

REGULATIONS FOR THE OPERATION OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM

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:-

“AC” means the Alliance Committee appointed by FA Council.

“Association” means The Football Association Limited.

“Club” means a football club for the time being in a League in membership of the NLS.

“League” means any competition sanctioned by the Association and/or an Affiliated Association in membership of the NLS.

“LC” means the Leagues Committee appointed by FA Council.

“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 league fixture in the League is played each year until the date on which the last league 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 Matches” 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 13 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.

“Regulations” means these regulations.

“Rules” means the FA Standardised Rules or FA Standard Code of Rules under which a League is administered.

“Step” means the level at which a Club participates in the National League System.

2. The National League System (“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.

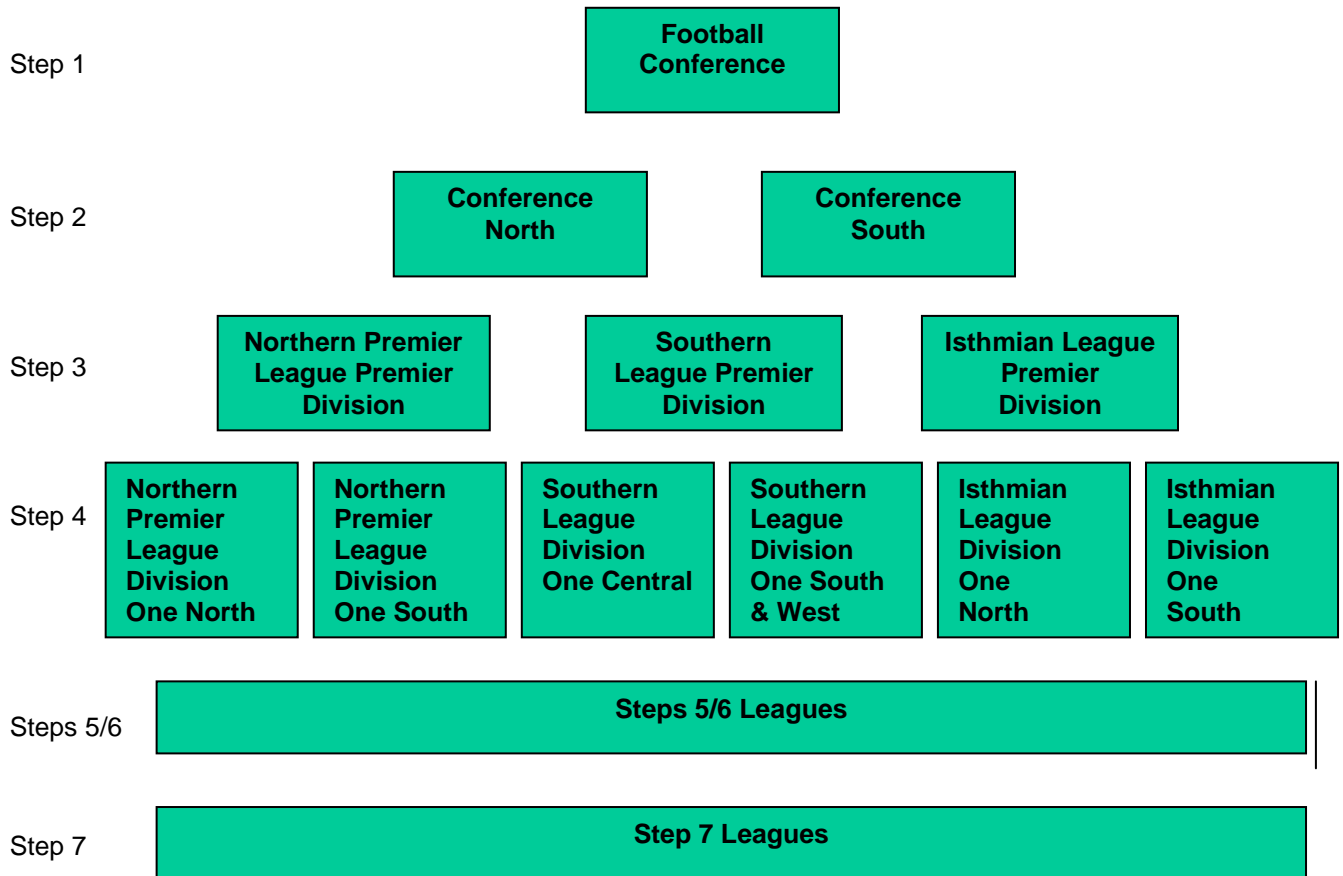
2.2 A framework for discussion on matters of policy and common interest to Leagues and Clubs.

