NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM REGULATIONS

1. DEFINITIONS

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

"The Association" means The Football Association Limited.

"Club" means a football club for the time being in a League in membership of the NLS or Feeder Leagues (as applicable).

"Committee" in these Regulations means the relevant Committee appointed by the Association.

"Competition" in these Regulations means a League in the NLS.

"Conditional Licence" means a Licence with conditions attached to be met by a Club within a period determined by the Competition in which the Club holding the Licence is allocated by the Committee. Such period is not to exceed 1 March in the Membership Year to which the Licence relates. Save in exceptional circumstances a Conditional Licence cannot be granted to a Club for successive Membership Years in respect of the same Criterion.

"Criteria" means the Criteria for participation in Play Off Matches as set out in regulation 9 of these Regulations.

"Feeder Leagues" means Regional NLS Feeder Leagues from where a Club can enter the NLS.

"League" means any competition sanctioned by The Association and/or an Affiliated Association in membership of the NLS or Feeder Leagues (as applicable).

"Licence" means an annual licence required to be held by a Club to be a member of a Competition that may be either an Unconditional Licence or Conditional Licence.

"NLS" means the National League System of competitions controlled by The Association where promotion and relegation links exist between participating Leagues.

"Playing Season" means the period between the date on which the first competitive fixture in the League is played each year until the date on which the last competitive fixture in the League is played. For Clubs participating in Play Off Matches this does include the period when Play Off Matches are played.

"Play Off Match(es)" means matches played between Clubs in a Play Off Position on a format to be determined by each League provided that the format is the same across each Step.

"Play Off Position" means the position of a Club at the end of each Playing Season which is provided for in Standardised Rule 12 as qualifying the Club to take part in a Play Off Match to qualify for promotion to the next Step for the next Playing Season.

"Regular Season" means the period between the date on which the first competitive fixture in the League is played each year and the date on which the last competitive fixture in the League is played, excluding Play Off Matches.

"Regulations" means these regulations.

"Rules" means The Association's Standardised Rules or The Association's Standard Code of Rules under which a League is administered.

"Step" means the level at which a Club participates in the NLS or Feeder League (as applicable).

"**Tiebreaker**" means the following method of ranking two or more Clubs in order to determine which Club should be ranked higher than the other(s):

- Stage 1 – highest goal difference (in League matches only, and divided by the total number of League matches played by that Club at the end of the current Regular Season).

- Stage 2 – if any Clubs remain tied after Stage 1, most goals scored (in League matches only, and divided by the total number of League matches played by that Club at the end of the current Regular Season).

- Stage 3 – if any Clubs remain tied after Stage 2, most League matches won (divided by the total number of League matches played by that Club at the end of the current Regular Season).

- Stage 4 – if any Clubs remain tied after Stage 4, the Clubs shall participate in a one-off play-off match (or series of play-off matches) to determine their final ranking (with the format and rules of any such play-off match(es) to be determined by the Committee at its absolute discretion).

"Unconditional Licence" means a Licence without any conditions attached.

2. THE NLS SHALL BE OPERATED IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS.

The aims and objectives of the NLS are to provide:

2.1 Clubs with a level of competitive football appropriate to their playing ability, stadium/ ground facilities and geographical location.

2.2 A framework for discussion on matters of policy and common interest to Leagues and Clubs.

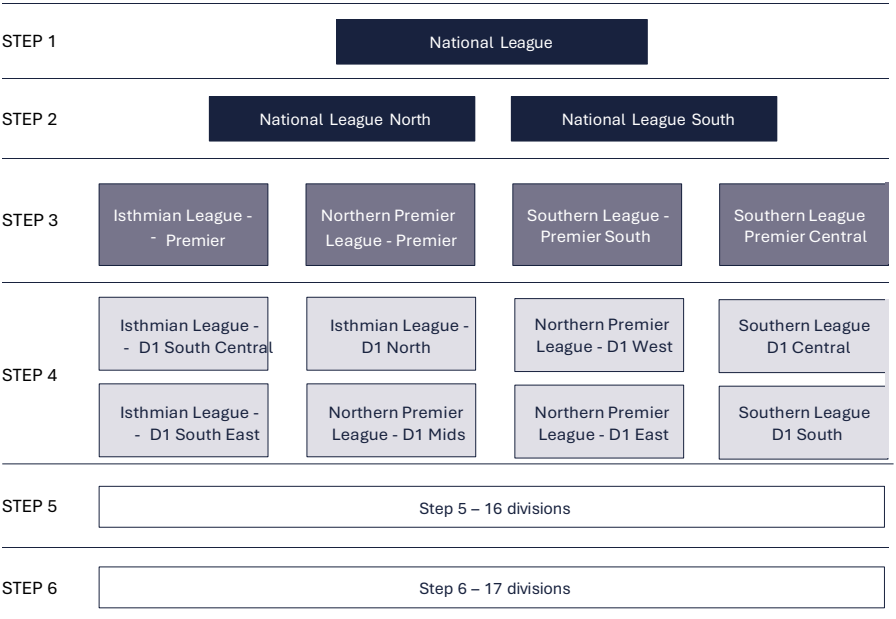
2.3 The seasonal movement of Clubs.

2.4 A co-ordinated approach between Leagues regarding the final date of the Playing Season.

All Leagues are bound by the Regulations. A Club is bound by the Regulations from the date it has qualified for placement into the NLS until such time as it leaves the NLS for whatever reason.

3. NLS LEAGUE STRUCTURE

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



The Leagues currently at Steps 5 and 6 are set out at the end of the Regulations.

Each Step shall have the following maximum number of Clubs: Step 1-24, Step 2-48, Step 3-88, Step 4- 176, Step 5 - 320, Step 6- 340. Clubs will be placed in the most geographically appropriate division.

3.2 Any league wishing to become part of the NLS must apply to the Committee by 31st December in the relevant year in such form and/or providing such information as shall be required by the Committee from time to time. The decision as to whether or not a league should be admitted to the NLS shall be made by the Committee which will then decide on the Step at which the League will compete.

