

REGULATIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND OPERATION OF THE WOMEN'S FOOTBALL PYRAMID AND GIRLS' FOOTBALL

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.

“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.

“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.

“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.

“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 Leagues 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 for the seasonal movement of clubs.

2.4. All Leagues and Clubs shall be bound by these Regulations from the date on which they enter the Women's Football Pyramid until such time as they leave the Women's Football Pyramid for whatever reason. All Leagues will be required to sign a copy of these Regulations as and when required by the Board.

3. POSITION 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. 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.

3.3. 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 in the Women's Football Pyramid according to its County Association affiliation, unless the provisions of Regulation 5.2 apply.

5. DETAILED PROMOTION AND RELEGATION PROVISIONS

5.1. The criteria for entry into a League, including the ground grading criteria, shall be agreed between the Board and the Leagues. 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.

5.2. 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.

- 5.3. 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.

- 5.4. At the conclusion of the 2018/2019 Playing Season, the following promotion and relegation procedures will apply:

Tier 1 and Tier 2

The Club in the bottom place in Tier 1 will be relegated to Tier 2. Subject to the ground grading criteria for Tier 1 and the other criteria for promotion, it will be replaced by the Clubs finishing in the top two positions in Tier 2.

Should a Club finishing in a promotion position in Tier 2 not wish to be considered for promotion or not meet the criteria for promotion, the Club finishing in third position in Tier 2 will, subject to the ground grading criteria and other criteria for promotion, be promoted to Tier 1 in place of the Club finishing in a promotion position. If the Club finishing in third position does not meet the criteria for promotion or does not wish to be promoted, the Club finishing in the relegation position in Tier 1 will not be relegated.

Tier 2 and Tier 3

Subject to eligibility criteria and the other criteria for promotion, the Clubs finishing in first place in the two divisions at Tier 3 (the "Tier 3 Divisional Champions") will be promoted to Tier 2. In the event that either of the Tier 3 Divisional Champions are not eligible for promotion and/or do not meet the promotion criteria, the Club finishing in second position in the same division as the Tier 3 Divisional Champion which is not eligible for promotion and/or does not meet the relevant criteria, will, subject to eligibility criteria, the criteria for promotion and the League rules at Tiers 2 and 3 (all as amended from time to time) be promoted in place of the Tier 3 Divisional Champion.

In order to determine the champion of Tier 3, the Tier 3 Divisional Champions shall participate in a play off match. The winner of the play off match shall be the champion of Tier 3.

Tier 3 and Tier 4

The Clubs in the bottom two places in each of the two divisions at Tier 3 will be relegated to Tier 4 (to the appropriate geographical division of Tier 2). These Clubs will be replaced by, subject to the ground grading criteria for Tier 3 and other criteria for promotion, the Clubs finishing in first position in each of the Leagues at Tier 4.

Tier 4 and Tier 5

The Clubs in the bottom two places in each of the four divisions at Tier 4 will be relegated to Tier 5 (to the appropriate geographical division of Tier 5). They will be replaced by, subject to the ground grading criteria for Tier 4 and other criteria for promotion, the Clubs finishing in first position in each of the Leagues at Tier 5. Should a Club finishing in first position of a League at Tier 5 not wish to be considered for promotion or not meet the criteria (including but not limited to the ground grading criteria) for promotion, then the Club finishing in second place may, subject to the ground grading criteria for Tier 4 and other criteria for promotion, be promoted in its place. Should neither the Club finishing in first place nor that finishing in second place wish to be considered for promotion or meet the criteria (including but not limited to the ground grading criteria) for promotion, the third placed Club may, subject to the ground grading criteria for Tier 4 and other criteria for promotion, be promoted in their place. Clubs finishing lower than third place will not be considered for promotion. If a Club finishing in first, second or third place in a League at Tier 5 is not eligible or does not wish for promotion, the highest placed Club in a relegation position in the most appropriate geographical League at Tier 4 will not be relegated.

Tier 5 and Tier 6

The Clubs in the bottom two places in each of the eight Leagues at Tier 5 will be relegated to Tier 6 (to the appropriate geographical Regional League Division One). These Clubs will be replaced by, subject to the ground grading criteria for Tier 5 and other criteria for promotion, the Clubs finishing in first place in each of the divisions at Tier 6. Should a Club finishing in first position not wish to be considered for promotion or not meet the criteria (including but not limited to the ground grading criteria) for promotion, then the Club finishing in second place may, subject to the ground grading criteria for Tier 5 and other criteria for promotion, be promoted in its place. Should neither the Club finishing in first place nor that finishing in second place wish to be considered for promotion or meet the criteria (including but not limited to the ground grading criteria) for promotion, the third placed Club may, subject to the ground grading criteria for Tier 5 and other criteria for promotion, be promoted in their place. Clubs finishing lower than third place will not be considered for promotion. If a Club finishing in first, second or third place in a League at Tier 6 is not eligible or does not wish for promotion, the lowest placed Club in the most appropriate geographical League at Tier 5 will not be relegated.

