

## NATIONAL LEAGUE COMPETITION RULES 2026

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### 1. APPLICABLE OPERATIONAL RULES

- 1.1 The National League (Premier Division and Division One) and the National Conferences together form part of the RFL Tier 3 Competition Structure within the National Community Rugby League (NCRL). Governance of these competitions sits with the RFL through its Operational Rules for Tiers Three and Four. Day-to-day management is delegated to the National League (NL) Management Group. All teams are required to comply with the RFL Operational Rules applicable to Tiers Three and Four.

### 2. MEMBERSHIP

- 2.1 Membership of the National Conferences is open to all clubs in England and Wales that are accepted through the formal promotion process. Clubs must meet the Minimum Standards set out in Appendix A or demonstrate active progress toward them through an approved development plan.

For the avoidance of doubt, a club may operate one team in the National League and one team in the National Conferences but may not operate more than one team within the same level of competition.

- 2.2 For the 2026 season, clubs will be allocated based on their final finishing position in the 2025 season. As part of this transition, the National League will operate under a newly established competition structure, with clubs placed into the appropriate level of competition according to both their 2025 results and the requirements of the NCRL framework. All allocations will be confirmed by the RFL to ensure alignment with the agreed structures and to safeguard competitive balance, integrity, and sustainability.
- 2.3 The annual subscription shall be £100 per team, and fees must be paid by 28<sup>th</sup> February. Any team that has not paid its annual subscription by this date will not be allocated fixtures until such fees are paid.
- 2.4 In addition to the annual subscription, certain teams may be required to pay a bond at the start of the season. This bond will be held by the RFL until the end of the season and will be returned subject to clubs fulfilling specified criteria relating to discipline and conduct.
- 2.5 The criteria will be agreed by the NL Management Group and communicated by the Competition Officer at the start of each season. Failure to meet the specified criteria will result in the full bond amount being forfeited.
- 2.6 All decisions regarding club entry, re-entry, or removal are made by the NL Management Group in accordance with the Terms of Reference.

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2.7 Clubs must ensure the following volunteers are registered on GameDay and appropriately qualified:

- Coaches
- Club Welfare Officer
- First Aiders
- Game Day Manager
- Club Secretary
- Club Chair

### 2.8 **Club Meetings Attendance**

All member clubs are required to attend designated Club Meetings, including the Annual Clubs Meeting. Failure to attend without prior approval from the Competition Officer may result in a fine of up to £100, or other sanctions as determined by the NL Management Group.

## 3 **START AND END DATE OF THE COMPETITION**

3.1 The NL season will run from early March to late October, spanning approximately 35 weeks. The season calendar accommodates league fixtures, play-offs, and optional National Cup rounds. Cup participation may influence fixture load and the use of Bank Holiday weekends.

3.2 Fixtures will be issued in December each year. Clubs can submit fixture requests for consideration as part of the application process by the end of November, indicating any dates they are unavailable to host games and requesting away fixtures where necessary.

## 4. **STRUCTURE OF THE COMPETITION**

4.1 This section is divided into two parts to reflect the distinct formats within Tier 3 of the National Community Rugby League (NCRL).

- Section 4A sets out the structure of the National Leagues (Premier Division and Division One).
- Section 4B sets out the structure of the National Conferences, which operate through regional conferences and the Cross-Conference Play-Offs (CCPOs).

Together, these provisions explain how promotion, relegation, and play-off mechanisms operate across Tier 3 under the governance of the National League (NL) Management Group.

The RFL, in conjunction with the NL Management Group, will determine the structure of the competition annually. This includes:

- The number and composition of divisions
- Promotion and relegation mechanisms
- Play-off formats and qualification criteria

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### 4A NATIONAL LEAGUE STRUCTURE (PREMIER DIVISION & DIVISION ONE)

#### 4A.1 Competition of Divisions

Tier 3 comprises the top levels of the National Community Rugby League (NCRL) pyramid:

- National Premier Division
- National Division One

#### 4A.2 Promotion and Relegation

Promotion into National Division One from the National Conferences is determined via the Tier 3 Cross-Conference Play-Offs (CCPOs), as outlined in section 4B below. This includes the structure of the CCPO Championship and Shield brackets, as well as the Final Series format.

Clubs must meet the Minimum Standards Criteria (Appendix A) to be eligible for promotion. Promotion and relegation between the National Premier Division and National Division One shall normally operate on a 'two up, two down' basis. The bottom two teams in National Division One will normally be relegated to the National Conferences. However, as per Rule 4.1, the RFL, in conjunction with the NL Management Group, will determine the final composition of each division.

Promotion to the National Premier Division from National Division One will be determined as follows:

- The team finishing 1st at the end of the regular season will be automatically promoted.
- The winner of the Grand Final will also be promoted.

If the 1st placed team also wins the Grand Final, the 2nd placed team from the regular season will receive the second promotion place.