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

4. RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR PROMOTION AND RELEGATION

The Committee shall provide for the seasonal promotion, relegation or the movement of Clubs.

5 DETAILED PROMOTION AND RELEGATION ISSUES

5.1 The criteria for entry to the NLS and the criteria for ground/stadium facilities and the Criteria for participation in Play Off Matches shall be determined by the Committee. All criteria so determined shall be published by The Association from time to time.

5.2 Subject to 5.5, at the conclusion of each Playing Season, the following procedures will apply to promotion / relegation subject to the application of the Rules:

Step 1 and Step 2

These regulations do not deal with promotion from Step 1

The Clubs finishing in the bottom four places at Step 1 at the end of the Playing Season will be relegated and placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 2 for the following Playing Season.

They will be replaced by the Clubs finishing in 1st position in each of the divisions at Step 2 together with a further two Clubs determined by a series of Play Off Matches. Where a Club finishes in 1st position but does not meet the criteria for promotion to the next Step, the Club finishing in 2nd position shall be promoted. The Clubs finishing in 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th positions shall be eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches. The Play Off Matches shall be played so that in each Step 2 division there is a qualifying round, semi-finals and a promotion final with all ties being played over a single leg at the ground of the higher placed Club. The winner of the promotion final in each Step 2 division will be promoted. If a Club is not eligible to enter Step 1 then it shall not take part in any Play Off Matches. In that event, such Club shall not be replaced and the Play Off Matches structure and draw shall be adjusted as necessary by the Competition on the basis of the remaining Clubs' final league positions.

Step 2 and Step 3

The Clubs in the bottom four places in each of the two divisions at Step 2 at the end of the Regular Season will be relegated and placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 3 for the following Playing Season.

They will be replaced by the Clubs finishing in 1st position in each of the four divisions at Step 3 together with a further four Clubs determined by a series of Play Off Matches.

Where a Club finishes in 1st position in a division at Step 3 but does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 2, the Club finishing in 2nd position in that division at Step 3 shall be automatically promoted to Step 2.

Where the Clubs finishing in 1st and 2nd position in a division at Step 3 do not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 2:

- No Club shall be automatically promoted to Step 2 from that division at Step 3.
- The structure and draw of the Play Off Matches in that division at Step 3 shall be adjusted as necessary by the Competition (such adjustment to be approved by the Committee).
- The Clubs finishing in the highest relegation positions in each of the two divisions at Step 2 shall be ranked by points-per-game (League matches only) and the Club with the highest points-per game shall be granted a reprieve from relegation (subject to any Tiebreaker required).

Subject to meeting the criteria for promotion to Step 2, the Clubs finishing in 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 7th positions in each division of Step 3 shall be eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches.

The Play Off Matches in each division of Step 3 shall be as follows:

- Qualifying Round – (a) the Club finishing in 4th position shall play the Club finishing in 7th position (“**QR1**”), and (b) the Club finishing in 5th position shall play the Club finishing in 6th position (“**QR2**”).
- Semi-Finals – (a) the winner of QR1 shall play the Club finishing in 3rd position (“**SF1**”), and (b) the winner of QR2 shall play the Club finishing in 2nd position (“**SF2**”).
- Final - the winner of SF1 shall play the winner of SF2 in the final Play Off Match, and the winner shall be promoted to Step 2

All Play Off Matches shall be played over one leg at the ground of the participating Club that finished in the highest position at the end of the Regular Season.

Clubs finishing below 7th position will not be eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches.

Where a Club does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 2, it shall not be permitted to take part in the Play Off Matches and shall not be replaced. The structure and draw of the Play Off Matches shall be adjusted as necessary by the Competition (such adjustment to be approved by the Committee).

The promoted Clubs will be placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 2 for the following Playing Season.

Step 3 and Step 4

The Clubs finishing in the bottom four places in each of the four divisions at Step 3 at the end of the Regular Season will be relegated and placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 4 for the following Playing Season.

They will be replaced by the Clubs finishing in 1st position in each of the eight divisions at Step 4 together with a further eight Clubs determined by a series of Play Off Matches.

Where a Club finishes in 1st position but does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 3, the Club finishing in 2nd position in that division at Step 4 shall be automatically promoted to Step 3.

Where the Clubs finishing in 1st and 2nd position in a division at Step 4 do not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 3:

- No Club shall be automatically promoted to Step 3 from that division at Step 4.
- The structure and draw of the Play Off Matches in that division at Step 4 shall be adjusted as necessary by the Competition (such adjustment to be approved by the Committee).
- The Clubs finishing in the highest relegation positions in each of the four divisions at Step 3 shall be ranked by points-per-game (League matches only) and the Club with the highest points-per game shall be granted a reprieve from relegation (subject to any Tiebreaker required).

Subject to meeting the criteria for promotion to Step 3, the Clubs finishing in 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and

7th positions in each division of Step 4 shall be eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches.

The Play Off Matches in each division of Step 4 shall be as follows:

- Qualifying Round – (a) the Club finishing in 4th position shall play the Club finishing in 7th position ("**QR1**"), and (b) the Club finishing in 5th position shall play the Club finishing in 6th position ("**QR2**").
- Semi-Finals – (a) the winner of QR1 shall play the Club finishing in 3rd position ("**SF1**"), and (b) the winner of QR2 shall play the Club finishing in 2nd position ("**SF2**").
- Final - the winner of SF1 shall play the winner of SF2 in the final Play Off Match, and the winner shall be promoted to Step 3.

  All Play Off Matches shall be played over one leg at the ground of the participating Club that finished in the highest position at the end of the Regular Season.

Clubs finishing below 7th position will not be eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches.

Where a Club does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 3, it shall not be permitted to take part in the Play Off Matches and shall not be replaced. The structure and draw of the Play Off Matches shall be adjusted as necessary by the Competition (such adjustment to be approved by the Committee).

