

24 - WOMEN'S FOOTBALL PYRAMID REGULATIONS

1. DEFINITIONS

In the interpretation of these Regulations, the following words and expressions, unless otherwise defined herein, shall have the following meanings:

"Affiliated Association" shall have the meaning set out in the Rules.

"Board" means The FA Women's Football Board.

"Club" means a football club for the time being in membership of a League.

"County Association" shall have the meaning set out in the Rules.

"County League" means a geographical grouping of one or more divisions within which any divisions playing 11 v 11 open aged football are considered to be participating at Tier 7.

"FA WSL and FA WC Board" means The FA Women's Super League and The FA Women's Championship Board.

"Football Creditors" shall have the meaning set out in the Rules.

"League" means any league sanctioned by The Association and/or an Affiliated Association in membership of the Women's Football Pyramid.

"Licence" means a licence required to be held by a Club in membership of Tiers 1 and 2.

"Other Criteria for Promotion" means any additional promotion criteria communicated by the Board to Clubs in the relevant Tier from time to time.

"Parent Association" shall have the meaning set out in the Rules.

"Playing Season" means the period between the date on which the first competitive fixture in a League is played each year until the date on which the last competitive fixture in a League is played.

"Regional League" means a regional grouping of divisions participating at Tier 5 and Tier 6.

"Regional League Format A" means a Regional League with a maximum membership of 36 Clubs and comprising one division participating at Tier 5 and two divisions participating at Tier 6.

"Regional League Format B" means a Regional League with a maximum membership of 40 Clubs and comprising one division participating at Tier 5 and three divisions participating at Tier 6".

"Regulations" means these regulations.

"Rules" means the rules of The Association as amended from time to time.

"The Association" shall have the meaning set out in the Rules.

"Tier" means the level at which a Club participates in the Women's Football Pyramid.

"Tier 1 Promotion Requirements" means the requirements of a Tier 1 Licence and the ground grading criteria for Tier 1.

"Tier 2 Application Process" means the application process communicated by the FA WSL and FA WC Board to relevant Clubs via which promotion to Tier 2 from Tier 3 is determined in the particular circumstances set out in Regulation 5.

"Tier 2 Promotion Requirements" means the eligibility criteria, the requirements of a Tier 2 Licence and the ground grading criteria for Tier 2.

"Tier 3 Champion Club" means the winner of the Tier 3 Play-Off Match.

"Tier 3 Play-Off Match" means the play-off match between those clubs finishing in first place in each of the two divisions at Tier 3.

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“Tier 3 Runner Up Club” means the loser of the Tier 3 Play-Off Match.

“Women's Football Pyramid” means the system of women's and girls' leagues controlled by The Association where promotion and relegation links exists between the participating Leagues.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Women's Football Pyramid shall be operated in accordance with these Regulations.
- 2.2 A Club shall be required to hold a Licence to be a member of the League at Tiers 1 and 2.
- 2.3 The aims and objectives of the Women's Football Pyramid are:
 - 2.3.1 To provide clubs with a level of competitive football appropriate to their playing ability, stadium/ground facilities, economic means and geographical location.
 - 2.3.2 To provide a framework for discussion on matters of policy and common interest to Leagues and Clubs.
 - 2.3.3 To allow the seasonal movement of clubs.
- 2.4 All Leagues and Clubs participating in the Women's Football Pyramid shall be bound by and comply with these Regulations. Every League and Club shall be deemed, as participants of the Women's Football Pyramid, to have accepted these Regulations and to have agreed to abide by the decisions of the Board in relation thereto, subject to any right of appeal prescribed in these Regulations.