#### 4A.3 Grand Final Series

The National Premier Division and National Division One will conclude with a structured three-week Grand Final Series:

- **Week 1:** Elimination and qualifying finals – 3<sup>rd</sup> v 6<sup>th</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> v 5<sup>th</sup>
- **Week 2:** Semi-finals – 1<sup>st</sup> v lowest ranked elimination final winner & 2<sup>nd</sup> v highest ranked elimination final winner
- **Week 3:** Grand Final – Winner of Semi-final 1 v Winner of Semi-final 2

The top six teams in each division will qualify for the finals based on league standings.

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### 4A.4 League Tables

**4A.4.1** The League competition tables shall be compiled by the RFL. The positions shall be determined by the number of points gained, with points being awarded as follows: two points for each Match won; and one point for each Match drawn.

**4A.4.2** The League placings will be determined and calculated as follows:

- The Club with the highest number of points shall be at the top of the league table, and the Club with the lowest shall be at the bottom.
- Where Clubs have an equal number of points, their relative positions shall be determined by points difference so that the Club having the greater points difference is placed above the Club with the lesser points difference.
- Where Clubs have an equal number of points, and their points difference is equal, then relative positions shall be determined by the head-to-head record in League matches only. Where their head-to-head record is even, then the aggregate score of all head-to-head league fixtures will decide the team on top.
- If the positions are still equal, positions will be determined by the toss of a coin, which shall be carried out at such time and place as the RFL shall direct, and those Clubs concerned shall be entitled to witness the toss.

**4A.4.3** League Tables will be published regularly throughout the season and will reflect the standings based on the criteria outlined above. These tables are managed by the Competition Officer and will be made available via GameDay and the RFL website. Clubs are responsible for checking their standings and reporting any discrepancies.

### 4A.5 National Cup Competition

- The NL Management Group will operate an opt-in National Cup competition for Tier 3 clubs.
- Cup rounds may overlap with league fixtures or be scheduled on Bank Holiday weekends.
- All participating clubs are guaranteed a minimum of two fixtures via the Cup or Shield format.
- Cup participation may affect fixture load and backlog flexibility. Clubs opting in must commit to fulfilling all scheduled Cup fixtures.
- The Cup is designed to offer competitive variety, national engagement, and marquee moments within the NCRL calendar.

*Note: Cup rounds are concentrated during the summer period to support player availability and reduce fixture strain. Clubs not entering the Cup will follow a streamlined calendar with additional backlog flexibility.*

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### 4B NATIONAL CONFERENCES STRUCTURE

#### 4B.1 Composition of Conferences

The National Conferences within the National Community Rugby League (NCRL) comprise the following regional conferences:

- Yorkshire Conference (x2)
- North West Conference
- Cumbria Conference
- Southern Conference

#### 4B.2 Cross Conference Playoffs

- *Championship Format*: Sixteen (16) teams from the five (5) National Conferences will qualify for the Championship Cross-Conference Playoffs (CCPOs) at the conclusion of the regular league season. Qualification places will be allocated as follows and will be subject to annual review by the NL Management Group:
  - *North West – Top 4 teams*
  - *Yorkshire A – Top 3 teams (plus potentially the best placed 4<sup>th</sup> placed team)*
  - *Yorkshire B – Top 3 teams (plus potentially the best placed 4<sup>th</sup> placed team)*
  - *Cumbria – Top 3 teams*
  - *Southern – Top 2 teams*
- The sixteen (16) qualified teams will be drawn into four (4) groups of four (4).
  - Teams from the same division may not be drawn into the same group.
  - Teams will be seeded based on final league position, with higher-placed teams receiving the higher seeding.
  - Each team will play three (3) group fixtures, with a minimum of one (1) home fixture.
  - The top two (2) teams from each group will progress to the knockout phase, comprising quarter-finals, semi-finals, and a final.
- *Promotion*: The two Championship CCPO Grand Finalists will be promoted to National Division One.
- *Shield CCPO*: A Shield CCPO competition will operate concurrently for teams not qualifying for the Championship CCPOs.
  - All remaining National Conference teams, aside from the Southern Conference, will be eligible for entry. End of season structures for remaining teams in the Southern Conference shall be decided before the start of the season, as determined by the RFL in conjunction with the Management Group.
  - Teams will be drawn into eight (8) groups of three (3) or four (4), replicating the Championship structure where applicable.
  - Each team will play two (2) or three (3) group fixtures, depending on group size.
  - The top team from each group will qualify for the knockout phase, consisting of quarter-finals, semi-finals, and a final.

