

THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

STEP 7 REVIEW – FINAL REPORT, JUNE 2012

The Football Association has now completed its review of the Step 7 structure of the National League System and at a meeting of the Leagues Committee held on 12 June 2012 the Report submitted by the Step 7 Review Group was considered and the recommendations contained therein fully endorsed.

Set out below are the recommendations:

League Structure

That, as from the commencement of Season 2012/2013 Step 7 of the National League System is structured as follows:

Step 7 – to be awarded to leagues where 100% of their clubs meet the Step 7 minimum ground grading requirements as at 31 March and the league complies with all other requirements for Step 7 status.

Step 7A – to be awarded to leagues where 75% or more of their clubs meet the Step 7 minimum ground grading requirements as at 31 March and the league complies with all other requirements for Step 7 status. *(It was noted that in Season 2011/12 these leagues had been referred to as provisional)*

Step 7B – to be awarded to leagues where 60% or more of their clubs meet the ground grading requirements as at 31 March and the league complies with all other requirements for Step 7 status.

In all cases, there must be a minimum of 14 clubs in membership of a Step 7. Step 7A or Step 7B division with no more than 25% of Membership comprising of reserve teams of clubs competing at a higher level in the National League System.

In future clubs joining a Step 7, Step 7A or Step 7B divisions will be allowed until 31 March in the year following promotion to meet the Step 7 Minimum Grading Requirements or they will be relegated.

The classification awarded to leagues would apply for three years however, it would still be possible for a league to apply annually (by 31 December) for a higher classification if they were of the opinion that they could meet the relevant criteria. It would also still be possible for leagues outside the System to apply on an annual basis (by 31 December) if they were able to meet these requirements.

As from the commencement of season 2012/2013 the following leagues will be granted **Step 7 status**:

- Anglian Combination
- Central Midlands League
- Cheshire League
- Dorset Premier League
- Essex Olympian League
- Herts Senior County League
- Humber Premier League
- Leicestershire Senior League
- Midland Combination
- Northern Football Alliance
- Peterborough & District League
- Sheffield & Hallamshire County Senior League
- Somerset County League
- Staffordshire County Senior League
- Suffolk & Ipswich League
- Wearside League
- West Cheshire League
- West Midlands (Regional) League
- West Yorkshire League

As from the commencement of season 2012/2013 the following leagues will be granted **Step 7A status**:

- Bedfordshire County League
- Cambridgeshire County League
- Essex & Suffolk Border League
- Gloucestershire County League
- Hampshire Premier League
- Liverpool County Premier League
- Manchester Football League
- Middlesex County League
- Northants Combination
- Nottinghamshire Senior League
- Oxfordshire Senior League
- Reading Football League
- South West Peninsula League
- Sussex County League Division 3
- West Lancashire League

As from the commencement of season 2012/2013 the following leagues will be granted **Step 7B status**:

- Kent County League
- Spartan South Midlands League
- Surrey Elite Intermediate League
- Teesside League

The Kent County League are being treated as a special case due to rebuilding their numbers following the creation of the Kent Invicta League at Step 6 of the National League System.

The following leagues were not granted Step 7 status as they did not currently meet the required criteria however, they would be eligible to apply for Step 7 status in the future if the required number of clubs meet the criteria by 31 March in any year:

- Brighton, Hove & Albion League
- Devon & Exeter League
- East Berkshire League
- East Sussex League
- Lincolnshire League
- Mid Sussex League
- North Berkshire League
- Northampton Town League
- West Riding County Amateur League
- West Sussex League
- Worthing & District League
- York & District League

The following league's status is pending awaiting receipt of additional information:

- Mercian Regional Football League
- Wiltshire League.

Funding Issues

With regard to future funding opportunities, especially with regard to Administration Grants, the League Finance Sub Committee would be reviewing this new Step 7 structure at their next meeting and further information would be provided in due course.

Ground Grading

For information purposes a copy of the Step 7 minimum grading requirements is shown in the attached Appendix.

There has been much confusion regarding the provision of toilet facilities for players and match officials across the board at Step 7 and after much discussion it has been agreed that match officials must have exclusive use of a separate toilets and that they cannot be shared with players. It was also agreed that each team have separate toilet facilities, however it was accepted that this may not always be possible and was the ideal situation rather than a requirement. The new wording is shown in the attached Appendix and it was agreed that leagues advise their member clubs who currently do not comply, as they have shared toilets facilities, that they would have a further 12 months, until 31 March 2013, to comply fully with the requirements.

No further extension beyond this date would be provided.

**Leagues Committee
June 2012**

GROUND GRADING REQUIREMENTS

Step 7 Minimum Ground Grading Guidelines

1. GROUND

1.1 Security of Tenure

Where a club does not own the freehold of their ground then evidence of adequate security of tenure must be provided.

1.2 Ground Share

Ground sharing would be at the discretion of each league within the National League System, taking into account local circumstances. Where ground sharing is permitted the club must have sole control over and use of facilities on match days.

Ground sharing must not be allowed in order for a club to gain promotion.

1.3 Capacity

There is no stated ground capacity.

1.4 Boundary of Ground

There is no requirement for a ground to be enclosed in any way.

1.5 Clubhouse

A clubhouse facility, whilst being desirable, is not compulsory.