The promoted Clubs will be placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 3 for the following Playing Season.

Step 4 and Step 5

The Clubs finishing in the bottom four places in each of the eight divisions at Step 4 at the end of the Regular Season will be relegated and placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 5 for the following Playing Season.

Clubs relegated for finishing in the bottom four places in each of the eight divisions at Step 4 will be replaced by the Clubs finishing in 1st position in each of the sixteen divisions at Step 5 together with a further 16 Clubs (one Club from each of the sixteen divisions at Step 5) determined by a series of Play Off Matches.

Where a Club finishes in 1st position but does not meet the minimum criteria for promotion to Step 4, the Club finishing in 2nd position in that division at Step 5 shall be automatically promoted to Step 4.

Where the Clubs finishing in 1st and 2nd position in a division at Step 5 do not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 4:

- No Club shall be automatically promoted to Step 4 from that division at Step 5.
- The structure and draw of the Play Off Matches in that division at Step 5 shall be adjusted as necessary by the Competition (such adjustment to be approved by the Committee).
- The Clubs finishing in the highest relegation positions in each of the eight divisions at Step 4 shall be ranked by points-per-game (League matches only) and the Club with the highest points-per game shall be granted a reprieve from relegation (subject to any Tiebreaker required).

Subject to meeting the criteria for promotion to Step 4, the Clubs finishing in 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th positions in each division of Step 5 shall be eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches.

The Play Off Matches in each division of Step 5 shall be as follows:

- Semi-Finals – (a) the Club finishing in 2nd position shall play the Club finishing in 5th position ("**SF1**"), and (b) the Club finishing in 3rd position shall play the Club finishing in 4th position ("**SF2**").
- Final - the winner of SF1 shall play the winner of SF2 in the final Play Off Match, and the winner shall be promoted to Step 4.

All Play Off Matches shall be played over one leg at the ground of the participating Club

that finished in the highest position at the end of the Regular Season.

Clubs finishing below 7th position will not be eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches.

Where one Club does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 4, it shall not be permitted to take part in the Play Off Matches and shall be replaced by the Club finishing in 6th position. If the Club finishing in 6th position also does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 4, the Club finishing in 7th position shall be the replacement Club. If the Club finishing in 7th position does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 4, there shall be no replacement Club.

Where a second Club does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 4, it shall not be permitted to take part in the Play Off Matches and shall be replaced by the Club finishing in 7th position (unless the Club finishing in 7th position is already participating in the Play Off Matches or does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 4, in which case there shall be no replacement Club).

Where fewer than four Clubs are eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches, the structure and draw of the Play Off Matches shall be adjusted as necessary by the Competition (such adjustment to be approved by the Committee).

The promoted Clubs will be placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 4 for the following Playing Season.

Step 5 and Step 6

The Clubs in the bottom two places in each of the sixteen divisions at Step 5 at the end of the Regular Season will be relegated and placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 6 for the following Playing Season.

These Clubs will be replaced by (i) the Clubs finishing in 1st position at the end of the Regular Season in each of the two divisions operated by the South West Peninsula League; (ii) the Clubs finishing in 1st position at the end of the Regular Season in each of the remaining fifteen divisions at Step 6; and (iii) a further fifteen Clubs determined by a series of Play Off Matches within those remaining fifteen divisions (i.e. not including the two divisions operated by the South West Peninsula League).

Where a Club finishes in 1st position but does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 5, the Club finishing in 2nd position in that division at Step 6 shall be automatically promoted to Step 5.

Where the Clubs finishing in 1st and 2nd position in a division at Step 6 operated by the South West Peninsula League do not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 5:

- No Club shall be automatically promoted to Step 5 from that division at Step 6.
- The Clubs finishing in the highest relegation positions in each of the divisions at Step 5 (shall be ranked by points-per-game (League matches only) and the Club with the highest points-per game shall be granted a reprieve from relegation (subject to any Tiebreaker required).

Where the Clubs finishing in 1st and 2nd position in one of the remaining fifteen divisions at Step 6 do not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 5:

- No Club shall be automatically promoted to Step 5 from that division at Step 6.
- The structure and draw of the Play Off Matches in that division at Step 6 shall be adjusted as necessary by the Competition (such adjustment to be approved by the Committee).
- The Clubs finishing in the highest relegation positions in each of the divisions at Step 5 shall be ranked by points-per-game (League matches only) and the Club with the highest points-per game shall be granted a reprieve from relegation (subject to any Tiebreaker required).

Subject to meeting the criteria for promotion to Step 5, the Clubs finishing in 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th positions in each of the remaining fifteen divisions at Step 6 shall be eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches.

The Play Off Matches in each of the remaining fifteen divisions of Step 6 shall be as follows:

- Semi-Finals – (a) the Club finishing in 2nd position shall play the Club finishing in 5th position (**"SF1"**), and (b) the Club finishing in 3rd position shall play the Club finishing in 4th position

("**SF2**").

- Final - the winner of SF1 shall play the winner of SF2 in the final Play Off Match, and the winner shall be promoted to Step 5.

All Play Off Matches shall be played over one leg at the ground of the participating Club that finished in the highest position at the end of the Regular Season.

Clubs finishing below 7th position will not be eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches.

Where one Club does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 5, it shall not be permitted to take part in the Play Off Matches and shall be replaced by the Club finishing in 6th position. If the Club finishing in 6th position also does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 5, the Club finishing in 7th position shall be the replacement Club. If the Club finishing in 7th position does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 5, there shall be no replacement Club.

Where a second Club does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 5, it shall not be permitted to take part in the Play Off Matches and shall be replaced by the Club finishing in 7th position (unless the Club finishing in 7th position is already participating in the Play Off Matches or does not meet the criteria for promotion to Step 5, in which case there shall be no replacement Club).