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### 4B.3 Promotion and Relegation

- Clubs qualifying via the CCPO Championship Grand Final will be automatically elevated to National Division One.
- Promotion is non-negotiable and cannot be declined, deferred, or traded.
- Clubs must meet the Minimum Standards Criteria (Appendix A) to be eligible for promotion or continued participation.
- Promotion and relegation between each National Conference and its respective Tier 4 regional competition shall normally operate on a 'two up, two down' basis. However, up to three teams may be relegated from each of the National Conferences in any season. The number of teams relegated from each National Conference will be determined by the regional distribution of teams promoted via the Cross-Conference Playoffs (CCPOs) and teams relegated from National Division One, in order to maintain the prescribed number of teams in each division. A detailed explanation of the promotion and relegation mechanism is set out in Appendix C.
- Clubs promoted from Tier 4 regional competitions shall enter the appropriate National Conferences division in the following season, subject to placement by the NL Management Group in consultation with the relevant Tier 4 Management Group.
- Clubs relegated from the National Conferences shall enter the appropriate Tier 4 regional competition in the following season, subject to placement by the relevant Tier 4 Management Group.

### 4B.4 League Tables

**4B.4.1** The League competition tables shall be compiled by the RFL. The positions shall be determined by the number of points gained, with points being awarded as follows: two points for each Match won; and one point for each Match drawn.

**4B.4.2** The League placings will be determined and calculated as follows:

- The Club with the highest number of points shall be at the top of the league table and the Club with the lowest shall be at the bottom.
- Where Clubs have an equal number of points, their relative positions shall be determined by points difference so that the Club having the greater points difference is placed above the Club with the lesser points difference.
- Where Clubs have an equal number of points, and their points difference is equal, then relative positions shall be determined by the head-to-head record in League matches only. Where their head-to-head record is even, then the aggregate score of all head-to-head league fixtures will decide the team on top.
- If the positions are still equal, positions will be determined by the toss of a coin, which shall be carried out at such time and place as the RFL shall direct, and those Clubs concerned shall be entitled to witness the toss.

**4B.4.3** League Tables will be published regularly throughout the season and will reflect the standings based on the criteria outlined above. These tables are managed by the Competition Officer

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and will be made available via GameDay and the RFL website. Clubs are responsible for checking their standings and reporting any discrepancies.

### 4B.5 National Cup Competition

- The NL Management Group will operate an opt-in National Cup competition for Tier 3 clubs.
- Where entry numbers exceed 32, the competition will begin with a Qualifying Round to reduce the field to 32 teams for the First Round Proper. The number of byes awarded will depend on total entries.
- All participating teams are guaranteed a minimum of two fixtures, provided they reach the First Round Proper. Teams eliminated in the Qualifying Round exit the competition at that stage and do not enter the Supplementary Cup.
- Teams defeated in the First Round Proper (Round of 32) will enter the Supplementary Cup, which will run concurrently with the later rounds of the National Cup.
- Both the National Cup and Supplementary Cup will follow a knockout format, culminating in semi-finals and finals in the final scheduled Cup rounds.
- Cup rounds may overlap with league fixtures and may be scheduled on Bank Holiday weekends where appropriate.
- Cup participation may impact fixture load and backlog flexibility. Clubs opting in must commit to fulfilling all scheduled Cup fixtures across the competition.
- The Cup is designed to provide competitive variety, national engagement and marquee events within the NCRL season calendar.

*Note: Cup rounds are concentrated during the summer period to support player availability and reduce fixture strain. Clubs not entering the Cup will follow a streamlined calendar with additional backlog flexibility.*

## 5 FIXTURES

### 5.1 Fixture Scheduling and Attendance

- 5.1.1 Fixtures must be played according to the published fixture list unless an alternative date is mutually agreed by both teams and approved by the Competition Officer. Any club wishing to rearrange a fixture must consult their opponents in the first instance to discuss possible changes. If an agreement is reached, correspondence confirming the details of the change should be sent by the requesting team to the Competition Officer, including a contact from the opposing team to confirm their agreement.
- 5.1.2 Visiting teams must arrive at least 30 minutes prior to kick-off. Delays must be reported immediately to the Competition Officer. Fines may apply for late arrivals.

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### 5.2 Sanctions for non-fulfilment

5.2.1 A club that fails to attend a League, Play-Off, Grand Final or Cup fixture without reasonable cause may face one or more of the following sanctions as determined by the NL Management Group:

- A fine of up to £500 for League fixtures and up to £250 for Cup fixtures
- Relegation at season's end
- A deduction of up to 4 points (to be applied either in the current or following season) as determined by the NL Management Group
- Rescheduling of the fixture at the discretion of the Competition Officer

In addition, any club failing to fulfil a fixture must pay reasonable expenses to the non-offending club, as determined by the NL Management Group. This may include the referee's full fee and expenses. The non-offending team should contact the Competition Officer to notify them of their intention to claim within seven days of the date of the game.