2.3 The seasonal movement of Clubs.

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. Position of a League in the National League System

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



The Leagues currently at Steps 5, 6 and 7 are set out at the end of the Regulations.

- 3.2 Any league wishing to become part of the NLS must apply to The Association by 31st December in the relevant year in such form and/or providing such information as shall be required by the LC from time to time. The decision as to whether or not a league should be admitted to the NLS shall be made by the LC which will then decide on the Step at which the League will play.
- 3.3 Any League wishing to propose an adjustment to its position within the NLS must apply in writing to the LC by 31st December in any year for such proposal to be determined by the LC in order, if approved, to have effect in the following Playing Season.

4. Rules and Regulations for Promotion and Relegation

The LC shall provide for the seasonal promotion, relegation or lateral movement of Clubs. A League must be committed to promoting and relegating Clubs at the conclusion of each Playing Season.

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 LC. All criteria so determined shall be published by The Association from time to time.
- 5.2 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

The following does not apply to 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 to 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 participation at the next Step, the Club finishing in 2nd position shall be promoted and the Club finishing in the next eligible position shall take part in the Play Off Matches. Where a Club finishes in a Play Off Position but does not meet the criteria for participation in Play Off Matches the Club finishing in the next eligible position shall take part in the Play Off Matches. The Play Off Matches shall be played so that in each Step 2 division the highest placed of the eligible Clubs plays against the lowest placed and the other two Clubs play each other. The aggregate winners will play each other and the winner of that match will be promoted. If there are only three eligible Clubs then the highest placed shall receive a bye to a second match where it will play the winner of the other Play Off Match and the winner of that match will be promoted. Clubs finishing below position 7 will not be considered for Play Off Matches.

Step 2 and Step 3

The Clubs in the bottom three places in each of the two divisions at Step 2 at the end of the Playing Season will be relegated to 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 divisions at Step 3 together with a further three Clubs determined by a series of Play Off Matches. Where a Club finishes in 1st position but does not meet the criteria for participation at the next Step, the Club finishing in 2nd position shall be promoted and the Club finishing in the next eligible position shall take part in the Play Off Matches. Where a Club finishes in a Play Off Position but does not meet the criteria for participation in Play Off Matches the Club finishing in the next eligible position shall take part in the Play Off Matches. The Play Off Matches shall be played so that the highest placed of the eligible Clubs plays against the lowest placed and the other two Clubs play each other. At Step 2 the aggregate winners will play each other and the winner of that match will be promoted and at Step 3 the winners of each first match will play each other and the winner of that match will be promoted. If there are only three eligible Clubs then the highest placed shall receive a bye to a second match where it will play the winner of the other Play Off Match and the winner of that match will be promoted. Clubs finishing below position 7 will not be considered for Play Off Matches.