Where fewer than four Clubs are eligible to take part in the Play Off Matches, the structure and draw of the Play Off Matches shall be adjusted as necessary by the Competition (such adjustment to be approved by the Committee).

The promoted Clubs will be placed in a feeder pool and placed in the most geographically appropriate division at Step 5 for the following Playing Season.

Step 6 and relegation

At the end of the Regular Season the Clubs in the bottom three positions of each of the seventeen Step 6 divisions will be liable to relegation. Where a Step 6 division is operating with fewer than 18 Clubs at the end of the Regular Season (or where the number of Clubs could fall below 18 following promotion, relegation and/or lateral movements), the Committee shall decide at its absolute discretion whether the Clubs in the bottom three, bottom two or bottom positions of that division will be liable to relegation. The final number of Clubs to be relegated will be confirmed once promotion candidates from Feeder Leagues and any vacancies are known. If reprieves are required the Clubs third from bottom in each applicable division will be ranked on a points per match basis (then goal difference, then goals scored if required) - the Club(s) with the best points per match will be reprieved. If all third from bottom Clubs are reprieved, and a further reprieve(s) is required, the same process will apply for Clubs in second from bottom in each applicable division (and so on).

Power of the Committee

Where this Regulation 5.2 does not provide a resolution to a particular combination of promotion and relegation scenarios, the Committee shall determine at its absolute discretion how to resolve the matter.

5.3 At Steps 2-5 the Club finishing in last place in the table at the end of the Regular Season will be relegated and not reprieved.

5.4 At Steps 1 to 6, if a Club becomes eligible to take part in a Play Off Match and refuses to take part in that match or if a Club qualifies for promotion and refuses to be promoted then that Club shall be relegated from the division it last played in and shall play the following Playing Season in the division at the next Step level below. If the refusal/ineligibility applies to a Club currently operating at Step 6, the Club will be removed from the NLS and placed in the appropriate Regional NLS Feeder League, provided there is an eligible Club at Feeder League level to replace them.

5.5 A vacancy occurs within the NLS when a Club:

(a) notifies the League in which it holds membership that it shall resign from the League (either with immediate effect or at the end of the Playing Season);

(b) is withdrawn or removed from the League for any reason; or

(c) is relegated in accordance with Regulation 5.8 (in circumstances where that Club has not otherwise been relegated).

5.6 Where a Club notifies the League in which it holds membership that it shall resign from the League at the end of the Playing Season, that resignation may only be withdrawn before the end of the Playing Season with the consent of that League.

5.7 Where a vacancy occurs within the NLS the following procedures will apply:

TIMING / CIRCUMSTANCES OF VACANCY	PROCEDURE
After the AGM of the League in which the Club holds membership, but before the League has commenced its first fixture (in any division)	• Only internal changes to the constitution of a League are allowed following the AGM of that League • The League is not otherwise permitted to fill the vacancy for that Playing Season. • Where a League decides to make an internal change to fill the vacancy, it shall be filled by the Club finishing in the highest relegation position in that division of the League at the end of the previous Playing Season. • Where a League does not fill the vacancy via an internal change, the Club shall be treated as a relegated Club for the purposes of the standings of that division of the League and will be placed in (and remain in) bottom place until the end of the forthcoming Playing Season. o The vacancy shall therefore pass to the Step below and shall be filled as follows: The Clubs finishing in the highest relegation positions in the divisions of that Step at the end of the forthcoming Regular Season shall be ranked by points-per-game (League matches only) and the Club with the highest points-per game shall be granted a reprieve from relegation (subject to the Club being eligible for a reprieve and subject to any Tiebreaker required). • Where the Club finishing in the highest relegation position in a division has already been granted a reprieve (or is not eligible for a reprieve), it shall not form part of any ranking process and shall not be replaced in that process. • Where all the Clubs finishing in the highest relegation position in the divisions of that Step have already been granted a reprieve (or are not eligible for a reprieve), the Clubs finishing in the next highest relegation positions in the divisions will be ranked according to the process set out above (and so on). • Where the number of vacancies is greater than the number of Clubs eligible to be reprieved, the Committee shall determine how to fill those vacancies at its absolute discretion.

After the first fixture has commenced in the League in which the Club holds membership, but before the completion of fixtures in the division of the League in which the vacancy has occurred	• The playing record of the Club shall be expunged (and the playing records of the other Clubs in the division shall be adjusted accordingly). • The Club's points total will be reduced to 0. • The Club shall be treated as a relegated club for the purposes of the standings of that division and shall be placed in (and remain in) bottom place until the end of the Playing Season. • The vacancy shall therefore pass to the Step below and shall be filled as follows: The Clubs finishing in the highest relegation positions in the divisions of that Step at the end of the Regular Season shall be ranked by points-per-game (League matches only) and the Club with the highest points-per game shall be granted a reprieve from relegation (subject to the Club being eligible for a reprieve and subject to any Tiebreaker required). • • Where the Club finishing in the highest relegation position in a division has already been granted a reprieve (or is not eligible for a reprieve), it shall not form part of any ranking process and shall not be replaced in that process. • Where all the Clubs finishing in the highest relegation position in the divisions of that Step have already been granted a reprieve (or are not eligible for a reprieve), the Clubs finishing in the next highest relegation positions in the divisions will be ranked according to the process set out above (and so on). • Where the number of vacancies is greater than the number of Clubs eligible to be reprieved, the Committee shall determine how to fill those vacancies at its absolute discretion.
After the completion of fixtures in the division of the League in which the vacancy has occurred, but before Club allocations for the following Playing Season have been determined by The Association	• The standings of that division for the most recent Playing Season shall not be affected. • The Club shall be treated as a relegated Club (regardless of final standing). • Where the Club did not finish the Playing Season in a relegation position, the Club that finished the Playing Season in the highest relegation position in that division shall be granted a reprieve from relegation. • In any event, the vacancy shall pass to the Step below and shall be filled as follows: The Clubs finishing in the highest relegation positions in the divisions of that Step at the end of the Regular Season shall be ranked by points-per-game (League matches only) and the Club with the highest points-per game shall be granted a reprieve from relegation (subject to the Club being eligible for a reprieve and subject to any Tiebreaker required).