5.2.2 The NL Management Group reserves the right to determine the timing, scale, and nature of any sanction applied for breaches of competition rules, including but not limited to fixture non-fulfilment, misconduct, or failure to comply with league protocols. Sanctions may be applied within the same season or, where appropriate, carried forward to the following season

### 5.3 Player Eligibility and Registration

5.3.1 A club found guilty of fielding an ineligible or unregistered player will face a minimum fine of £100 and a two-point deduction from its playing record in the current season. If that team wins the fixture, the points accrued will be automatically forfeited and awarded to the opposing team.

### 5.4 Fixture Completion Thresholds

5.4.1 If a team fails to complete its League fixture programme but has played 50% or more of its scheduled fixtures, the results of the remaining fixtures will be awarded to the opposition based on the offending club's season average scoreline.

5.4.2 If a team completes less than 50% of its scheduled fixtures, all its results will be immediately expunged.

*Note: The 50% threshold is calculated based on the total number of scheduled league fixtures for that team.*

### 5.5 Grounds Unfit to Play

5.5.1 If the home club suspects that its ground may be unfit for play due to adverse weather or other causes, it must immediately contact a Match Official from the RFL-approved list to conduct a ground inspection.

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If the Match Official deems the ground unfit for play and determines that it is unlikely to become playable before the scheduled kick-off, this decision must be communicated immediately to:

- The visiting club
- The appointed Match Official
- The Competition Officer

Failure to follow this procedure may result in the home club being found guilty of Misconduct. In addition to any sanctions, the home club will be responsible for reimbursing reasonable travel expenses incurred by any Match Official or club that was not notified in accordance with this rule.

5.5.2 This clause aligns with Operational Rule B2:4. Clubs must also refer to the [RFL's Grass Pitch Inspection Form](#) and guidance on hard ground protocols. A common-sense approach should be applied, prioritising player welfare and fixture fulfilment. Where appropriate, clubs are encouraged to consider alternative venues.

5.5.3 In the case of a no-fault postponement, if clubs cannot agree on a new date within 14 days of the original postponement, then the Competition Officer will issue a new date for the fixture. This will be on the next available Saturday, or if there are no Saturday dates available, the fixture will be set for a midweek evening. If the new fixture is not played as instructed by the Competition Officer, sanctions will apply as outlined in section 5A.2.

### 6. **PLAYER REGISTRATIONS**

6.1 All players shall annually register with the club using the RFL GameDay system. The League will circulate a link to the registration portal to the clubs to commence the registration process. During this process, a Player must become an Our League Active member.

6.2 New Players can be signed 'on the day' using the GameDay system. Clubs must make every effort to confirm that players are free to register in this manner. Clubs are responsible for ensuring that a player is eligible to play for them before allowing the player to play. A Competition Officer can be contacted on match day to check a player's eligibility.

6.3 The RFL may introduce, from time to time, new registration processes.

#### 6.4 **Professional Players**

6.4.1 The NL Management Group shall allow professional players to play within the Competition in accordance with the Operational Rules and any regulations that are in place relating to the dual registration of players. This season's dual-registration regulations can be viewed [HERE](#).

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6.4.2 Players whose contractual arrangements with a Professional club during the current season have been terminated by mutual consent shall not, after the 31<sup>st</sup> of August annually, be allowed to register in the NL.

### 6.5 Transfers

6.5.1 Clubs may register or transfer players from other clubs, using GameDay. It is the responsibility of the new club to initiate the transfer. The club the player is moving from will need to approve any outgoing transfer requests on GameDay. Clubs will have 7 days to notify the Competition Officer of any objections to a transfer being approved. After this point, if no objections are raised the Competition Officer will approve the transfer on the club's behalf. The player has final sign off of the transfer. The process must be completed in full, including player sign off, before a player plays. The club shall follow any other policies issued by the RFL in relation to the registration of players.

6.5.2 All players must fulfil any financial obligations to their current club before any transfer to another club, including professional clubs, will be permitted. This would exclude a players OLA membership fee for those clubs that have opted to pay for their players. This also applies to a player wishing to sign for a different club in future seasons.

6.5.3 The deadline date for transferring players shall be the 31<sup>st</sup> of August each year, subject to the NL Management Group's discretion.

## 7. MATCH DAY OPERATIONS

7.1 All games shall, unless there is a mutual agreement between the competing clubs to the contrary, be organised and staged on Saturday afternoons with a scheduled kick-off time of 2.30 pm. The League, at the start of the season, may also designate selected fixtures to be played on Friday evenings. Fixtures may alternatively be played midweek, on Sundays, or at different kick-off times on Saturdays, provided both clubs agree. Any changes to the date or time of a fixture must be agreed by both clubs, and the Competition Officer must be notified in good time prior to the scheduled fixture

### 7.2 Contacting Opponents and Kit Obligations

7.2.1 It is the responsibility of the home club, during the week preceding a game, to contact both its opponents and the relevant Match Officials regarding team colours and ground directions by no later than 8pm on the Thursday before the following Saturday's fixture. Away clubs should acknowledge any correspondence received and confirm their intention to travel, no later than 24 hours before the scheduled kick off time.