3. MEMBERSHIP OF A LEAGUE IN THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL PYRAMID

- 3.1 The structure of the Women's Football Pyramid is as set out at Appendix A. Reserve sections/divisions sit outside of the Women's Football Pyramid.
- 3.2 Subject to regulation 3.3, a League in Tier 3 to Tier 6 inclusive is permitted to operate with between 10 and 12 Clubs per division.
- 3.3 A Regional League may only operate as a Regional League Format B provided that:
 - 3.3.1 each division operates with no more than 10 teams;
 - 3.3.2 the Regional League has consulted with the County Leagues (at Tier 7) for that geographical region; and
 - 3.3.3 this operating position has been approved:
 - (a) at a general meeting of the Regional League; and
 - (b) by the Board (whose decision shall be final and binding).
- 3.4 The top division of a County League shall play open age 11 v 11 format of football.
- 3.5 Where a County League wishes for any of its divisions (other than the top division) to play the 11 v 11 format of football or flexible format(s), the County League must obtain the approval of its members at its general meeting.
- 3.6 Any league wishing to become part of the Women's Football Pyramid (“Applicant League”) must (subject to the below) enter at Tier 7. An Applicant League must apply to The Association by 31st December in the year before the Playing Season in which it wishes to play in the Women's Football Pyramid will commence in such form and/or providing such information as shall be required by The Association from time to time. A league will only be permitted to enter the Women's Football Pyramid above Tier 7 if there are exceptional circumstances. The decision as to whether or not a league should be admitted to, and the Tier at which it will play in the Women's Football Pyramid shall be made by the Board.

- 3.7 Any League whose membership of the Women's Football Pyramid is suspended or withdrawn by the Board, or due to resignation by the League, will not be eligible to participate in any business of the Women's Football Pyramid, including the promotion and relegation process, during the period of suspension or after the date of such withdrawal or resignation of membership.

4. GENERAL PROVISIONS REGARDING PROMOTION AND RELEGATION

- 4.1 The Women's Football Pyramid shall provide for the seasonal promotion and relegation of Clubs between Tiers 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 Playing Season. In extenuating circumstances, where a League is not in a position to relegate due to that League not being up to strength, it must obtain the permission of the Board.
- 4.2 A Club shall be promoted or relegated to the correct designated league or division in the Women's Football Pyramid according to its County Association affiliation, unless the provisions of Regulation 5 provide for the contrary.

5. DETAILED PROMOTION AND RELEGATION PROVISIONS

- 5.1 The criteria for entry into a League at Tier 1 or Tier 2 (i.e. the requirements of a Tier 1 or Tier 2 Licence), including the ground grading criteria, shall be determined by the FA WSL and FA WC Board.
- 5.2 The criteria for entry into a League at Tier 3 to Tier 7, including the ground grading criteria, shall be agreed between the Board and the Leagues at Tier 3 to Tier 7.
- 5.3 The agreed criteria in respect of ground grading for each Tier are contained in the Women's Football Pyramid Ground Grading Document as published by The Association from time to time.
- 5.4 It may be necessary from time to time to move Clubs laterally between Leagues at the same Tier to accommodate the movement of Clubs by normal promotion and relegation. Where this is necessary, no Club will be asked to move more than once in any three seasons, unless, as determined by the Board it would be advantageous to the Club to do so earlier than three seasons.
- 5.5 Each year the Board will consider whether any lateral movements may be necessary at Tiers 3 to 7; if so the Clubs likely to be affected shall be notified and, if the Club does not wish to be moved laterally, given the opportunity to present a case to the Board. The decision of the Board shall be final and binding subject only to arbitration under the Rules.

In coming to its decision the Board will have regard to any representations made by any party, the distance to be travelled by any Club to be moved compared to the distance travelled in the Playing Season prior to movement, the financial impact on the Club to be moved, the frequency with which the Club has been moved in the past, the number of Clubs both in the division to which the Club is to be moved and in the division from which the Club is moved, and any other matter that it considers to be relevant.

- 5.6 At the conclusion of the Playing Season the following procedures regarding promotion and relegation will apply:

Tier 1 and Tier 2

The Club finishing in the bottom place in Tier 1 will be relegated to Tier 2.

Subject to it demonstrating compliance with the Tier 1 Promotion Requirements, the Club finishing in first place in Tier 2 shall replace the Club relegated from Tier 1 to Tier 2.

In the event that the Club finishing in first place in Tier 2 does not wish to be considered for promotion or is not able to demonstrate compliance with the Tier 1 Promotion Requirements, promotion to Tier 1 will be offered to the Club finishing in second place in Tier 2 (subject to that Club demonstrating compliance with the Tier 1 Promotion Requirements).