	• Where the Club finishing in the highest relegation position in a division has already been granted a reprieve (or is not eligible for a reprieve), it shall not form part of any ranking process and shall not be replaced in that process. • Where all the Clubs finishing in the highest relegation position in the divisions of that Step have already been granted a reprieve (or are not eligible for a reprieve), the Clubs finishing in the next highest relegation positions in the divisions will be ranked according to the process set out above (and so on). • Where the number of vacancies is greater than the number of Clubs eligible to be reprieved, the Committee shall determine how to fill those vacancies at its absolute discretion.
After the completion of fixtures in the same division of the League in which the vacancy has occurred, and after Club allocations for the following Playing Season have been determined by The Association	• The Committee shall determine how to fill the vacancy at its absolute discretion. *Guidance* *To the extent possible, the Committee shall aim to fill the vacancy in a way which causes the least disruption to the NLS.*
Relegation in accordance with Regulation 5.8 (in circumstances where that Club has not otherwise been relegated)	• The standings of that division for the most recent Playing Season shall not be affected. • The Club shall be treated as a relegated Club (regardless of final standing). • The Club that: (a) finished the most recent Playing Season in the highest relegation position in that division and (b) is eligible to be granted a reprieve from relegation, shall be granted a reprieve from relegation.

Power of the Committee
Where this Regulation 5.7 does not provide a resolution for a particular vacancy, the Committee shall determine at its absolute discretion how to resolve the matter.

5.8 Clubs are not allowed to enter into a ground share agreement in order to gain promotion or to retain membership at a particular Step where the Club has failed to attain or maintain the relevant Grade.

Clubs are not allowed to enter into a ground share agreement at a ground already shared by two Clubs, save for in exceptional circumstances as determined by the Committee in its absolute discretion.

5.9 Stadium Accreditation Programme requirements will be in accordance with the Rules.

Each Playing Season, a Club participating at Step 1 to Step 6 must attain the following Stadium Accreditation by 31 March:

STEP	GRADE
Step 1	Grade 1
Step 2	Grade 2
Step 3	Grade 3
Step 4	Grade 4

Step 5	Grade 5
Step 6	Grade 6

Where a Club fails to attain the relevant grade by 31 March in a Playing Season, it will not be eligible for promotion or to participate in any Play Off Match in that Playing Season and will be relegated to the Step immediately below at the end of the Playing Season (save for where that Club also fails to meet the Stadium Accreditation criteria applicable for the Step immediately below, in which case the Committee shall decide (at its sole discretion) where to place the Club for the following Playing Season).

Clubs promoted from Feeder Leagues must install floodlights in working order by 30th September following promotion. Failure to do this will result in a sanction being imposed at the discretion of the League of which the Club is a member. If by 31st March in the year following promotion the floodlights are still not installed then the Club will be a relegated Club and be dealt with accordingly.

5.10 If a Club is relegated for not achieving the required Grade for the Step at which it is playing (regardless of whether the Club finishes in a relegation position or not), it will not be eligible for promotion again until the ground has attained the required Grade for the Step to which that Club wishes to be promoted. The Club must attain that Grade by 31st March in the year in which it seeks promotion.

5.11 Where a club resigns from a League, that club will not be eligible for promotion for at least one Playing Season following the Season in which it resigned. Regulation 5.9 shall also apply if, in the Playing Season during which the Club resigns, that Club failed to attain the required Grade for the Step at which it was playing.

5.12 In the event of any question arising regarding the interpretation of these Regulations it will be decided by The Association in its sole discretion.

6. THE MOVEMENT OF CLUBS WITHIN THE NLS 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 or otherwise as set out in these Regulations or League Rules save with the approval of the Committee.

It may be necessary from time to time to move Clubs laterally at the same Step. Each year the Committee (or sub-committee thereof) will consider whether any lateral movements may be necessary at each Step and the final decision shall rest with the Committee / sub-committee. Only a Club subject to lateral movement from one League to another may appeal that decision pursuant to Regulation 8.2(b).

6.2 If a Club wishes to move to either: (a) another division at the Step of the NLS at which its current division operates, or (b) another division at a Step of the NLS below that at which its current division operates, that Club must make an application in writing to the Committee on or before 31st March in each year to be effective for the following Playing Season. In the event of such application being successful the League from which the Club is moving (if applicable) shall not levy a financial penalty on that Club.

6.3 (i) If a Club (whether a Members' Club or a Company) is wound up, liquidated, or is removed from its League or withdraws from football competition ('the Former Club'), and a new Club ('the New Club') is established which wishes to be placed within the NLS, it will be allowed to make an application only to join a League/ division at Step 5 of the NLS unless the Former Club was in either Step 4 or Step 5 when the event which caused it to cease its membership occurred in which case it must re-join the NLS at a minimum of two Steps below the level at which it was at the time the event occurred, or withdrew from football competition, whichever is lower. Where the Former Club was a member of Premier League or EFL then the Committee shall at its absolute discretion determine in

which League the New Club shall be placed for the following Playing Season and will set out at its complete discretion the requirements to be met by the New Club.

In order for consideration to be given to the placement in the NLS of the New Club in the following Playing Season, an initial application must be received by the Committee by 1st March or within twenty-one days of the Former Club being wound up, liquidated, resigning or being removed from its League or withdrawing from football competition, if such date is later than 1st March.

The full application accompanied by all necessary documents including evidence of security of tenure having been granted to the New Club and affiliation to a County Football Association must be received by 31st March or within twenty-one days of the Former Club being wound up, liquidated, resigning or being removed from its League or withdrawing from football competition, if such date is later than 1st March. The application shall be copied to the League of which membership is being requested. The application will be determined by the Committee.

