effect in the following Playing Season.

## 4. Rules and Regulations for Promotion and Relegation

The LC 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 the Regulations must be in a position to promote and relegate Clubs at the conclusion of each Playing Season.

## 5. Detailed Promotion and Relegation Issues

- 5.1 The criteria for entry to the NLS and the criteria for ground/stadium facilities and the criteria for participation in play off matches shall be determined by the LC. All criteria so determined shall be published by The Association from time to time.
- 5.2 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.
- 5.3 At the conclusion of each Playing 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 for the following Playing Season. 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. Where a Club finishes in a Play Off Position but does not meet the criteria for participation in play-off matches the Club finishing in the next eligible position shall take part in the play off matches. The play off matches shall be played so that the highest placed of the eligible Clubs plays against the lowest placed and the other two Clubs play each other. The winners of each match will play each other and the winner of that match will be promoted. If there are only three eligible Clubs then the highest placed shall receive a bye to a second match where it will play the winner of the other play off match and the winner of that Final will be promoted. Clubs finishing below position 7 will not be considered for play off matches.

### 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 for the following Playing Season. 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. Where a Club finishes in a Play Off Position but does not meet the criteria for participation in play off matches the Club finishing in the next eligible position shall take part in the play off matches. The play off matches shall be played so that the highest placed of the eligible Clubs plays against the lowest placed and the other two Clubs play each other. The winners of each match will play each other and the winner of that match will be promoted. If there are only three eligible Clubs then the highest placed shall receive a bye to a second match where it will play the winner of the other play off match and the winner of that Final will be promoted. Clubs finishing below position 7 will not be considered for play off matches.

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 for the following Playing Season. 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. Where a Club finishes in a Play Off Position but does not meet the criteria for participation in play off matches the Club finishing in the next eligible position shall take part in the play off matches. The play off matches shall be played so that the highest placed of the eligible Clubs plays against the lowest placed and the other two Clubs play each other. The winners of each match will play each other and the winner of that match will be promoted. If there are only three eligible Clubs then the highest placed shall receive a bye to a second match

where it will play the winner of the other play off match and the winner of that Final will be promoted. Clubs finishing below position 7 will not be considered for play off matches. 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

The Clubs in the bottom two places in each of the six divisions at Step 4 at the end of the Playing Season will be relegated to a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate League at Step 5. These Clubs 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. The Clubs to be promoted from Step 5 will be placed in a feeder pool and allocated to the most geographically appropriate division.

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 vacancies remain, Clubs finishing in 2nd place in Step 5 Leagues will be ranked for promotion purposes according to the average number of points gained per games played.

Any Club seeking promotion from Step 5 to Step 4 must achieve an E Grade by 31st March in the Playing Season when promotion is sought. Such Grade shall be obtained by making application to The Association accompanied by the relevant grading fee. The Association will arrange an inspection as soon as practical thereafter.

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

The promotion and relegation of Clubs between Steps 5, 6 and 7 shall be dealt with by the Leagues concerned subject to the right of appeal to the LC in accordance with Regulation 8.2.

All Step 7 leagues shall include in their constitutional rules and regulations provisions for the movement of Clubs as detailed above.

- 5.4 Where a vacancy occurs the following procedures will apply:-
- (i) Where a potential vacancy had been notified in a particular division prior to the end of the Playing Season, the Club concerned would be classed as the relegated Club and the best ranked Club in that division would be reprieved.
  - (ii) Where a vacancy occurs following the completion of the Playing Season then the best ranked Club across the particular Step would be reprieved. The ranking to be determined by the average points gained per game played.
  - (iii) Where a vacancy occurs after the date of a League AGM then a competition would not be able to replace the Club(s) concerned.
- 5.5 Only internal changes to the constitution of a League are allowed following the holding of a League's Annual General Meeting.
- 5.6 Clubs are not allowed to enter into a ground share agreement in order to gain promotion or to be saved from relegation.

