

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 FA Rules.

"Association" means The Football Association Limited.

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

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

"FAWFC" means The FA Women's Football Committee.

"Football Creditors" shall have the meaning set out in The FA 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 Steps 1 and 2.

"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.

"Relevant Decision Making Body" means:

- (a) for the League and/or any Clubs at Steps 1 and 2, the Board; and
- (b) for any Leagues and/or Clubs at Steps 3 to 7 (inclusive), the FAWFC.

For the avoidance of doubt, where a decision involves or relates to any League and/or Club at Steps 1 and/or 2, the Relevant Decision Making Body is the Board (for example, a proposed merger between a Club in membership of the League at Step 2 and a Club in membership of a League at Step 3 shall be determined by the Board).

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

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

"Women's Football Pyramid" means the system of 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 Steps 1 and 2.
- 2.3 The aims and objectives of the Women's Football Pyramid 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.
- 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 Relevant Decision Making Body.

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 Step 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 Step 7 if there are exceptional circumstances. The decision as to whether or not a league should be admitted to, and the Step 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 Relevant Decision Making Body, 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. RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR PROMOTION AND RELEGATION

- 4.1 The Women's Football Pyramid shall provide for the seasonal promotion and relegation of Clubs between Steps within the system. A League that signifies its acceptance to be bound by these Regulations must be in a position to promote and relegate Clubs at the conclusion of each 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 Relevant Decision Making Body.
- 4.2 A Club shall be promoted or relegated to the correct designated league in the Women's Football Pyramid according to its County FA affiliation, unless complying with the provisions of Regulation 5.2.

5. DETAILED PROMOTION AND RELEGATION ISSUES

- 5.1 The criteria for entry into a League, including the ground grading criteria, shall be agreed between the Relevant Decision Making Body and the Leagues. The agreed criteria in respect of ground grading for each Step 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 Step 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 FAWFC it would be advantageous to the Club to do so earlier than three seasons.
- 5.3 Each year the FAWC will consider whether any lateral movements may be necessary at Steps 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 FAWFC. The decision of the FAWFC shall be final and binding subject only to arbitration under The FA Rules.

In coming to its decision the FAWFC 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 Subject to any changes to the competition structure referred to below, at the conclusion of the 2017/2018 Playing Season, the following promotion and relegation procedures will apply:

Step 1 (FA WSL 1) and Step 2 (FA WSL 2)

There will be no promotion and relegation between Step 1 and Step 2.

Step 2 (FA WSL 2) and Step 3 (FA WPL Northern and Southern Divisions)

From the 2018/2019 Playing Season onwards, the Leagues comprising Step 1 and Step 2 will be replaced with new leagues and participation in these leagues will be determined by an application process specified by the Association. Consequently there will be no promotion and relegation between Step 3 and Step 2 at the conclusion of the 2017/2018 Playing Season.

However, the Clubs finishing in first place in the two divisions at Step 3 will participate in a championship play-off match to determine the champion of Step 3 ("Champion Club"). If the Champion Club applies for a place in Step 2, it shall have its application for Step 2 considered separately from other applicant clubs in accordance with a process and terms to be specified by the Association.

If the Champion Club does not apply or is not awarded a place in Step 2 through this application process and if the club which lost the championship play-off match has applied for a place in Step 2, this runner-up Club shall be entitled to have its application considered separately in accordance with the above.

It is intended that promotion and relegation will be reinstated from season 2018/2019 onwards.

Step 3 (FA WPL Northern and Southern Divisions) and Step 4 (FA WPL Division 1)

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

Step 4 (FA WPL Division 1) and Step 5 (Regional League Premier Division)

The Clubs in the bottom two places in each of the four divisions at Step 4 will be relegated to Step 5 (to the appropriate geographical Regional League Premier Division). They will be replaced by, subject to the ground grading criteria for Step 4 and other criteria for promotion, the Clubs finishing in first position in each of the Leagues at Step 5. Should a Club finishing in first position of a League at Step 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 Step 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 Step 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 Step 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 Step 4 will not be relegated.