7.2.2 In the event of a colour clash involving two competing clubs it is the responsibility of the visiting team to provide and wear a suitable alternative strip, to thereby enable the home team to maximise any shirt/sponsorship opportunity.

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### 7.3 Game Day Manager

- 7.3.1 Each Club must appoint a “Game Day Manager” whose duties on match days include, and may extend to, acting as a touchline steward in support of the Match Officials while play is in progress. Match Officials must receive the same level of hospitality as the visiting club.
- 7.3.2 To prevent abuse or other unacceptable behaviour, Match Officials appointed by the RFL must be escorted to and from the dressing rooms, and onto and off the field of play, by a club official designated for that purpose.

### 7.4 Technical Areas and Dug Outs

- 7.4.1 The listed Head Coach shall ensure that registered officials ONLY, together with players and substitutes, occupy the dugouts.
- 7.4.2 Each team shall ensure the following:
- **Maximum Officials:** Only 10 people (including substitutes) allowed in the technical area during play.
  - **Dugout Conduct:** Everyone must remain seated, except substitutes warming up or authorised personnel wearing designated bibs (e.g., Medical - Red, Coach - Yellow, Substitutes - Orange).
  - **Technical Area:** Must be clearly marked (10m max length, 1m from touchline).
  - **Dugout Priority:** If there’s one dugout, it must be given to the visiting team.
  - **Team Sheet:** All dugout personnel must be listed on the Official Team Sheet.
  - **Dismissed Personnel:** Dismissed individuals must leave the dugout/field area and not return.
  - **Penalties:** Non-compliance results in fines and/or suspensions for individuals and clubs.

### 7.5 Team Sizes & Substitutes

- 7.5.1 Each team may nominate a maximum of 4 replacements whose names must be communicated to the Match Official prior to the game. Unlimited interchanges will be permitted from (17) seventeen named players. Substitutes will be sanctioned either by the Match Official alone or an official designated to oversee the interchange process.

### 7.6 Medical Requirements

- 7.6.1 Each home club is required to ensure that a first aider attends each game. The first aider should make themselves known to the Match Official before the start of any Match and shall remain for a minimum of 15 minutes after the end of the Game and shall speak directly with a designated Official from both clubs, if necessary, to ensure that the correct reporting paperwork is completed. If there is no first aider, then the Match Official will not permit a game to take place.
- 7.6.2 First aiders should be listed on the team sheet and are required to register on the GameDay system as a volunteer.

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7.6.3 In the event a player sustains an injury to the head or displays signs or symptoms of concussion, the Match Official will stop the game and ask for the first aider to attend to them. If the first aider suspects a concussion, the player **MUST** be removed from the field of play and remain off the field. If the player refuses to follow the first aider's advice, then the Match Officials can hold up play until the player follows the instructions of the first aider. Advice for managing a concussion can be found [HERE](#). The RFL is supportive of and follows the SRA concussion guidance – please read through the guidance in full [Concussion Guidelines](#) and ensure they are applied to matches and training at all times.

### 7.7 Reporting Injuries and Concussion

7.7.1 In the event of a serious injury or suspected concussion at a Match, the incident must be reported in accordance with the reporting procedures issued by the RFL at the start of each season. This includes submitting all required information through the designated system identified in the RFL guidance. Any head injury must be reported as directed, as this information is required for insurance purposes.

### 7.8 Post Match Arrangements

7.8.1 The home club shall be responsible for supplying all the competing players, club officials and appointed Match Officials with a suitable post-match meal (up to a maximum of 25 people per team). The visiting club is obligated to accept such hospitality.

7.8.2 In the case of away clubs failing to fulfil a fixture the home club, providing they have not been notified at least 48 hours in advance, may also claim up to a maximum of £100 towards refreshment costs. Any club which will not be requiring refreshments should notify its opponents in advance of the game; otherwise, the club will be liable to pay £100 compensation to the home club. The non-offending team should contact the Competition Officer to notify them of their intention to claim.

### 7.9 Team Sheet and Reporting Results

7.9.1 Teams must submit their team sheet online via GameDay at least 30 minutes before the scheduled kick-off, including player shirt numbers and positions. Team sheets must be accurately completed prior to the start of all matches, including friendly games. Any changes after that point must be reported to the Match Official on the day.

7.9.2 For National League fixtures (Premier Division and Division 1 only), the home club official must, in addition to the requirements outlined in the above rule, within 2 hours of the match finishing, submit a completed team sheet and send it to the Competition Officer at [competitions@rfl.co.uk](mailto:competitions@rfl.co.uk) and to all designated media contacts listed on the team sheet. Team sheets must include the full forename and surname of all participants (no initials), the scorers with score timeline, and the Man of the Match from both teams. Failure to submit the team sheet correctly or within the required timeframe will result in a £25 administration fine for a first offence, with the fine doubling for subsequent offences up to a maximum of £100.