Other promotions and relegations can occur within a League if agreed by a majority of the Clubs in membership of that League or in the case of the South East Region, by the Joint Liaison Committee ("JLC") and with the approval of the Board.

Tier 6 to Tier 7

The movement of Clubs between Tiers 6 and 7 (County Leagues) will be via a promotion pool.

The Clubs at Tier 7 can apply to the Board to be considered for promotion to the relevant League at Tier 6. Application must be made by 31 March in each year and priority will be based on the finishing positions of the Clubs at Tier 7. 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 JLC, shall decide which Clubs shall be promoted taking into account the number of vacancies after any relegation has occurred.

Play-Off Matches

Where the appropriate JLC decides that a number of 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.

Tiers within the same League

In exceptional circumstances and only in the case of Leagues which are played 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.

Reserve Teams

Where a reserve section/division exists in a League at Tier 6 any reserve teams or any additional teams of Clubs already in membership of that League at Tier 6 of the Women's Football Pyramid shall move to the reserve section/division when it is established. Any reserve team or any additional teams of Clubs already in membership of the Women's Football Pyramid which are promoted from Tier 7 shall be placed (where such a league exists) in the reserve section/ division of the relevant Tier 6 League.

Unless a reserve section/division exists, reserve teams are not permitted to play above Tier 6.

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 Club 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 the travelling required to compete in a League sanctioned by a County Association, is 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). The Board shall decide, at its absolute discretion, whether this exception applies and its decision shall be final and not subject to appeal.
- 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 Relevant Decision Making Body;
- 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.
- 6.7. A Club may apply by 31st March to the League in which it has its membership for voluntary relegation to a League/division one Tier below at the end of current Playing Season after discharging its full obligations to the League. Any such successful application shall count as one of the relegation places from that League at the end of current Playing Season and the League shall adjust its remaining relegation place(s) accordingly. Any disputes shall be referred to the Board.

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 only at Tier 7 and only to the County League of their Parent County Association.
- 7.2. Any Club shall 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 the travelling required to compete in a League sanctioned by a County Association is 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). The Board shall decide, whether this exception applies and 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.

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 on Form "A", save with the prior written permission of the Board. A Club participating in a League at Tier 7 shall not be permitted to change its playing name (i.e. the name under which the Club competes in a League), as recorded on Form "A", save with the prior written permission of its County Association. Any application for a change of playing name must be received by the Board or County Association (as appropriate) on or before 31 March in a Playing Season in order for it to be considered by the Board or County Association (as appropriate) for adoption in the following Playing Season. The Board or County Association (as appropriate) will use its absolute discretion in deciding whether to approve a change in a Club's playing name.

9. WOMEN'S FOOTBALL CONFERENCE

The Women's Football Conference (the "Conference") will comprise of representatives from Leagues and the representatives appointed by the 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. 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 5, 6 and 7, and will operate in accordance with their terms of reference.

In the case of the South East Region, the JLC may be responsible for determining the promotion and relegation between Tiers 5 and 6 where appropriate.

The JLCs will be established on a regional basis and will comprise representatives of the Leagues at Tiers 5, 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 PYRAMID OF FOOTBALL

Any Club with more than one team in any League in the Women's Football Pyramid shall always fulfil its fixtures in this order of precedence, subject to the players being properly registered with the League(s): first team, reserve team, A team and other lower teams.

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 Board who shall deal with it as appropriate.

12. GIRLS' TEAMS PLAYING IN LEAGUES

- 12.1. Any clubs wishing to enter a new 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 applies to all new teams, irrespective of whether a club has another team already competing in a league

sanctioned by The Association or any County FA.

- 12.2. The following exceptions to the above regulation shall apply, and a new 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:

12.2.1. the travelling required to compete in a league sanctioned by The Association or another County Association is 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);

12.2.2. 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

12.2.3. 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 (i) to (iii) above and having regard to the playing standard of the team, 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.

- 12.3. Subject to Regulation 12.2, existing teams shall continue to participate in any league that they have previously participated in irrespective of whether that league is sanctioned by The Association, a County Association other than the one with which that team's Club is in membership, or its Parent Association, unless it is moving to a league sanctioned by its Parent Association where a vacancy exists.

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 the Regulations for Football Association Appeals.

- 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).

WOMEN'S PYRAMID OF FOOTBALL 2018/2019

