



A GUIDE TO REGIONAL NLS FEEDER LEAGUES

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
REQUIREMENTS OF LEAGUE STATUS	4
SANCTIONING OF THE LEAGUES	5
LEAGUE/CLUB BENEFITS	6
ROLES & RELATIONSHIPS – CLUB/CFA/FA	7
PINNACLE OF COUNTY FOOTBALL	8
SECURITY OF TENURE / GROUND GRADING	9
FAQ's	10

INTRODUCTION

In 2019 The FA's Leagues Committee (FALC) discussed the future of Step 7 football as part of the ongoing National League System (NLS) restructure. During discussions, a number of key points were considered, including:

- The scale of the NLS and The FA's ability to offer a high-level service as a result (c.1,700 teams of which c.720 are Step 7)
- In conjunction with the above, the fact that County Football Associations (CFA's) are best-placed to be able to offer support and services to their member Clubs at this level of the game
- Whether, by being placed at Step 7, the highly regulated nature of NLS football is appropriate to these Football Clubs
- That Standardised Rules covers Steps 1 to 6 and Step 7 is aligned to the Standard Code of Rules
- The process of allocating Clubs and the fact that Clubs are often 'comfortable within their skin' and do not react well to enforced lateral movement
- The large number of Clubs that have been promoted through the System either naturally or by way of a restructure. This has resulted in lower numbers of eligible Clubs for promotion to Step 6

As a result, The FA Council agreed to the FALC's proposal to reposition Step 7 to be known as 'Regional NLS Feeder Leagues'. In reality this does not heavily impact CFA's, particularly from a resourcing point of view, but does afford Clubs at this level of the game a local knowledge which cannot be possible from the centre.

The aim of this document is to be clear as to FA/CFA/League responsibilities and an opportunity for The FA to be clear and transparent with regards to some of the processes it uses.

The FALC, through its Step 7/Non-NLS Sub-Committee, believes that this is an excellent opportunity to refer to this level of the game as being the pinnacle of county-level football and to build clear player pathways for Saturday male open-age football, which in turn may go some way towards the growth and retention of this category of football.

REQUIREMENTS OF LEAGUE STATUS

On completion of the 2019-20 season, existing Step 7 Leagues will automatically become recognised as Regional NLS Feeder Leagues, providing they continue to adhere to the requirements listed below. These Leagues will be allocated their initial membership by the FALC in the same manner as in previous seasons. It is anticipated that Clubs will be allocated in mid-late May, subject to the completion of fixtures.

Any non-NLS League can make an application to the FALC by 31 December each season in order to be considered for Regional NLS Feeder League status in the following. As part of any application, the FALC will consider the views of the relevant CFA(s).

For due consideration to be given, a League should submit the following information:

- A list of 14-18 Clubs that are being proposed for placement within the Feeder division
- A ground grading questionnaire* for each of the above Clubs, with confirmation that they all meet the '*Minimum Grading Requirements for Regional NLS Feeder League Football*'
- A completed League Ground Grading Overview form*
- Correspondence from the relevant CFA(s) confirming that the proposal would support the growth and/or retention of Saturday male open-age football in the area and not impact negatively on the provision of this category of football
- The latest set of League accounts

When considering such request, the FALC must consider a number of issues including but not limited to:

- Any impact on existing provision
- The potential impact on promotion numbers to Step 6 – i.e. too many to cater for
- The potential for more applications to The FA Vase
- The potential for more applications to the Football Stadia Improvement Fund

* Forms are obtained from The FA

SANCTIONING OF THE LEAGUES

The sanctioning of Leagues where the most senior division is a Feeder League will be in accordance with the '*Sanction and Control of Competitions*' Regulations. The sanctioning authority will be determined by the CFA with the highest team count as determined by the FALC and the CFA will remain as the sanctioning authority for a minimum period of 3 seasons.

Where a Competition has a Step 5 and/or 6 division(s) as well as a Feeder League, these will be sanctioned as separate Competitions with The FA being the sanctioning authority of all Step 5/6 Leagues and the relevant CFA the Feeder League and below.

The allocation of Clubs to a Feeder League is a matter for the League to propose and the sanctioning authority to consider at the point of sanction. Counties should consider if new Clubs entering a League expand the geographical footprint of membership beyond the intended/historical League boundaries. The FA will only become involved in disputes between Leagues and/or County FA's.

FA ACTION: The FA will set up new Competitions within WGS for the Midland League, Southern Combination and Spartan South Midlands League as these will have both Step 5/6 and Feeder League Competitions. These Competitions will be clearly marked as 'Step 5/6' in order to aid with disciplinary reporting.

CFA ACTION: County FA's will be asked to educate match officials on a local basis so that match officials report any disciplinary offences under the correct competition.

LEAGUE/CLUB BENEFITS

During the process of considering whether or not to remove Step 7 Leagues from the National League System, it was important to the FALC that Leagues and Clubs did not lose existing benefits that are associated with Step 7 status.