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In the event that the Clubs finishing in first and second place in Tier 2 do not wish to be considered for promotion or are not able to demonstrate compliance with the Tier 1 Promotion Requirements, the Club finishing in the bottom place in Tier 1 shall remain in Tier 1 and will not be relegated.

Compliance with the Tier 1 Promotion Requirements shall be determined by the FA WSL and FA WC Board at its absolute discretion.

Tier 2 and Tier 3

Save as set out otherwise below, the Club finishing in the bottom place in Tier 2 will be relegated to the appropriate division in Tier 3 by reference to the Club's geographical location.

Subject to the relevant Club demonstrating compliance with the Tier 2 Promotion Requirements, the Tier 3 Champion Club shall be promoted to Tier 2 in place of the Club relegated from Tier 2 to Tier 3.

In the event that the Tier 3 Champion Club does not wish to be considered for promotion or is not able to demonstrate compliance with the Tier 2 Promotion Requirements, the Tier 3 Runner Up Club shall be promoted to Tier 2 in place of the Club relegated from Tier 2 to Tier 3 (subject to the Tier 3 Runner Up Club demonstrating compliance with the Tier 2 Promotion Requirements).

In the event that both the Tier 3 Champion Club and the Tier 3 Runner Up Club do not wish to be considered for promotion or are not able to demonstrate compliance with the Tier 2 Promotion Requirements, the Clubs finishing in second place in each of the two divisions at Tier 3 shall be invited to participate in a Tier 2 Application Process. Subject to the relevant Club demonstrating compliance with the Tier 2 Promotion Requirements, The FA WSL and FA WC Board shall determine at its absolute discretion which Club (if any) shall be promoted to Tier 2 via the Tier 2 Application Process. In the event that neither of the Clubs in second place in each of the two divisions at Tier 3 wish to be considered for promotion or are not able to demonstrate compliance with the Tier 2 Promotion Requirements, the Club finishing in bottom place in Tier 2 shall remain in Tier 2 and will not be relegated.

Compliance with the Tier 2 Promotion Requirements shall be determined by the FA WSL and FA WC Board at its absolute discretion.

Tier 3 and Tier 4

Save as otherwise set out below, each Club finishing in eleventh place and below in each of the two divisions at Tier 3 will be relegated to the appropriate geographical division of Tier 4.

Subject to each Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 3 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, the Clubs finishing in first place in each of the divisions at Tier 4 shall replace the Clubs relegated from Tier 3 to Tier 4.

In the event that a Club finishing in first place in a Tier 4 division does not wish to be considered for promotion or is not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 3 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, promotion to Tier 3 will be offered to the Club finishing in second place in the same Tier 4 division (subject to that Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 3 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion).

In the event that a Club finishing in second place in a Tier 4 division does not wish to be considered for promotion or is not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 3 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, promotion to Tier 3 will be offered to the Club finishing in third place of the same Tier 4 division (subject to that Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 3 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion).

In the event that each of the Clubs finishing in first, second and third place in a Tier 4 division do not wish to be considered for promotion or are not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 3 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, the highest placed Club in a relegation position in the most appropriate geographical division at Tier 3 shall remain in Tier 3 and/or will not be relegated.

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Compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 3 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion shall be determined by the Board at its absolute discretion.

Tier 4 and Tier 5

Save as otherwise set out below, each Club finishing in eleventh place or below in each of the four divisions at Tier 4 will be relegated to the appropriate division of Tier 5 by reference to the Club's geographical location.

In the event that a Tier 4 division does not receive a Club relegated from Tier 3 or no Clubs relegated from Tier 3, the highest placed Club in a relegation position in that particular Tier 4 division shall remain in Tier 4 and will not be relegated.

Subject to each Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 4 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, the Clubs finishing in first place in each of the eight divisions at Tier 5 shall replace those Clubs relegated from Tier 4 to Tier 5.

In the event that a Club finishing in first place in a division at Tier 5 does not wish to be considered for promotion or is not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 4 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, promotion to Tier 4 will be offered to the Club finishing in second place of the same Tier 5 division (subject to that Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 4 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion).

In the event that each of the Clubs finishing in first, second and third place in the Tier 5 division either do not wish to be considered for promotion or are not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 4 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, the highest placed Club in a relegation position in the most appropriate geographical division at Tier 4 shall remain in Tier 4 and will not be relegated. Where applicable, this shall be in addition to any Club remaining in that particular division of Tier 4 where no Tier 3 Clubs are relegated as set out above.

