



CHANGES TO ENGLAND HOCKEY LEAGUES

At the March 2018 board meeting, England Hockey agreed changes to the structure of the Investec Women's Hockey League and Men's Hockey League. The changes will be implemented in the 2019-20 season. These changes are the first step in adapting to the evolving landscape of the Hockey Pro League (and international player availability) and requests from clubs to review the domestic structure.

The most recent consultation (February 2018) strongly supported an interim restructure to the leagues and this is outlined beneath. More than two-thirds of teams in the England Hockey Leagues responded to the consultation as well as more than 50 Regional Premier League teams.

The changes will be revisited again after the Tokyo Olympics (and after two years of the Hockey Pro League) with a view to further developing the structure to support domestic hockey to progress for years to come.

England Hockey is ambitious about creating a structure that encourages clubs to continue to develop, strive for success at the highest level of European competition and support our international success objectives.

What are the changes for 2019-20?

For both genders the leagues will expand in size to three tiers, each of 10 teams:

Premier Division – Nine games will be played each side of the Christmas break in a traditional league format. The main change will be a three team playoff before Christmas (after half the league programme) that will allow clubs a chance to earn a place in European club competition. This is designed to allow clubs with international players to earn a place in Europe when their players are available for domestic hockey. The league champions, and other European place/s, will be determined by a three team end of season playoff. At the end of the season, the bottom team will be relegated and the 9th placed Premier Division team will go to a playoff.

Division 1 North and Division 1 South – The second tier of the structure will be two geographically split divisions. The winners of these Divisions will play off for the one automatic place in the Premier Division and also get a second chance to play the 9th placed Premier League team for a

place in the Premier Division.

Three Conferences - West, North, East – The third tier will be three Conferences operating in a similar manner to the current conferences. The key difference will be that clubs second teams will be able to join the Conferences (as long as their first team is at a higher level). This is in response to the current situation where many Regional Leagues have recently been won by second teams so the change should allow more continuity in league structures. Each of the Conference winners will be promoted. The teams finishing ninth and tenth of each of Division 1 North and Division 1 South will be relegated. The three runners up in Conferences will play off in a three team round robin with the top team promoted to Division 1.

Eligible teams winning Regional Leagues will be automatically promoted to the Conferences with the same relegation playoff from the Conferences as is currently in place.

A window in the winter for indoor club hockey will remain in January with the England Hockey run leagues restarting in February.

Through the consultation a set of standards for facilities, match day procedures and club operations have been discussed. The intention is to start to implement many of these from 2019-2020, starting at the highest levels. Details of these expectations will be released in due course with all clubs being given reasonable notice and timescales for implementation.

Implications for the 2018-19 Season

The 2018-19 season will form a transition season to the new arrangements. The existing structure will exist but with different consequences:

- Premier Division – no changes to the structure for 2018-19
- Conferences
 - Promotion arrangements to Premier Division as currently in place. A round robin competition with the 9th placed team in the Premier Division and the three Conference winners. The top two gain Premier Division status for 2019-20 (Premier Division Play offs)
 - The new Division 1 North and Division 1 South to be made up of the following teams
 - The team finishing 10th in the Premier Division
 - The teams finishing 3rd and 4th in the Premier Division Play offs
 - Teams placed 2nd-6th in the three Conferences

- A round robin play-off between the three teams finishing 7th in the three Conferences with the top two teams qualifying.
 - The remaining teams will play in the Conferences in 2019-20.
- Regional Premier Leagues
- The Top 4 placed teams in each of the five Regional League Premier Divisions will be invited to join the Conferences.

The number of players a club may register at any one time will be increased from 30 to 40.

The number of “overseas players” will also be extended from one to two. The regulations around overseas players are complex and clubs are strongly recommended to consider the guidance from England Hockey - more information is

here: <http://www.englishockey.co.uk/page.asp?section=1009&ionTitle=Non+EU+Players+%26+Coaches>)

Next Steps

For the 2019-20 season there are still details, including player registrations, eligibility and officiating appointments, that will be worked through with the support of the Regional Premier Leagues and officiating bodies over coming months.

The Future

The England Hockey Board foresee the 2018/19 and 2019/20 seasons being an interim position, and subject to the Hockey Pro League, expect continued development of the domestic competition to further support the original objectives of the Bridging the Gap project. These objectives have been supported both in the initial consultation and through the February 2018 consultation. England Hockey will continue to work in consultation with the clubs on any further changes via a revised committee structure for overseeing the England Hockey Leagues.



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