A list of main benefits can be found below:

Leagues:

League Development Plan (LDP) funding	Save for any annual review of the League Development Plan process, Feeder Leagues will still be able to apply for LDP funding (both Admin and Initiative grants)
The FA Inter-League Cup entry	Save for any annual review of the competition in its entirety, Feeder Leagues will continue to be able to make application to enter the Cup every two seasons

Clubs:

FSIF funding	The Football Foundation have been kept abreast of the NLS restructure throughout the process and any reference to 'Step 7' in their application documentation will be updated to read 'Feeder League'. Clubs will be able to apply as normal
The FA Vase entry	Clubs will be able to enter an application to The FA Vase, subject to having a H Grade ground and there being 'vacancies' for Feeder League Clubs
A pathway to Step 6	Promotion from Feeder Leagues to Step 6 Leagues will be managed by The FA, initially. Whilst the Regulations for promotion will be removed from the body of the ' <i>Regulations for the Operation of the National League System</i> ' they will form an appendix of the Regulations in order to formalise the process. The requirements for promotion will remain the same as per the current process for promotion from Step 7 to 6. This will be reviewed once the transition has bedded in
Players being eligible for The FA Inter League Cup	Players will be eligible for selection as per the competition Rules

ROLES & RELATIONSHIPS – CLUB/CFA/FA

Whilst a League may sanction to a particular CFA there may be a number of CFA's who have Clubs within membership of any given competition. It is important that CFA's continue to support their member Clubs even if they play in a competition sanctioned by another County.

Area of	The FA	CFA	League
Promotion process (Feeder to Step 6)	Will set the criteria on an annual basis. Will be a central body for applications to be made. Will forward applications for info to Parent CFA's. Will make final decision as to successful candidates.	Will provide support to Clubs in order to ensure that they have an off-field readiness, such as: ensuring Clubs have a business plan, assistance with FSIF applications and the required non-playing personnel to make the step-up	Provide vital knowledge and experience of the process to its member Clubs.
Internal promotion process (into Feeder)	N/A	Will sanction Leagues which confirm the Rules of internal promotion	Will manage promotion and relegation through SCOR
Dispute resolution	Escalated to The FA should the CFA not be able to resolve	Will provide the first point of dispute resolution	Will escalate disputes to their CFA, if required
Appeals	N/A	The relevant sanctioning authority will deal with Appeals against League decisions	N/A
League Development Plan process*	Will provide a venue, panel members and administer the process. Final sign-off of funding	Will assist League in writing the plan in order to link to strategic activities of CFA. Will provide a delegate to annual review meeting	Create a development plan which highlights planned initiatives, any costing and predicted return on investment

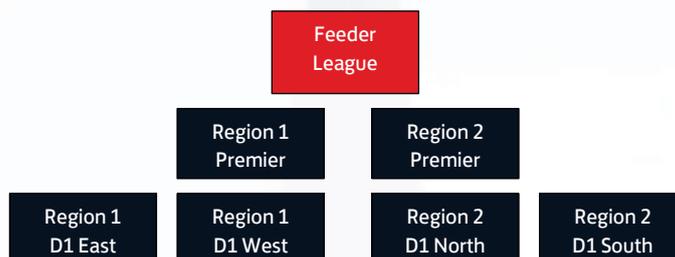
**Subject to annual process review*

PINNACLE OF COUNTY FOOTBALL

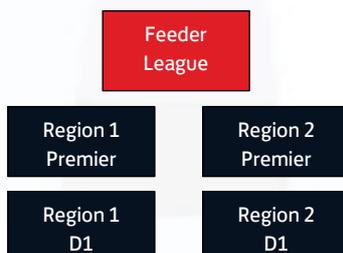
Moving forward, the FALC would encourage CFA's to develop a Saturday male open age player pathway, in order for players and Clubs to understand their journey through this category of football. CFA's are not required to formulate a particular style of structure, as the FALC understands that this is not a one size fits all scenario.

Examples of existing structures include:

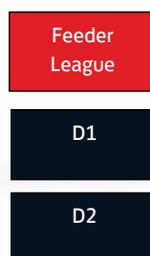
The pyramid:



A regionalised linear approach:



A basic linear approach:



SECURITY OF TENURE / GROUND GRADING

Each Club competing within a Feeder League must have the required security of tenure. At Feeder League level, this mirrors the requirements of Standardised Rule 2.3.2. Security of tenure is not only important to protect the Club and the League it is playing in (by confirming that the Club can remain at the ground for at least the next playing season) but would be required in order to access funding for facility improvement.

As referenced earlier, each Club is expected to meet the '*Minimum Grading Requirements for Regional NLS Feeder League Football*' in order to participate within a Feeder League. The grading document can be found here, which is updated annually: <http://www.thefa.com/get-involved/player/ground-grading>

FAQ's

Question	Answer
Several forms are referenced throughout the document – where do we get copies of these from?	In the first instance please contact NLS@TheFA.com – the intention over time is to create an online portal to address numerous NLS matters
When do Clubs have to comply with the 'Minimum Ground Grading Requirements for Feeder Leagues'?	Clubs must adhere fully with the minimum requirements before being allocated to a Feeder League division. Technically speaking this should be by 31 March in the year before promotion to a Feeder League but provided this is complied with before the Leagues AGM, this is fine
Can Clubs or Leagues apply for dispensation to work around the minimum grading requirements? If so, who do they apply to?	There is no formal route in order to apply for dispensation of this nature. That said, if a unique situation were to arise, it would be a matter for the FALC
Can a County have more than one Feeder League?	Naturally, some of the larger County FA's will have more than one Feeder League division due to geographical needs. We refer back to the last four bullet points on page 4.
Can a Club affiliated to County FA 'X' play in a Feeder League sanctioned by County FA 'Y'?	Yes, there will be numerous examples of this. The FALC are not suggesting that all Clubs must be realigned to fall under their parent County FA
What, if anything, is the process for lateral movement from one Feeder League to another?	If both Leagues and both sanctioning authorities agree to the lateral movement then this would be acceptable. Any dispute would be raised with the FALC
There is no mention of League status from a refereeing point of view in this document – can you clarify?	Whilst the refereeing structure is being reviewed to align more closely to the structure of the NLS (and Feeder Leagues), the two structures operate in isolation. Any query around the refereeing structure must be raised with The FA's Refereeing team