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

Step 3 and Step 4

The Clubs in the bottom four places in each of the three divisions at Step 3 at the end of the Playing Season will be relegated to 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 Club finishing in 1st position in each of the divisions at Step 4 together with a further six Clubs to be determined by a series of Play Off Matches. Where a Club finishes in 1st position but does not meet the criteria for participation at the next Step, the Club finishing in 2nd position shall be promoted and the Club finishing in the next eligible position shall take part in the Play Off Matches. Where a Club finishes in a Play Off Position but does not meet the criteria for participation in Play Off Matches the Club finishing in the next eligible position shall take part in the Play Off Matches. The Play Off Matches shall be played so that the highest placed of the eligible Clubs plays against the lowest placed and the other two Clubs play each other. The winners of each match will play each other and the winner of that match will be promoted. If there are only three eligible Clubs then the highest placed shall receive a bye to a second match where it will play the winner of the other Play Off Match and the winner of that match will be promoted. Clubs finishing below position 7 will not be considered for Play Off Matches.

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

Step 4 and Step 5

At the end of the Playing Season the Clubs in the bottom two places in each of the four divisions at Step 4 administered by the Northern Premier and Southern Leagues, together with the Clubs in the bottom three places in each of the two divisions administered by the Isthmian League will be relegated and placed in the most geographically appropriate League at Step 5. Irrespective of any provision contained within the Rules the Clubs finishing in bottom position in each of the six Step 4 divisions will be relegated and will not be relieved. These Clubs will be replaced by the

fourteen most suitable Clubs from the Leagues at Step 5 as determined by the LC. The suitability shall be determined as the Club finishing in 1st position in each Step 5 League which meets the entry criteria and wishes to be considered for promotion. In the event of the 1st placed Club not being eligible, the Clubs finishing in 2nd or 3rd position shall be subject to the same criteria. In usual circumstances, no more than one Club will be promoted from any one League. The Clubs to be promoted from Step 5 will be allocated to the most geographically appropriate division at Step 4.

If vacancies remain, consideration will be given to relieving those Clubs other than bottom placed clubs relegated from Step 4 who will be ranked according to the average number of points gained per games played and the Club with the highest average shall be relieved first. In the event of Clubs having an identical record the Club to be relieved shall be determined by the LC.

Any Club seeking promotion from Step 5 to Step 4 must make application to the Association on the prescribed form, copied to their existing League, by 30th November in the relevant year. The application must be accompanied by the appropriate application fee, as determined by the LC, which is non refundable. Applicant Clubs must achieve a minimum E Grade by 31st March in the Playing Season when promotion is sought.

Step 5 to Step 6 and Step 6 to Step 7

The promotion and relegation of Clubs between Steps 5, 6 and 7 shall be dealt with as follows.

Movement of Clubs between Steps 5, 6 and 7, where a League operates at each Step, shall be included in their constitutional rules and regulations. Irrespective of any provision contained within the Rules, the Clubs finishing in bottom position in each of the fourteen Step 5 divisions will be relegated to Step 6 and will not be relieved, as determined by the LC.

Clubs seeking promotion to Step 5 from a League at Step 6 which is not linked to Step 5, must make application using the prescribed form direct to the Association, copied to their existing League, by 31st December in the relevant year. Each application must be accompanied by the agreed grading fee, as determined by the LC, which is non refundable.

Clubs seeking promotion to Step 6 from a League at Step 7 which is not linked to Step 6, must make 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 Step 7 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 will not be considered for promotion and only one club will be considered from each league. Each application must be accompanied by the agreed grading fee, as determined by the LC, which is non refundable.

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

5.3.1 Where a vacancy occurs in a particular division prior to the end of a Playing Season, the Club creating the vacancy is taken to be the Club in the bottom position in that division.

5.3.2 Where a vacancy occurs at Steps 2 and 3 following the completion of a Playing Season the best ranked Club in a relegation position across the particular Step is relieved. The ranking to be determined by the average points gained per game played and comparable league position. The Club with the highest average shall be relieved first. In the event of Clubs having an identical record the Club to be relieved shall be determined by the LC.

Where a vacancy arises and clubs at Step 4 are to be relieved, the four clubs in 21st position in the Northern Premier and Southern Leagues and the two clubs in 22nd position in the Isthmian League would be ranked by the average points per game played. In the event of all of the above six clubs being relieved and there are further vacancies available the next two places would be allocated to the clubs in 23rd position in the Isthmian League ranked on the average points per game played.