In the event that each of the Clubs finishing in first, second and third place in the Tier 5 division either do not wish to be considered for promotion or are not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 4 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, the highest placed Club in a relegation position in the most appropriate geographical division at Tier 4 shall remain in Tier 4 and will not be relegated. Where applicable, this shall be in addition to any Club remaining in that particular division of Tier 4 where either one Tier 3 Club is relegated or no Tier 3 Clubs are relegated as set out above.

Those Clubs relegated to Tier 5 and those Clubs promoted to Tier 4 shall be placed in the appropriate division in Tier 5 or Tier 4 by reference to the Club's geographical location as determined by the Board at its absolute discretion.

Compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 4 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion shall be determined by the Board at its absolute discretion.

Tier 5 and Tier 6

Regional League Format A

Save as otherwise set out below, where a Tier 5 division within a Regional League Format A is operating with 11 Clubs or more, each Club finishing in eleventh place or below in the Tier 5 division within a Regional League Format A will be relegated to the appropriate division in Tier 6 within that Regional League Format A by reference to the Club's geographical location.

Save as otherwise set out below, where a Tier 5 division within a Regional League Format A is operating with less than 11 Clubs, each Club finishing in eighth place and below in the Tier 5 divisions within a Regional League Format A will be relegated to the appropriate division of Tier 6 within that Regional League Format A by reference to the Club's geographical location.

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In the event that a Tier 5 division within a Regional League Format A does not receive either a Club relegated from Tier 4 or no Clubs relegated from Tier 4, the highest placed Club in a relegation place in that particular Tier 5 division shall remain in Tier 5 and will not be relegated.

Subject to each Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, the Clubs finishing in first place in each of the Tier 6 divisions within a Regional League Format A shall replace those Clubs relegated from the Tier 5 division within that Regional League Format A.

In the event that a Club finishing in first place in a division at Tier 6 does not wish to be considered for promotion or is not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, promotion to Tier 5 will be offered to the Club finishing in second place of the same Tier 6 division (subject to that Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion).

In the event that a Club finishing in second place in a division at Tier 6 does not wish to be considered for promotion or is not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, promotion to Tier 5 will be offered to the Club finishing in third place of the same Tier 6 division (subject to that Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion).

In the event that each of the Clubs finishing in first, second and third place in a division at Tier 6 either do not wish to be considered for promotion or are not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, the highest placed Club in a relegation place in the most appropriate geographical division at Tier 5 shall remain in Tier 5 and will not be relegated. Where applicable, this shall be in addition to any Club remaining in that particular division of Tier 5 where no Clubs are relegated from Tier 4 as set out above.

Compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion shall be determined by the Board at its absolute discretion.

Regional League Format B

Save as otherwise set out below, each Club finishing in eighth place and below of a Tier 5 division within a Regional League Format B will be relegated to the appropriate division in Tier 6 within that Regional League Format B by reference to the Club's geographical location.

In the event that a Tier 5 division within a Regional League Format B does not receive either a Club relegated from Tier 4 or no Clubs relegated from Tier 4, the highest placed Club in a relegation place in that particular Tier 5 division shall remain in Tier 5 and will not be relegated.

Subject to each Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, the Clubs finishing in first place in each of the Tier 6 divisions within a Regional League Format B shall replace those Clubs relegated from the Tier 5 division within that Regional League Format B.

In the event that a Club finishing in first place in a division at Tier 6 does not wish to be considered for promotion or is not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, promotion to Tier 5 will be offered to the Club finishing in second place of the same Tier 6 division (subject to that Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion).

In the event that a Club finishing in second place in a division at Tier 6 does not wish to be considered for promotion or is not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion, promotion to Tier 5 will be offered to the Club finishing in third place of the same Tier 6 division (subject to that Club demonstrating compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion).

In the event that each of the Clubs finishing in first, second and third place in the Tier 6 division either do not wish to be considered for promotion or are not able to demonstrate compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or Other Criteria for Promotion, the highest placed Club in a relegation place in the most appropriate geographical division at Tier 5 shall remain in Tier 5 and will not be relegated. Where applicable, this shall be in addition to any Club remaining in that particular division of Tier 5 where no Clubs are relegated from Tier 4 as set out above.