In considering any application, the Committee will set out at its sole discretion the requirements to be met by the New Club.

In the event of more than one application being received within twenty-one days of the Former Club being wound up, liquidated, resigning or being removed from its League or withdrawing from football competition, the Committee will consider at its discretion which application will be considered in accordance with this Regulation.

(ii) If a Club is removed from its League and wishes to remain in the NLS it shall apply to the Committee within five working days of it receiving written notification of its removal from its League. The Committee will consider such application and will place the Club in what it considers at its sole discretion to be the most appropriate League/division for the following Playing Season.

6.4 If a Club (whether a Members' Club or a Company) ceases to be a member of its league and that Club (that is not a New Club as defined at 6.3 above) wishes to be placed within the NLS for the immediately following Playing Season, then unless otherwise determined by the Committee, it may be allowed to make an application to join a League/division below the most recent League/division of which the Club was a member.

In order for consideration to be given to the placement in the NLS by the Club in the immediately following Playing Season, an initial application must be received by the Committee in accordance with the procedures set out at 6.3 above. The application shall be copied to the League of which membership is being requested. The application will be determined by the Committee at its absolute discretion.

In considering any application, the Committee will set out at its sole discretion the requirements to be met by the Club in determining whether to approve the application.

6.5 *For the purposes of this Regulation 6.5, references to a "club" shall mean a club participating in a league below the NLS and Feeder Leagues in which the default day for league fixtures to be played is a Saturday.*

If two or more Clubs (or a Club and a club) ("the Merging Clubs") are proposing a transaction or series of transactions that result in the merging or consolidation ("the Proposed Merger") of those Clubs (or Club and club) into one Club ("the Merged Club") then a formal application to do so must be received by the Committee 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 Committee shall determine at its absolute discretion (or whether, if the application involves a club) where the Merged Club is to be included in the

NLS for the following Playing Season subject to the provisions of item 6.5.5 below.

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 Committee shall determine at its absolute discretion where the Merged Club is to be included in the NLS for the following Playing Season subject to the provisions of item 6.5.5 below.

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

6.5.1 The requirements of Standardised Rule 2.9 for the current Playing Season must be met by each of the Merging Clubs. If one or more of the Merging Clubs is subject to an insolvency event then Standardised Rule 2.9.2 shall be applied to such club(s), otherwise Standardised Rule 2.9.1 shall be applied;

6.5.2 The proposed playing name of the Merged Club must be acceptable to the Committee; and

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

6.5.4 Any other criteria that the Committee may from time to time deem to be appropriate;

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 (or outside the NLS if the transaction involves a club). 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.

Any decision regarding whether a proposed transaction or series of transactions falls to be considered under this Regulation shall be determined by the Committee at its absolute discretion.

7. PLACEMENT OF A CLUB INTO A LEAGUE

7.1 Usually a club can only enter the NLS at Step 6 via a Feeder League. However a League may seek approval from the Committee to receive a club or team not currently in membership of a League within the NLS 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. Such request must be received from the league by no later than 1st February. Any decision shall only be capable of Appeal to The Association by the affected League.

7.2 Reserve teams, including a team from a club or Club which is not considered by the Committee to be sufficiently separate from another club or Club, will not be permitted to compete above Step 6 in the NLS. There must be a minimum of two Steps between a first and reserve team. This does not apply at Steps 6 and Feeder League level. No two teams from the same Club can play at the same Step.

7.3 Teams from Higher Education or Further Education establishments are not permitted to compete above Step 5. This does not prevent any such establishment forming a Club which complies with all entry criteria and which is separate from the establishment itself.

7.4 Where a Club moves from one League to another, for whatever reason, the League from which it is being moved must provide the League to which the Club is being moved with a certificate confirming that the Club being moved does not owe any money or other property of any nature to the League from which it is being moved. The Club being moved cannot compete in its new League until such certification has been provided and the onus will be on the Club being moved to ensure that it has cleared all indebtedness to its previous League.

8. PROCEDURES FOR THE DETERMINATION OF ANY MATTER, DISPUTE OR DIFFERENCE BY THE COMMITTEE

8.1 The Committee 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 Committee may require the attendance at a meeting or the written observations of any League or Club, as it considers appropriate to assist its determination.

8.2 (a) Any dispute or difference between a League and a Club relating to promotion and relegation issues, lateral movement and/or other eligibility criteria must be referred for determination to the Committee; such determination shall be final and binding subject only to Arbitration in accordance with Rule K.

(b) Subject to Regulation 6.1 above, any decision of the Committee 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 Appeal Regulations save for (i) appeals in relation to Stadium Accreditation decisions where the procedures are outlined in Regulation 8.2(c) below and (ii) appeals in relation to decisions made pursuant to Regulations 6.1 and 6.2 above where the procedures are outlined in Regulation 8.2(d) below.

(c) Procedures for Stadium Accreditation Appeals

(i) The ratification of the Stadium Accreditation decision must be sent in writing within 14 days of the final decision date, currently 31st March.

(ii) Appeals in relation to Stadium Accreditation Appeals must be submitted to The Association's Judicial Services Department within seven days from the date of the written decision outlining the Grounds of Appeal, with a copy to The Association's National League System Department.

(iii) Unless both parties agree that a hearing should be conducted on the papers, the Committee will appear before an Appeal Board with the Appellant to respond to the application and there is no requirement to make a formal response in writing.

(iv) In all cases the Committee will submit any documentation including the Stadium Accreditation report that was considered by the Committee in relation to the Stadium Accreditation decision, (which the appellant would already have received).

(v) Dates would be set annually in advance by the Judicial Services Department for the hearing of Stadium Accreditation appeals and details of the dates would be notified to all Clubs in the correspondence from the Committee notifying the decision of the Stadium Accreditation assessment.

(d) Procedures for appeals against decisions made pursuant to Regulation 6.1 and 6.2

(i) Such appeals must be submitted to The Association's Judicial Services Department within seven days from the date of the written decision outlining the Grounds of Appeal, with a copy to The Association's National League System Department.