7.9.3 Immediately after the game, the home club, in consultation with the Match Official and a designated officer from the opposition, must agree the final result and enter it on GameDay

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within 15 minutes. Failure to enter the score in this timeframe will incur a £25 administration fine for a first offence, with subsequent fines doubling up to a maximum of £100.

7.9.4 All clubs must enter their full points scoring information on GameDay within 48 hours of the match. This includes tries, goals and Man of the Match. Failure to complete this entry on time will incur a £25 administration fine for a first offence, doubling for further offences up to a maximum of £100.

### 7.10 **Abandonment of Games**

7.10.1 If a game is abandoned with more than three-quarters of the playing time elapsed, the result shall stand unless otherwise determined by the NL Management Group. If less than three-quarters of the playing time has elapsed, the NL Management Group, at its sole discretion, may order a game to be replayed.

## 8 **DISCIPLINE, SUSPENSIONS AND FINES**

8.1 All disciplinary matters, suspensions, fines and appeals shall be dealt with in accordance with Section D of the RFL Operational Rules and the F9 On-Field Sentencing Guidelines.

## 9 **APPEALS**

9.1 Appeals against disciplinary sanctions shall be conducted under Section D of the RFL Operational Rules, with reference to the F9 On-Field Sentencing Guidelines where applicable.

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### APPENDIX A – CLUB STANDARDS & DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

#### A1. Purpose

This framework sets out the standards expected of clubs participating in the NL&NC. It is designed to support safe, inclusive, and sustainable competition, not to exclude clubs. The focus is on helping clubs grow, develop, and access support where needed. Clubs are expected to meet most standards and to commit to creating the remaining standards over time, with guidance from the NL Management Group.

#### A2. Facility Standards

Facilities are core to safe and sustainable participation. Clubs are expected to provide a safe, accessible, and welcoming environment for players, match officials, and spectators. Clubs that are not yet meeting all standards will be supported through development plans.

#### A2.1 Core Off-Pitch Standards (Must be achieved or demonstrably working towards for participation)

##### Accessibility & Inclusion

- Step-free access from the car park to the clubhouse and pitch.
- At least one accessible toilet for players and spectators.

##### Changing & Match Official Facilities

- Minimum 2 team changing rooms, meeting minimum standards being clean and tidy on arrival.
- Minimum 2 match official changing rooms, accessible in good time before kick-off (exact timing TBD).
- Player toilets and showers (minimum 1 cubicle – aspirational if not yet in place).
- Teams must have access to 2 WCs and 1 hand basin per changing area.
- Access to running hot and cold water.

##### Medical & Safety

- Dedicated First Aid / Medical Room.
- Access for emergency vehicles to the playing area.
- Fire Safety Certificate in place.
- Hygiene / Food Safety Certificate where food/drink is served.

##### Parking & Access

- Designated coach parking for visiting teams.
- Adequate car parking (number confirmed per site capacity).
- Clearly marked pedestrian and vehicle routes.

##### Spectator Provision

- Perimeter fence to separate spectators from the playing area.
- Spectator toilets (male and female) separate from player/official areas.
- Facilities for food and drink for spectators.
- Room/space for post-match hospitality for teams and officials.
- RFL signage and posters displaying spectator expectations and code of conduct.

##### Storage & Maintenance

- Secure indoor and outdoor storage for equipment.
- Facility maintained in good condition, free from hazards.

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### **A2.2 Pitch & Playing Area Standards**

#### Pitch Layout & Condition

- Clear, accurate line markings (painted, not burnt in).
- Pitch dimensions meet RFL minimum standards.
- Minimum run-offs observed, or approved mitigation in place (documented in pre-match checks).
- Grass pitch: PQS Standard – Basic or above; 3G pitch: valid certification submitted before season.

#### Matchday Infrastructure

- Post protectors and corner flags in place.
- Dugouts seating at least 6, located safely outside run-offs.
- Designated technical area.
- Scoreboard visible and in safe condition.
- Advertising boards securely fixed and clearly visible.
- Posts and crossbars compliant with RFL standards.
- Safe ball-stop netting where required.

#### Filming & Observation

- All games to be recorded and available on request.
- A vantage point for filming (ideally on or near the halfway line), safely accessible.

#### Ancillary Provision

- If the clubhouse is separate from the pitch, toilets must be available near the playing area.

### **A2.3 Developmental / Aspirational Facilities**

- Improved showers and changing facilities.
- Enhanced spectator amenities (covered seating, catering).
- Expanded storage and maintenance equipment.
- Additional safety and accessibility features.
- Clubs are encouraged to develop plans for these over 1–2 seasons.