Step 5 (Regional Premier Division) and Step 6 (Regional League Division 1)

The Clubs in the bottom two places in each of the eight Leagues at Step 5 will be relegated to Step 6 (to the appropriate geographical Regional League Division One). These Clubs will be replaced by, subject to the ground grading criteria for Step 5 and other criteria for promotion, the Clubs finishing in first place in each of the divisions at Step 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 Step 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 Step 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 Step 6 is not eligible or does not wish for promotion, the lowest placed Club in the most appropriate geographical League at Step 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 FAWFC.

Step 6 (Regional League Division 1) to Step 7 (County League)

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

The Clubs at Step 7 can apply to the FAWFC to be considered for promotion to the relevant League at Step 6. Application must be made by 31 March in each year and priority will be based on the finishing positions of the Clubs at Step 7. In the event that the champion Club at Step 7 has not applied for promotion by 31 March in the relevant year, that Club will nevertheless still be considered for promotion to Step 6.

The FAWFC, 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.

Steps within the same League

In exceptional circumstances and only in the case of Leagues which are played at more than one Step, the promotion and relegation between Steps 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 Relevant Decision Making Body.

Reserve Teams

Where a reserve section/division exists in a League at Step 6 any reserve teams or any additional teams of Clubs already in membership 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 Step 7 shall be placed (where such a league exists) in the reserve section/division of the relevant Step 6 League.

Unless a reserve section/division exists, reserve teams are not permitted to play above Step 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 Relevant Decision Making Body, such approval being final and binding.
 - 6.2 A Club shall be permitted to apply to the Relevant Decision Making Body to compete in a League sanctioned by any County FA, 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 FA is less onerous than the travelling that would be required to compete in the appropriate League sanctioned by the County FA with which it has membership (or its Parent Association, where applicable). The Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Relevant Decision Making Body by 1st April 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 Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Relevant Decision Making Body, it will be allowed to make an application only to join a League/division a minimum of two Steps below the League/division in which it was a member when wound up, liquidated, withdrawn or removed (e.g. from Step 1 to Step 3 or below, from Step 2 to Step 4 or below, from Step 3 to Step 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 Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Association 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 Relevant Decision Making Body, 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 Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Steps 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 Step 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 Step 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 Relevant Decision Making Body at its absolute discretion.

6.6 In the event that a League in the Women's Football Pyramid ceases to exist, the Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Step 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 Relevant Decision Making Body.

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 Step 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 FA, 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 FA is less onerous than the travelling that would be required to compete in the appropriate League sanctioned by the County FA with which it has membership (or its Parent Association, where applicable). The Relevant Decision Making Body shall decide, whether this exception applies.

- 7.3 In exceptional circumstances a League may seek approval from the Relevant Decision Making Body 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 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 Relevant Decision Making Body. Any application for a change of playing name must be received by the Relevant Decision Making Body on or before 31 March in a Playing Season in order for it to be considered by Relevant Decision Making Body for adoption in the following Playing Season. The Relevant Decision Making Body 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 FAWFC. 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 Steps 6 and 7.

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

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

Both the Conference and the JLCs may refer a matter to the FAWFC 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 FAWFC 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 FA with which the club is in membership. If the club is in membership of more than one County FA, 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 FA, regardless of whether the club is in membership of it, provided that the club can establish:

- (i) the travelling required to compete in a league sanctioned by The Association or another County FA is less onerous than the travelling that would be required to compete in the appropriate league sanctioned by the County FA with which it has membership (or its Parent Association, where applicable);

- (ii) there is no appropriate age group division in the league sanctioned by the County FA with which it has membership (or its Parent Association, where applicable) for the new team to compete in; or
- (iii) the league sanctioned by the County FA 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 FA 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 FA. The County FA 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 FA 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 irrespective of whether that league is sanctioned by The Association, a County FA 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 RELEVANT DECISION MAKING BODY

- 13.1 The Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Relevant Decision Making Body 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 (a) 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 Relevant Decision Making Body; such determination shall be final and binding subject only to arbitration in accordance with Rule K.
- (b) Any other decision of the Relevant Decision Making Body 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.

- 13.3 The Relevant Decision Making Body 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 Relevant Decision Making Body or a body constituted by a County Football Association).

APPENDIX A

WOMEN'S PYRAMID OF FOOTBALL 2017/2018