(ii) The Committee's response to the appeal shall be submitted to The Association's Judicial Services Department within seven days of the date the Club's appeal was submitted, with a copy to The Association's National League System Department.

(iii) In all cases the Committee will submit any documentation considered by the Committee in relation to the relevant decision (which the appellant would already have received) with its response.

(iv) The Committee will appear before an Appeal Board with the Appellant for determination of the appeal.

(v) Dates would be set annually in advance by the Judicial Services Department for

the hearing of such appeals and details of the dates would be notified to the Club in the correspondence from the Committee notifying them of the relevant decision.

8.3 The Committee may, at its discretion, delegate the resolution of any matter, dispute or difference arising under these Regulations to anybody it considers to be appropriate (including a sub-committee or commission which may include members of council not on the Committee or a body constituted by a County Football Association).

9. CRITERIA FOR THE PARTICIPATION IN PLAY-OFF MATCHES

In order to qualify for Play Off Matches a Club must comply with:

- Security of Tenure – see Standardised Rule 2.3.2
- Solvency – see Standardised Rule 13.B.2
- Ground Share requirements, i.e. not ground share in order to gain promotion – see 5.7 of these Regulations
- Stadium Accreditation – see 5.8 of these regulations and the relevant criteria document

10. ARBITRATION

The fact of participation in the NLS and signifying agreement to be bound by the Regulations shall constitute an agreement between each League and Club to refer to Arbitration any challenge in law arising out of, or in relation to, the Regulations in accordance with the provisions of FA Rule K.

11. LICENSING SYSTEM

A Club shall be required to hold a Licence to be a member of a Competition at Steps 1 to 4 of the NLS.

(a) The Association shall through the appropriate Committee operate a Licensing System to apply to all Clubs competing at Steps 1 to 4 of the National League System ("NLS"). A Club is required to hold a Licence to be a member of a Competition at Steps 1 to 4 of the NLS. The Licensing System to be applied is as shown at an Appendix to the Standardised Rules.

(b) Each Competition at Steps 1 to 4 of the NLS shall be responsible for the operation, assessment and granting of the Licence in respect of its Clubs through the Standardised Rules as approved by a Committee of The Association. A Competition at Steps 1 to 4 shall take all reasonable and practical steps to co-operate with The Association in the application of the Licence.

(c) In the event that a Competition fails to apply the Licensing System set out in the Standardised Rules to the satisfaction of The Association, then The Association shall have the powers of the Board of that Competition as set out in the Standardised Rules to apply such Licensing System. In addition, The Association may, if necessary, bring an action against the Competition for Misconduct under the Rules of The Association.

12. PRECEDENCE

In the case of conflict between the Regulations for the Operation of the NLS and the Rules, the Regulations take precedence.

LEAGUES/DIVISIONS AT STEPS 5 AND 6 OF THE NLS (SEASON 2025-26)

STEP 5	STEP 6
Combined Counties League Premier Div North Combined Counties League Premier Div South Eastern Counties League Premier Div Essex Senior League Hellenic League Premier Div Midland League Premier Div North West Counties League Premier Div Northern League Div 1 Northern Counties East League Premier Div Southern Counties East League Premier Div Spartan South Midlands League Premier Div Southern Combination Football League Premier Div United Counties League Premier Div North United Counties League Premier Div South Wessex League Premier Div Western League Premier Div	Combined Counties League Div 1 Eastern Counties League Div 1 North Eastern Counties League Div 1 South Hellenic League Div 1 Midland League Div 1 Northern Counties East Div 1 North West Counties League Div 1 North North West Counties League Div 1 South Northern League Div 2 South West Peninsula League Premier Div East South West Peninsula League Premier Div West Spartan South Midlands League Div 1 Southern Combination Football League Div 1 Southern Counties East League Div 1 United Counties League Div 1 Wessex League Div 1 Western League Div 1

APPENDIX A

Regional NLS Feeder League Regulations

1. League Structure

   1.1 The Leagues currently operating as Feeder Leagues are set out at the end of the Appendix.

   1.2 At Feeder League level the maximum number of Clubs in each division shall be determined by the Sanctioning Authority taking into account all relevant factors. In any case, this shall not be more than 18 Clubs. The minimum amount of Clubs should be 14.

   1.3 Any league wishing to become a Feeder League must apply to the FA Leagues Committee by 31st December in the relevant year in such form and /or providing such information as shall be required by the Committee from time to time. The decision as to whether or not a league should be admitted as a Feeder League shall be made by the Committee.

2. Rules and Regulations for Promotion and Relegation

   2.1 All Feeder League Clubs seeking promotion to Step 6 must make an application using the prescribed form direct to The Association, copied to their existing League, by 31st December in the relevant year. In order to be considered for promotion Clubs must finish in 1st position in their Feeder League. If the Club finishing in 1st position does not wish to be promoted or fails to meet the entry criteria then the Club finishing in 2nd position will be eligible for promotion. If the Club in 2nd position does not seek promotion or fails to meet the entry criteria then Clubs down to 5th position may be considered for promotion provided that they meet the appropriate entry criteria. Clubs finishing below 5th position may not be considered for promotion and only one Club may be considered for promotion from each League. Each application must be accompanied by the agreed application fee, as determined by the Committee, which is non-refundable.

   2.2 Clubs competing in a Feeder League must comply fully with the minimum requirements of Grade 8. To be considered for promotion to Step 6, Clubs must meet the requirements of Grade 7 and attain Grade 6 by 31st March in the year following promotion. Clubs can be promoted from Feeder Leagues to Step 6 without floodlights, provided that that all other requirements of Grade 7 are met by 31st March in the Playing Season in which the Club wishes to gain promotion and that the Club has the following in place:-

   - Planning permission granted for floodlights.
   - That by 30th September following promotion that floodlights are installed and in working order.
   - A development / business plan
   - Quotations / estimates for the work to be carried out.
   - Funding applications submitted, if required.