Compliance with the ground grading criteria for participation in Tier 5 and/or the Other Criteria for Promotion shall be determined by the Board at its absolute discretion.

Tier 6 and Tier 7

A Regional League shall include provisions in its rules, as agreed by the Board, for appropriate relegations to its feeder County Leagues upon reaching its maximum membership.

A Regional League which has not reached its maximum membership may include provisions in its rules for appropriate relegations to its feeder County Leagues provided that a sufficient number of teams have been promoted from its feeder County Leagues via the promotion pool at the end of that Playing Season.

The movement of Clubs from Tier 7 (County Leagues) to Tier 6 will be via a promotion pool.

Clubs in a League at Tier 7 playing open age 11 v 11 format can apply to the Board to be considered for promotion into Tier 6. Any such application must be made by 31 March in each year and priority will be based on the finishing positions of those Clubs. In the event that the champion Club at Tier 7 has not applied for promotion by 31 March in the relevant year, that Club will nevertheless still be considered for promotion to Tier 6.

The Board, in consultation with the relevant Joint Liaison Committee, shall decide which Clubs shall be promoted into Tier 6 (and into which division at Tier 6), taking into account:

- (a) the travel requirements for the relevant Club as well as for the member Clubs of the division it will be joining;
- (b) the number of vacancies after any relegation has occurred;
- (c) any applicable ground grading criteria; and
- (d) other published criteria for promotion pool applications.

Play-Off Matches

Where play-off matches are required in order to determine promotion and relegation in any Playing Season, these play-off matches shall be organised at the end of the Playing Season, provided that the Clubs were given notice prior to the start of that Playing Season or, if such notice was not given, by majority agreement of all the Clubs which could be involved in the play-off matches.

The rules for the play-off matches shall be determined by the Board.

Tiers within the same League

In exceptional circumstances and only in the case of Leagues which have divisions at more than one Tier, the promotion and relegation between Tiers which form part of the same League may be decided by a majority of those persons eligible to attend and vote at a Special General Meeting or Annual General Meeting where this is considered, subject to the approval of the Board.

Additional Teams

Second or subsequent teams from the same Club already competing in the Women's Football Pyramid are not permitted to play above Tier 6.

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6. THE MOVEMENT OF CLUBS WITHIN THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL PYRAMID 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 Board or in accordance with Regulation 6.3, such approval being final and binding.
- 6.2 A new Club intending to participate in a League at Tier 7 or a Club already participating in a League at Tier 7 shall be permitted to apply to the Board to compete in a League sanctioned by any County Association, regardless of whether the Club is in membership of it, where the Club can establish that: (a) the travelling required to compete in a League sanctioned by a County Association is significantly less onerous than the travelling that would be required to compete in the appropriate League sanctioned by the County Association with which it has membership (or its Parent Association, where applicable); (b) the format is not suitable for the Club; or (c) other extenuating circumstances exist. The Board shall decide, at its absolute discretion, whether this exception applies, after taking into consideration the impact on the affected Leagues and their member Clubs, the development of women's football in the area and after promotion and relegation in each affected League has been decided. The Board's decision shall be final and binding. Where the Board decides that the exception applies, the position may be subject to annual review.
- 6.3 Any Club proposing to move from one League to another, other than by promotion, relegation and/or via the promotion pool, must make 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 Board by 31st March in the relevant year in order to be effective for the following Playing Season. Only once promotion and/or relegation has been decided will a decision be made by the Board in respect of a Club's application.
- 6.4 If a Club (whether a members' club or a company) is wound up, liquidated or withdrawn or removed from a League/division in the Women's Football Pyramid and then wishes to reform and/or re-enter the Women's Football Pyramid the following Playing Season, unless otherwise determined by the Board, it will be allowed to make an application only to join a League/division a minimum of two Tiers below the League/division in which it was a member when wound up, liquidated, withdrawn or removed (e.g. from Tier 1 to Tier 3 or below, from Tier 2 to Tier 4 or below, from Tier 3 to Tier 5 or below etc.). This relates only to Clubs that wish to reform and/or return for the following Playing Season and subject to the approval of the Board as set out above.
- 6.5 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 Board and the League(s) of which the Merging Clubs are members by 31st December to be valid for the following Playing Season.