5.3.3 Where a vacancy occurs after the date of a League AGM then a League is not able to replace the Club(s) concerned for the following Playing Season.

5.4 Only internal changes to the constitution of a League are allowed following the holding of a League's Annual General Meeting.

5.5 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.

5.6 Ground grading requirements will be in accordance with the Rules.

In order to be considered for promotion, the following requirements will apply.

Step 1 - Clubs must comply fully with the requirements of Grade A.

Step 2 - Clubs competing at Step 2 must comply fully with the requirements of Grade B. To be considered for promotion to Step 1 or to be included in the Play Off Matches, Clubs must meet the requirements of Grade B together with any additional requirements by 31st March in the year in which they seek promotion. Clubs must also attain Grade A by 31st March in the year following promotion.

Step 3 - Clubs competing at Step 3 must comply fully with the requirements of Grade C. To be considered for promotion to Step 2 or to be included in the Play Off Matches, Clubs must meet the requirements of Grade C and attain Grade B by 31st March in the year following promotion.

Step 4 - Clubs competing at Step 4 must comply fully with the requirements of Grade D. To be considered for promotion to Step 3 or to be included in the Play Off Matches, Clubs must meet the requirements of Grade D and attain Grade C by 31st March in the year following promotion.

Step 5 - Clubs competing at Step 5 must comply fully with the requirements of Grade E. To be considered for promotion to Step 4, Clubs must meet the requirements of Grade E by 31st March in the year in which they seek promotion, and attain Grade D by 31st March in the year following promotion.

Step 6 - Clubs competing at Step 6 must comply fully with the requirements of Grade F. To be considered for promotion to Step 5 Clubs must meet the requirements of Grade F and attain Grade E by 31st March in the year following promotion.

Step 7 - Clubs competing at Step 7 must comply fully with the minimum requirements in force. To be considered for promotion to Step 6 Clubs must meet the requirements of Grade G and attain Grade F by 31st March in the year following promotion. Clubs can be promoted from Step 7 to 6 without floodlights provided that all other requirements of Grade G 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 for floodlights
- Funding applications submitted if required
- Quotations/estimates for the work to be carried out
- A development/business plan
- That by 30th September following promotion the floodlights are installed and in working order.

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.

5.7 If a Club is relegated for not achieving the required Grade for the Step at which it is playing it will not be eligible for promotion again until it has attained the required Grade for the Step to which it wishes to be promoted. The Club must have that Grade at 31st March in the year in which it seeks promotion.

6. The Movement of Clubs within the National League System 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 League Rules save with the approval of the LC.

It may be necessary from time to time to move Clubs laterally at the same Step. The LC shall determine any lateral movement of Clubs at the same Step by (a) promotion or relegation and (b) to enhance or maintain the strength of individual Leagues/Divisions. Prior to making a decision to move a Club or Clubs laterally, the LC shall consult with the Clubs and Leagues involved. Any decision shall be final and binding subject only to Arbitration in accordance with FA Rule K.

In coming to its decision the LC 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.

- 6.2 Any Club proposing to move from one League to another must make application in writing to The Association 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.

- 6.3 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, then unless otherwise determined by the LC, 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 The FA Premier League or Football League then the LC 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 LC 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 LC.

In considering any application, the LC 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 LC will consider at its discretion which application will be considered in accordance with this Regulation.

- 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 LC, 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 LC 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 LC at its absolute discretion.

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

- 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 LC 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 LC 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 LC 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 LC; and
- 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 LC 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. 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 LC at its absolute discretion

7. Placement of a Club into a League

- 7.1 Usually a club can only enter the NLS at Step 7. However, in exceptional circumstances a League may seek approval from the LC to receive a club not currently in membership of a League within the NLS provided that there is: (a) a vacancy within its constitution (b) the club meets the entry criteria and (c) promotion and relegation issues have been satisfied. Such request must be received by no later than 1st March.
- 7.2 Reserve teams, including a team from a club or Club which is not considered by the LC 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 & 7. No two teams from the same Club can play at the same Step. Reserve teams currently at Step 5 can remain unless relegated, once relegated they will not be permitted to be promoted back to Step 5.
- 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 certificate 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.