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

- 6.1 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.
- 6.2 Any Club proposing to move from one League to another must make application in writing to The Association on or before 31st January in each year to be effective for the following Playing Season. In the event of such application being successful the League from which the Club is moving shall not levy a financial penalty on that Club.
- 6.3 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 establish a new Club ('the New Club') and be placed within the NLS other than as set out in Regulation 5.3, 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 New Club in the following Playing Season, an initial application must be received by the LC by 1st March or within twenty-one days of the Former Club ceasing to trade, resigning or being removed from its League or withdrawing from football competition, if later.

The complete application by the New Club must be received by The Association 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 New 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.

- 6.4 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 Association 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.

## 7. Election of a Club into a League

- 7.1 Usually a Club can only enter the NLS 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.
- 7.2 Reserve teams are not 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.
- 7.3 Teams from Higher Education or Further Education establishments are not permitted to compete above Step 5. This does not prevent any such establishment forming a Club which complies with all entry criteria and which is separate from the establishment itself.

## 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 (a) Any dispute or difference between a League and a Club relating to promotion and relegation issues and/or other eligibility criteria must be referred for determination to the LC; such determination shall be final and binding.

8.2 (b) Any other decision of the LC shall be subject to a right of appeal to an Appeal Board. The decision of that Appeal Board shall be final and binding on all parties.

All referrals of appeals shall be conducted in accordance with the Regulations for Football Association Appeals. Such must be accompanied by a deposit as follows:

- Step 1 Clubs - £250
- Step 2 Clubs - £200
- Step 3 Clubs - £150
- Step 4 Clubs - £100
- All other applications - £50

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. Arbitration

The fact of participation in the NLS and signifying agreement to be bound by the 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, the Regulations in accordance with the provisions of the Rules of The Association.



**Leagues/divisions at steps 5, 6 & 7 of the national league system (season 2010/2011)**

Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
Combined Counties League Premier Div	Combined Counties League Div 1	Anglian Combination Premier Div
Eastern Counties League Premier Div	East Midlands Counties League	Bedfordshire League Premier Div
Essex Senior League	Eastern Counties League Div 1	Brighton Hove & District League Premier Div
Hellenic League Premier Div	Hellenic League Div 1 East	Cambridgeshire County League Premier Div
Kent League	Hellenic League Div 1 West	Central Midlands League Supreme Div
Midland Football Alliance	Midland Combination Premier Div	Cheshire League Div 1
North West Counties League Premier Div	North West Counties League Div 1	Dorset Premier League
Northern Counties East League Premier Div	Northern Counties East Div 1	East Berkshire League Premier Div
Northern League Div 1	Northern League Div 2	East Sussex League Premier Div
Spartan South Midlands League Premier Div	South West Peninsula League Premier Div	Essex Olympian League Premier Div
Sussex County League Div 1	Spartan South Midlands League Div 1	Essex & Suffolk Border League Premier Div
United Counties League Premier Div	Sussex County League Div 2	Gloucestershire County League Premier Div
Wessex League Premier Div	United Counties League Div 1	Hampshire Premier League
Western League Premier Div	Wessex League Div 1	Herts Senior County League Premier Div
	West Midlands (Regional) League Premier Div	Kent County League Premier Div
	Western League Div 1	Leicestershire Senior League Premier Div
		Liverpool County Premier League Premier Div
		Manchester League Premier Div
		Mid Sussex League Premier Div
		Middlesex County League Premier Div
		Midland Combination Div 1
		North Berkshire League Div 1
		Northampton Town League Premier Div
		Northamptonshire Combination Premier Div
		Northern Football Alliance Premier Div
		Oxfordshire Senior League Premier Div
		Peterborough & District League Premier Div
		Reading League Senior Div
		Somerset County League Premier Div
		South West Peninsula League Div 1 East
		South West Peninsula League Div 1 West
		Spartan South Midlands League Div 2
		Staffordshire County Senior League Premier Div
		Suffolk & Ipswich League Senior Div
		Sussex County League Div 3
		Wearside League
		West Cheshire League Div 1
		West Lancashire League Premier Div
		West Midlands (Regional) League Div 1
		West Sussex League Premier Div
		Wiltshire Football League Premier Div
		Worthing & District League Premier Div