



To: All Leagues at Steps 3 to 6 of the National League System (“NLS”)

12 April 2021

Dear Leagues,

NLS Restructure, Step 4 to 6

As you will be aware, following the curtailment of the 2020/21 league season for Steps 3-6 of the National League System, the Alliance and Leagues Committees (**‘the Committees’**) announced that they would consider the feasibility of undertaking the restructure at Steps 4-6 (which was intended to take effect from the 20/21 season but has been delayed due to the impact of COVID-19).

The Committees have now met to consider this matter and will be recommending to FA Council that the structural changes to the number of divisions in the National League System be completed in order to achieve the ‘pure pyramid’ at Steps 1 to 6 (as set out in the enclosed diagram). FA Council will be considering the recommendations of the Committees at a meeting on 22 April 2021.

In order to achieve this, by way of summary (and following consideration of a range of options), the Committees have proposed that:

1. The following divisional changes will be implemented (on the basis of the previously conducted tender process) for the 2021-22 season:
 - a. One new division will be created at Step 4, to be administered by the Northern Premier League;
 - b. Two new divisions will be created at Step 5, to be administered by the Combined Counties League and the United Counties League; and
 - c. The number of divisions at Step 6 will be reduced to 17.
2. In order to implement these divisional changes, 110 clubs will be required to upwardly move within the pyramid at Steps 4 to 6:
 - a. 20 clubs will move from Step 5 to Step 4;
 - b. 60 clubs will move from Step 6 to Step 5 (20 to backfill those Clubs elevated to Step 4, and 40 to populate the two new divisions); and
 - c. 30 clubs will move from Regional NLS Feeder Leagues to Step 6 (to bring Step 6 divisions to their full quota, taking into account the reduced number of divisions going forwards).
3. The mechanism for selecting clubs required to move into the new divisions at Step 4 and Step 5 will be as follows:
 - a. Each Club will be allocated an unweighted points per game figure on the basis of its completed fixtures in both the 2019/20 and 2020/21 seasons, i.e. the club’s total points across both seasons will be added together and divided by the number of games it has played across both seasons¹.
 - b. Clubs will then be ranked within their respective leagues on the basis of those calculations.
 - c. Clubs who are eligible for upward movement will be identified as follows:

¹ NB: A Club must have played in each of the two seasons (both at the same Step) in order to be eligible for upward movement via this process.

- i. **Step 5** – The top 3 ranked clubs from each of the North West Counties League, Northern Counties East League and Northern League, along with the top ranked Club from the remaining eleven Step 5 divisions, will be considered eligible for upward movement to Step 4 and will be invited to make an application to do so. Multiple clubs will be upwardly moved from these specific leagues, as per the previous ratification by FA Council, in order to address specific challenges with travelling distance and time which exist at Step 4.
 - ii. **Step 6** – The top 2 ranked clubs in each of the South West Peninsula League divisions, along with the top 3 ranked clubs from the eighteen remaining Step 6 divisions, will be considered eligible for upward movement to Step 5 and will be invited to make an application for upward movement. Fewer clubs will be upwardly moved from the South West Peninsula League Divisions, as per the previous ratification by FA Council, on the basis of geographical reasons for the relevant divisions at Step 5.
 - iii. The Committees are currently considering what additional requirements clubs who are eligible based on sporting merit will be required to meet in order to be upwardly moved via this process and further details will be communicated on this in due course.
 - d. It will not be mandatory for any club which is eligible for upward movement to make an application. If an eligible club decides not to do so, the next best ranked club will be invited (and so on) subject to any cut off point deemed appropriate by the Committees.
4. The process outlined above will lead to a need to backfill in certain divisions at Step 6 to bring them up to quota. Where there is a need to do so, the Committee will liaise with the relevant Step 6 Leagues and ask them to consider applications that were made by clubs on or before 31 December 2020 from clubs in Regional NLS Feeder Leagues within their relevant geographical area. Given the degree of variation in the number of fixtures completed by clubs in Regional NLS Feeder Leagues, the Committees did not consider it appropriate to utilise sporting data in the same way to determine upward movement. Accordingly, the proposed upward movement will be determined by the relevant Leagues on the basis of a subjective application process (although sporting data may be taken into account), with the final decision to allocate Clubs being with the Committee.
5. All applications will be assessed by the Committees on the basis of the principles above and clubs will be allocated accordingly.

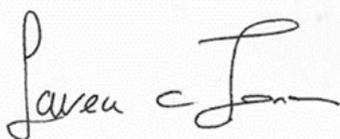
Following two disrupted seasons at this level, and with no movement having taken place at the end of the 2019/20 season, it is hoped that allowing upward club movement in the manner proposed by the Committees will support the integrity of the National League System, supporting clubs with desire and ambition to progress, without undermining its stability.

Should any Club wish to provide any observations on the proposal for upward club movement for FA Council to consider, or to declare that they would not wish to be considered for upwards movement, please email to NLS@thefa.com by no later than 17:00 on Friday 16th April.

Any observations received will be provided to FA Council as part of the relevant paperwork.

Clubs and Leagues will continue to be kept updated on this process.

Yours sincerely,



Laurence Jones
Head of National League System