7.5 In or about early April each year the LC will consider whether any lateral movements may be necessary at each Step; if so the Clubs likely to be affected shall be notified and given the opportunity to present a case if that Club does not wish to be moved laterally. The final decision shall rest with a sub-committee of the LC with members of Step 5 Leagues if appropriate and any appeal shall be to the LC using members who have not been involved in the original decision. The decision of that appeal shall be final and binding subject only to Arbitration under FA Rule K.

8. Procedures for the Determination of any Matter, Dispute or Difference by the Leagues Committee

8.1 The LC 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 1. The LC 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 and/or other eligibility criteria must be referred for determination to the LC; such determination shall be final and binding.

8.2(b) Any other decision of the LC 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. Such must be accompanied by a deposit as follows:

Step 1 Clubs - £250

Step 2 Clubs - £200

Step 3 Clubs - £150

Step 4 Clubs - £100

All other applications - £50

8.3 The LC 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 sub-committee or commission which may include members of council not on the LC or a body constituted by a County Football Association).

9. 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.

10. Precedence

In the case of conflict between the Regulations for the Operation of the National League System and the Rules, the Regulations take precedence.

**LEAGUES/DIVISIONS AT STEPS 5, 6 & 7 OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE SYSTEM
(season 2014/2015)**

Step 5	Step 6	Step 7
Combined Counties League Premier Div	Combined Counties League Div 1	Anglian Combination Premier Div
Eastern Counties League Premier Div	East Midlands Counties League	Cambridgeshire County League Premier Div
Essex Senior League	Eastern Counties League Div 1	Central Midlands League Div North
Hellenic League Premier Div	Hellenic League Div 1 East	Central Midlands League Div South
Midland League Premier Div	Hellenic League Div 1 West	Cheshire League Div 1
North West Counties League Premier Div	Kent Invicta League	Dorset Premier League
Northern Counties East League Premier Div	Midland League Div 1	Essex Olympian League Premier Div
Northern League Div 1	North West Counties League Div 1	Essex & Suffolk Border League Premier Div
Southern Counties East League	Northern Counties East Div 1	Gloucestershire County League Premier Div
Spartan South Midlands League Premier Div	Northern League Div 2	Hampshire Premier League Senior Div
Sussex County League Div 1	South West Peninsula League Premier Div	Herts Senior County League Premier Div
United Counties League Premier Div	Spartan South Midlands League Div 1	Humber Premier League Premier Div
Wessex League Premier Div	Sussex County League Div 2	Leicestershire Senior League Premier Div
Western League Premier Div	United Counties League Div 1	Liverpool County Premier League Premier Div
	Wessex League Div 1	Manchester Football League Premier Div
	West Midlands (Regional) League Premier Div	Middlesex County League Premier Div
	Western League Div 1	Midland League Div 2
		Northern Football Alliance Premier Div
		Nottinghamshire Senior League Senior Div
		Peterborough & District League Premier Div
		Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League Premier Div
		South West Peninsula League Div 1 East
		South West Peninsula League Div 1 West
		Somerset County League Premier Div
		Staffordshire County Senior League Premier Div
		Suffolk & Ipswich League Senior 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
		Step 7A
		Northamptonshire Combination Premier Div
		Oxfordshire Senior League Premier Div
		Reading Football League Senior Div
		Teesside League Div 1
		York Football League Premier Div
		Step 7B
		Bedfordshire County League Premier Div
		Kent County League Premier Div
		Spartan South Midlands League Div 2
		Surrey Elite Intermediate League Intermediate Div
		West Riding County Amateur League Premier Div