If a clubhouse facility exists either on or adjacent to the ground, this should be open on match days to provide refreshments to spectators.

1.6 Car Parking

There should be adequate car parking facilities on or adjacent to the ground.

1.7 Pitch Perimeter Barrier

As a minimum, there must be post and rope surrounding the pitch on all those sides that may be occupied by spectators.

The barrier, if other than solid wall type of construction may be infilled. Advertising boards may be acceptable as a means of infill.

Ideally, there should be a minimum of 1.83 metres, ideally 2 metres between the touchline, goal line and the pitch perimeter barrier.

1.8 Pitch Standards

The playing surface will be grass, unless otherwise authorised by the respective League Rules and must be of an acceptable standard. It must be free from surface depressions and excessive undulations.

The maximum slope allowable shall not exceed an even gradient of vertical to horizontal 1 : 41 in any direction.

1.9 Playing Area

The playing area is to be in accordance with the requirements of the Laws of the Game. Law 1 states that the length of the touchline must be greater than the length of the goal line.

| | | | |
|--------|---|------------------------|-------------------------|
| Length | - | Minimum 90 m (100 yds) | Maximum 120 m (130 yds) |
| Width | - | Minimum 45 m (50 yds) | Maximum 90 m (100 yds) |

It should be noted that at Grade H the playing area must be a minimum of 100 metres x 64 metres.

Goal posts and goal net supports should be of professional manufacture and conform to the current safety requirements and to the requirements of the Laws of the Game.

Reference should be made to the Goalpost Safety Information booklet published by The Football Association.

1.10 Technical Area

Portable trainers' boxes are permitted and must be securely fixed when in use.

It is desirable for a Technical Area to be marked out in accordance with the guidance contained in the 'Laws of the Game' booklet.

1.11 Secure Walkway

A secure walkway is not a requirement.

1.12 Floodlighting

Floodlighting is not compulsory at this Grade.

However, where it is provided it must be to an average lux reading of 120. No single reading can be less than one quarter of the highest reading so as to ensure an even spread of light.

Reading shall be on a grid of 88 markings (8 across, 11 down) evenly spaced with the outside readings falling on the pitch boundary line. The average of all the readings is taken to be the average illumination level in lux of the floodlighting installation.

The lux values must be tested every two years in accordance with current guidelines by an approved independent contractor.

When new or improved installations are being planned, an average lux. reading of 180 should be provided.

1.13 Public Address System

A public address system is not compulsory.

1.14 Entrances

There is no requirement for fixed entry points.

However, where a turnstile is installed, it must be fully operational and of the controlled revolving type.

1.15 Exits

Where fixed exit points are provided, there must be sufficient to ensure the safe evacuation of the ground if necessary.

All exits must be clearly signposted.

1.16 Emergency Access

Access for emergency services should be provided.

2. SPECTATOR FACILITIES

2.1 Seated Accommodation

Seated accommodation is not a requirement.

2.2 Covered Standing Accommodation

Covered accommodation is not compulsory.

Hard standing is not compulsory.

However, where it is provided it must be a minimum width of 0.9 metre, measured from the spectator side of the pitch perimeter barrier where provided. .

2.3 Toilets

Provision should be made for adequate toilet facilities.

2.4 Refreshment Facilities

Refreshment facilities for spectators are not compulsory.

3. DRESSING ROOM FACILITIES

All dressing rooms must be secure and suitable for purpose.

3.1 Players

Separate dressing rooms must be provided for both teams. Existing dressing room dimensions will be in order, provided that they are of a minimum of 12 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas. However, clubs wishing to progress should be aware of the need to increase to a minimum of 18 square metres. Where clubs are planning to build new changing rooms, these must be planned to be a minimum size of 18 square metres, excluding shower and toilet areas.

Each dressing room should have the following:

A shower area comprising of at least 3 working showerheads for each team – if not located in the dressing room then they must be located adjacent to it.

Adequate toilet facilities exclusively for the use of players - if not located in the dressing room then they must be located adjacent to it and must not be accessible to the general public.

Hot and cold running water

Shared shower facilities are not acceptable.

Ideally separate toilet facilities should be provided for each team. It is not acceptable for players and match officials to share toilet facilities.

In order to be considered for promotion to Step 6, clubs must have en suite shower and toilet facilities with a minimum of 4 showerheads.

3.2 Match Officials

Separate dressing rooms must be provided for match officials, the minimum size of which shall be 4 square metres excluding shower and toilet areas.

Each match official's dressing room should have the following:

At least 1 working showerhead.

Adequate toilet facilities, exclusively for the use of match officials, which must be separate from those provided for the players. These do not necessarily need to be situated in the dressing room but must not be accessible to the general public.

Hot and cold running water

Provision should be made for changing accommodation for both male and female match officials.

When new changing rooms are being planned or existing changing rooms refurbished an area of 6 square metres and facilities for mixed gender match officials should be provided.

In order to comply with the G Grade after promotion to Step 6, clubs must provide en suite shower and toilet facilities for the match officials.

All dressing room areas to be maintained to a high level of cleanliness and secure on match days.

4. MEDICAL

There must be a suitable qualified person (minimum F.A. Save a Life) in attendance.

All clubs must provide first aid equipment at their ground.