   Failure to install floodlights in working order by 30th September following promotion will result in a sanction being imposed at the discretion of the League of which the Club is a member. If by 31st March in the year following promotion the floodlights are still not installed then the Club will be a relegated Club and be dealt with accordingly.

3. Placement of a Club in a League

   3.1 The matter of draft placements for Clubs in Feeder Leagues is for the League in conjunction with its Sanctioning Authority. Once drafted, proposed placements are to be submitted to the Committee for ratification by an appropriate date as prescribed by the Committee from time to time. This is save for Clubs being allocated to Feeder Leagues having been relegated from Step 6, which is a matter for the Committee.

   3.2 Reserve and 'A' teams may participate in Feeder Leagues. Clubs should note the provision concerning Reserve teams at Step 6 under Regulation 7.2 in the 'National League System

Regulations'.

4. Movement of a Club between Leagues

4.1 Movement of a Club from participation in one League to another is not permitted other than by promotion and relegation or otherwise as set out in League Rules save with the approval of the Committee.

It may be necessary from time to time to move Clubs laterally at the same Step. Each year the Committee (or sub-committee thereof) will consider whether any lateral movements may be necessary at each Step and the final decision shall rest with the Committee/sub-committee. Only a Club subject to lateral movement from one League to another may appeal that decision pursuant to Regulation 5.2(b).

4.2 Any Club wishing to move from one League to another must make an application in writing to the Committee on or before 31st March in each year to be effective for the following Playing Season. In the event of such application being successful, the League from which the Club is moving shall not levy a financial penalty on that Club.

5. Procedures for the determination of any matter, dispute or difference by the Committee

5.1 The Committee 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 in Regulation 2. The Committee may require the attendance at a meeting or the written observations of any League or Club, as it considers appropriate to assist its determination.

5.2 (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 Committee; such determination shall be final and binding subject only to Arbitration in accordance with Rule K.

(b) Subject to Regulation 4.1 above, any decision of the Committee 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 Appeal Regulations save for
(i) appeals in relation to Stadium Accreditation decisions where the procedures are outlined in Regulation 5.2(c) below and (ii) appeals in relation to decisions made pursuant to Regulations
4.1 and 4.2 above where the procedures are outlined in Regulation 5.2(d) below.

(c) Procedures for Stadium Accreditation Appeals

(i) The ratification of the Stadium Accreditation decision must be sent in writing within 14 days of the final decision date, currently 31st March.

(ii) Appeals in relation to Stadium Accreditation Appeals must be submitted to The Association's Judicial Services Department within seven days from the date of the written decision outlining the Grounds of Appeal, with a copy to The Association's National League System Department.

(iii) The Committee will appear before an Appeal Board with the Appellant to respond to the application and there is no requirement to make a formal response in writing.

(iv) In all cases the Committee will submit any documentation including the Stadium Accreditation report that was considered by the Committee in relation to the Stadium Accreditation decision, (which the appellant would already have

received).

(v) Dates would be set annually in advance by the Judicial Services Department for the hearing of Stadium Accreditation appeals and details of the dates would be notified to all Clubs in the correspondence from the Committee notifying the decision of the Stadium Accreditation assessment.

(d) Procedures for appeals against decisions made pursuant to Regulation 4.1 and 4.2

(i) Such appeals must be submitted to The Association's Judicial Services Department within seven days from the date of the written decision outlining the Grounds of Appeal, with a copy to The Association's National League System Department.

(ii) The Committee's response to the appeal shall be submitted to The Association's Judicial Services Department within seven days of the date the Club's appeal was submitted, with a copy to The Association's National League System Department.

(iii) In all cases the Committee will submit any documentation considered by the Committee in relation to the relevant decision (which the appellant would already have received) with its response.

(iv) The Committee will appear before an Appeal Board with the Appellant for determination of the appeal.

(v) Dates would be set annually in advance by the Judicial Services Department for the hearing of such appeals and details of the dates would be notified to the Club in the correspondence from the Committee notifying them of the relevant decision.

5.3 The Committee may, at its discretion, delegate the resolution of any matter, dispute or difference arising under these Regulations to anybody it considers to be appropriate (including a sub-committee or commission which may include members of council not on the Committee or a body constituted by a County Football Association).

Leagues with Regional NLS Feeder League status - 2025-26 season:

Anglian Combination Premier Div
Bedfordshire County League Premier Div Cambridgeshire County League premier Div Central Midlands League Div North Central Midlands League Div South Cheshire League Premier Div
Devon League Premier Div East
Devon League Premier Div West
Dorset Premier League
Essex & Suffolk Border League Premier Div Essex Olympian League Premier Div
Gloucestershire County League Premier Div Hampshire Premier League Senior Div
Herts Senior County League Premier Div Humber Premier League Premier Div Kent County League Premier Div
Leicestershire Senior League Premier Div Lincolnshire Football League Premier Div
Liverpool County Premier League Premier Div Manchester Football League Premier Div Mid Sussex Football League Premier Div Middlesex County League Premier Div Midland League Div 2
Northamptonshire Combination Premier Div Northern Football Alliance Premier Div North Riding Football League Premier Div

Nottinghamshire Senior League Senior Div Oxfordshire Senior League Premier Div Peterborough & District League Premier Div Salop Leisure Football League Premier Div Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League Premier Div
Somerset County League Premier Div
Southern Combination Div Two
Spartan South Midlands League Div 2
St Piran Football League Premier East
St Piran Football League Premier West
Staffordshire County Senior League Premier Div
Suffolk & Ipswich League Senior Div
Surrey Elite Intermediate League Intermediate Div
Thames Valley Premier League Premier Div
Wearside League
West Cheshire League Div 1
West Lancashire League Premier Div
West Midlands (Regional) League Div 1
West Yorkshire League Premier Div
Wiltshire Football League Premier Div
York Football League Premier Div
Yorkshire Football League