### **A3. What's Expected (Governance & Club Operation)**

#### Clubs should also aim to:

- Maintain a functioning committee (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer).
- Ensure key volunteers are trained/qualified (e.g., first aider, welfare officer, Game Day Manager).
- Demonstrate a sustainable senior team structure, with links to youth or development squads.
- Submit key governance documents (constitution, list of officials, balance sheet).
- Operate in line with RFL governance, safeguarding, and health & safety requirements.

### **A4. How It Works**

- Clubs that do not meet every standard may submit a short development plan; support will be offered.
- Site visits may be arranged to provide guidance, not inspection.
- Development plans should be realistic and time-bound, typically within a single season.
- The NL Management Group will review club standards and development plans as part of promotion and relegation assessments.

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### **A5. Annual Declaration**

Each season, clubs will confirm via a short declaration:

- Any known facility limitations.
- Planned upgrades or development goals.
- Intended admission charges and concessions.
- Confirmation that core safety, safeguarding, and compliance measures are in place.

### **A6. What Happens If You're Not There Yet**

If a club fails to meet core safety or compliance standards:

- Advisory notice issued with support offered.
  - Conditional participation may be granted while improvements are made.
  - Persistent non-compliance may lead to sanctions or non-selection.
- Developmental targets (youth links, facility upgrades) are monitored but not penalised unless persistently neglected.

### **A7. Final Decisions**

The NL Management Group makes all decisions on club entry, retention, and progression during the promotion and relegation review cycle.

- Clubs will be notified in writing of decisions, with explanations and guidance for improvement where relevant.
- Decisions are based on a combination of factors, including:
  - Compliance with core safety and governance standards
  - Evidence of commitment to development (e.g., youth links, facility upgrades, volunteer training)
  - Demonstrated ability to operate sustainably and inclusively
  - Participation in NL competitions and events
- Where a club falls short of standards, the Management Group may:
  - Issue advisory notices with recommended actions
  - Grant conditional participation while improvements are made
  - Delay promotion or progression until standards are met

The overarching aim is to support clubs to grow and succeed, not to exclude them unnecessarily.

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### NL Club Standards Checklist

**Purpose:** This checklist helps clubs see what is expected for safe, inclusive, and sustainable participation. Some standards are **must-haves** while others are **developmental** or **aspirational** for long-term growth. If you haven't met everything yet, you can create a **development plan** with NL Management Group support.

#### Facilities – Off-Pitch

Standard	Achieved (✓)	Working Towards (✓)	Aspirational (✓)	Notes / Plan
Step-free access from the car park to the clubhouse/pitch				
Accessible toilet(s) for players/spectators				
Minimum 2 team changing rooms				
Minimum 2 match official changing rooms, available before kick-off				
Player toilets and showers (1 shower cubicle minimum)				
Teams have access to 2 WCs + 1 hand basin per changing room				
Access to running hot and cold water				
Dedicated First Aid / Medical Room				
Access for emergency vehicles to the pitch				
Fire Safety Certificate in place				
Hygiene / Food Safety Certificate if serving food				
Designated coach parking for visiting teams				
Adequate club parking (number per site)				
Perimeter fence or barrier for spectators				
Spectator toilets separate from players/officials (male & female)				
Facilities for spectator food and drink				
Room for post-match hospitality for teams/officials				
Secure indoor/outdoor storage for equipment				
RFL signage & posters on conduct/expectations				

#### Pitch & Playing Area

Standard	Achieved (✓)	Working Towards (✓)	Aspirational (✓)	Notes / Plan
Clear line markings (painted)				
Pitch dimensions meet RFL minimum standards				

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Minimum run-offs observed, or approved mitigation in place				
Grass pitch PQS Basic or above OR 3G pitch with valid certificate				
Post protectors & corner flags				
Dugouts seating ≥6, outside run-offs				
Designated technical area				
Scoreboard visible and safe				
Advertising boards safely fixed & visible				
Posts/crossbars compliant with RFL				
Safe ball-stop netting where needed				
All games recorded and available on request				
Vantage point for filming (preferably halfway line)				
Toilets near the pitch if the clubhouse is separate				

### Governance & Club Operations

Standard	Achieved (✓)	Working Towards (✓)	Aspirational (✓)	Notes / Plan
Functioning committee: Chair, Secretary, Treasurer				
Key volunteers trained/qualified (first aider, welfare officer, Game Day Manager)				
Sustainable senior team structure				
Links to youth/development squads				
Key governance documents submitted (constitution, list of officials, balance sheet)				
Operating in line with RFL governance, safeguarding, and H&S				

#### Using this checklist

1. Tick the relevant column for each standard.
2. For any unmet standards, note actions and timelines in the “Notes / Plan” column.
3. Submit this checklist alongside any development plan to the NL Management Group if requested.
4. The majority of standards must be met for participation; developmental standards should be planned for over the next 1–2 seasons; aspirational standards are for long-term growth.