A deed of agreement, which shall be legally binding on all parties must be submitted to The Association by 31st March in the year immediately following receipt of the application. The Board shall determine at its absolute discretion where the Merged Club is to be included in the Women's Football Pyramid for the following Playing Season subject to the provisions of item 6.5.5 below.

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

- 6.5.1 with regard to each of the Merging Clubs:
- 6.5.1.1 The shareholders or members of the Club have voted to agree to the transfer of the Club's membership to the new entity and/or a licensed insolvency practitioner(s) appointed to the Club has agreed to sell or transfer some or all of the Club's assets to the new entity.
- 6.5.1.2 All Football Creditors in the Club must be paid in full or transferred in full (with each creditor's consent) to the new entity, and evidenced as such.

6.5.1.3 All other creditors in the Club must be paid in full or transferred in full (with each creditor's consent) to the new entity and evidenced as such.

6.5.1.4 The proposed new entity has provided financial forecasts to the Board and the League showing its ability to fund the Club for the next twelve (12) months or to the end of the Playing Season following transfer (whichever is the longer) and that evidence of funding sources has been provided.

6.5.1.5 The Board must have given approval for the transfer to take place.

In the event that requirement 6.5.1.1 and/or 6.5.1.3 are not fully complied with, and only where the Board, at its absolute discretion, deems there to have been exceptional circumstances surrounding the application for the merger, it may approve the merger (subject to compliance with all other provisions above);

6.5.2 the proposed playing name of the Merged Club must be acceptable to the Board;

6.5.3 the Merged Club must have security of tenure to a ground that meets the relevant ground grading requirements;

6.5.4 any other criteria that the Board may from time to time deem to be appropriate; and

6.5.5 the Merged Club will ordinarily be placed at the lower of the Tiers at which the Merging Clubs ended the Playing Season in which the application is made. For the purposes of this Regulation, if one of the Merging Clubs has finished that Playing Season in a relegation place, then they will be deemed to have ended the Playing Season at the Tier to which they would have been relegated without the Proposed Merger proceeding or if one of the Merging Clubs has finishing the Playing Season in a promotion place, then they will be deemed to have ended the Playing Season at the Tier to which they would have been promoted 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 Board at its absolute discretion.

6.6 In the event that a League in the Women's Football Pyramid ceases to exist, the Board will use its reasonable endeavours to place the Clubs previously playing in that League at the next highest level of the Women's Football Pyramid for the following Playing Season (but is under no obligation to do so), unless otherwise requested by a Club.

7. ELECTION OF A CLUB INTO A LEAGUE

7.1 Subject to Regulation 7.3, a Club can only enter the Women's Football Pyramid at Tier 7 and only to the County League of their Parent County Association.

7.2 Any Club shall, with the permission of the Board, be permitted to compete in a League sanctioned by any County Association, regardless of whether the Club is in membership of it, where the Club can establish that: (a) the travelling required to compete in a League sanctioned by a County Association is significantly less onerous than the travelling that would be required to compete in the appropriate League sanctioned by the County Association with which it has membership (or its Parent Association, where applicable); (b) the format is not suitable for the Club; or (c) other extenuating circumstances exist. The Board shall decide, whether such permission shall be granted, after taking into consideration the impact on the affected Leagues and their member Clubs, the development of women's football in the area and after promotion and relegation in each affected League has been decided. The Board's decision shall be final and binding. If permission is granted, this may be subject to annual review.

7.3 In exceptional circumstances a League may seek approval from the Board to elect a Club not currently in membership of that League provided that there is: (a) exceptional circumstances (b) a vacancy within its constitution (c) the Club meets the entry criteria and (d) promotion and relegation issues have been satisfied.

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8. CHANGE IN PLAYING NAME

A Club participating in a League at Tier 6 or above shall not be permitted to change its playing name (i.e. the name under which the Club competes in a League), as recorded when affiliating to their Parent Association, save with the prior written permission of the Board. Any application for a change of playing name must be received by the Board on or before 1 May in a Playing Season in order for it to be considered by Board for adoption in the following Playing Season. The Board will use its absolute discretion in deciding whether to approve a change in a Club's playing name.