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### APPENDIX B – SEASONAL TIMELINE & FIXTURE PLANNING

This appendix outlines the key dates and planning phases for the National League (NL) season. All clubs must adhere to the timeline to ensure smooth scheduling and operational readiness.

#### Fixture Planning Timeline

Phase	Timing	Club Action
<b>Fixture Request Forms Issued</b>	Early November	Clubs complete and return forms indicating unavailable dates and preferred away fixtures
<b>Fixture Request Deadline</b>	End of November	All requests must be submitted to the Competition Officer
<b>Fixture List Published</b>	December	Full season fixture list issued to clubs
<b>Season Launch</b>	Early March	First round of league fixtures begins
<b>Protected Weekends</b>	Easter, May BH x2, August BH, Challenge Cup, SL GF	No league fixtures unless backlog or Cup ties
<b>National Cup Rounds</b>	May to October	Opt-in competition: minimum two fixtures guaranteed
<b>CCPO Group Stage</b>	Early to Mid-September	Cross-conference fixtures determine bracket placement
<b>CCPO Knockout Stage</b>	Late September to Mid-October	Championship and Shield brackets
<b>National League Finals Series</b>	October	Top six teams compete in structured play-offs
<b>Minor Finals Day</b>	Mid-October	CCPO Championship & Shield finals
<b>Grand Finals Day</b>	Late October	National Premier & Division One finals
<b>Season Close &amp; ACM</b>	Late October	Final declarations, re-selection, and planning for next season

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### APPENDIX C – PROMOTION & RELEGATION

#### Promotion & Relegation Between National Divisions & National Conferences

##### National Premier Division & Division 1 Play-Offs

Promotion and relegation between National Division One and the National Conferences will be determined through structured play-offs. The National Division play-offs mirror the National Conference Cross-Conference Play-Offs (CCPOs) to ensure parity in match load and competitive opportunity.

##### National Division Play-Off Format:

- Week 1: (*Elimination Semi-finals*)
  - 3rd vs 6th
  - 4th vs 5th
- Week 2: (*Semi-finals*)
  - 1st and 2nd (bye in Week 1) play winners of Week 1
- Week 3:
  - Winners meet in the Grand Final

##### National Conference Cross-Conference Play-Offs (CCPOs)

Promotion to National Division 1 is decided via the CCPOs, involving both “live” and “partially live” conferences.

##### CCPO Objectives:

- Establish a clear, unified pathway to the National Divisions
- Deliver a balanced and engaging end-of-season competition
- Provide recognition and opportunity across all regions

##### CCPO Structure:

- Two strands:
  - Championship CCPOs – National Conference champion + 2 promoted clubs
  - Shield CCPOs – Competitive pathway for non-promotion teams
- Begins with group stage, followed by an eight-team knockout bracket
- Ensures exciting, meaningful matches across all regions
- Promotion awarded to Championship Grand Finalists

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### Promotion and Relegation Between Tier 3 and Tier 4

#### Annual Movement Within Regions

Each region will manage promotion and relegation between Tier 3 (National Conferences) and Tier 4 (Regional Leagues) to maintain balanced competition sizes.

Standard Movement:

- Up to 2 teams promoted from Tier 4 to Tier 3
- Up to 3 teams relegated from Tier 3 to Tier 4
- Tier 4 champions automatically offered promotion (if standards met)

Responsive Balancing:

- Adjustments depend on movements between the National Divisions and the National Conferences
- Ensures each Tier 3 conference maintains 8–10 teams
- Regional balancing applies where multiple conferences exist (e.g. Yorkshire)

#### Worked Examples

Example 1 – 2 teams are promoted from Yorkshire A to National Division One, and 2 North West based teams are relegated from National Division One to the North West Conference:

- Yorkshire (net loss of 2 teams): In this situation no teams would be relegated to Tier 4 and 2 teams would be promoted from the YML Premier Division to ensure 10 teams the following season
- North West (net gain of 2 teams): In this situation 3 teams would be relegated to Tier 4 and 1 team would be promoted from the NWML Premier Division to ensure 10 teams the following season

Example 2 – 2 teams are promoted from the North West Conference to National Division One and 1 North West based team is relegated from National Division One:

- Net loss of 1 team: 1 team would be relegated from the North West Conference to the NWML Premier and 2 teams would be promoted from the NWML Premier ensuring 10 teams the following season

Example 3 – 1 team is promoted from the Cumbrian Conference and 2 Cumbrian based teams are relegated from National Division One:

- Net gain of 1 team: 2 teams would be relegated to the Tier 4 Cumbrian Regional Division, with 1 team being promoted from the same divisions ensuring 10 teams the following season

Example 4 – Equal movement in and out of any Conference:

- If a Conference Division loses the same number of teams through promotion as it gains via relegation from National Division One, then the standard 2 up / 2 down between each Conference and their respective Tier 4 regional division will apply