A Club participating in a League at Tier 7 seeking to change its playing name must follow the relevant provisions contained within the rules of its County Association. Any approved name changes shall be adopted in the following playing season regardless of any provisions to the contrary in the County Association's Rules.

Any Club applying to the promotion pool with a pending change to playing name for the following season must inform the Board of this potential change.

9. WOMEN'S FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

The Women's Football Conference (the "Conference") will comprise of representatives from Leagues and the representatives appointed by that Board in accordance with its constitution. The objective of the Conference is to take steps to protect and further the interests of women's and girls' Association football.

10. JOINT LIAISON COMMITTEES (JLCS)

Regional JLCs will be established to consider matters relating to the development of the Women's Football Pyramid in their regions. In particular JLCs will be responsible for recommending the promotion and relegation of Clubs between Tiers 6 and 7, and will operate in accordance with their terms of reference.

The JLCs will be established on a regional basis and will comprise representatives of the Leagues at Tiers 6 and 7.

Both the Conference and the JLCs may refer a matter to the Board for determination.

11. PLAYING ORDER OF PRECEDENCE IN THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL PYRAMID

Any Club with more than one team in the Women's Football Pyramid (including external reserve sections) shall always fulfil its fixtures in this order of precedence, subject to the players being properly registered with the League(s): first team, any second team, any subsequent team.

A League shall deal with any breach of this Regulation by the teams of a member Club playing within the same League. Any breach of this Regulation by teams of a Club playing in more than one League shall be reported to the Board who shall deal with it as appropriate.

12. GIRLS' TEAMS PLAYING IN LEAGUES

12.1 Any clubs wishing to enter a girls' team into a league competition shall only do so if the league competition is sanctioned by the County Association with which the club is in membership. If the club is in membership of more than one County Association, the league competition must be sanctioned by the Club's Parent Association.

This Regulation 12.1 applies to all new and existing teams, irrespective of whether a club has another team already competing in a league sanctioned by The Association or any County Association.

12.2 The following exceptions to the above regulation shall apply, and a team shall be permitted, for one Playing Season only, to compete in a league sanctioned by The Association or any County Association, regardless of whether the club is in membership of it, provided that the club can establish:

- (a) the travelling required to compete in a league sanctioned by The Association or another County Association is significantly less onerous than the travelling that would be required to compete in the appropriate league sanctioned by the County Association with which it has membership (or its Parent Association, where applicable);
- (b) there is no appropriate age group division in the league sanctioned by the County Association with which it has membership (or its Parent Association, where applicable) for the new team to compete in; or
- (c) the league sanctioned by the County Association with which it has membership (or its Parent Association, where applicable) does not offer the format of football that the Club wishes the new team to compete in eg 11 v 11, 7 v 7.

The County Association with which the Club is in membership, or the Club's Parent Association where applicable, shall decide, whether any one of the above exceptions applies and if so whether the team may compete in a league sanctioned by The Association or another County Association. The County Association or Parent Association shall review this decision annually based on the exceptions set out in (a) to (c) above and having regard to the playing standard of the team, the development of girls football in the area, the league in which it has been given permission to participate and the league it would be required to participate in if it was required to play in a league sanctioned by the County Association with which it has membership or its Parent Association as appropriate.

13. PROCEDURES FOR THE DETERMINATION OF ANY MATTER, DISPUTE OR DIFFERENCE BY THE BOARD

- 13.1** The Board 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 2. The Board may require the attendance at a meeting or the written observations of any League or Club, as it considers appropriate to assist its determination.
- 13.2** Any dispute or difference between a League and a Club relating to promotion and relegation issues, lateral movement and/or other eligibility criteria must be referred for determination to the Board; such determination shall be final and binding subject only to arbitration in accordance with Rule K.
- 13.3** Any other decision of the Board 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 Part C of the Disciplinary Regulations (Appeals – Non-Fast Track).
- 13.4** The Board 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 subcommittee or commission which may include members of council not appointed to the Board or a body constituted by a County Association).

APPENDIX A

