

**ADULT MALE FUTURE COMPETITIONS STRUCTURE -
BRIEFING AND FAQs FOR COUNCIL MEMBERS: MARCH 2021**

1. Introduction

- 1.1 We are pleased to present the latest proposals in our work to recommend an optimal playing offer and structure that protects the future health of the Game for adult men by meeting the needs of current and future players.
- 1.2 The review was necessary as participation data shows that players are playing less often and have different motivations than 15 or 20 years ago which are sometimes at odds with the amount and type of rugby on offer to a player now.
- 1.3 This review started in September 2019 and we have undertaken a thorough process including analysis of game data, various surveys, and multiple clubs, CB and Council webinars where we have spoken to all stakeholders involved in the game and listened intently to the diverse views.
- 1.4 Below is a summary of what the game can expect from changes outlined in this plan:
 - a. A target date for FCS implementation of season 2022/23.
 - b. The size of leagues at Levels 5 and below to be capped at 12, and at Levels 3 & 4 to be capped at 14.
 - c. Retention of the principle of automatic league promotion for the winners of the league.
 - d. An aim to reduce the churn of teams through the leagues and increase stability through amended relegation (see FAQs below).
 - e. At all levels there will be a protected two-week break over the Christmas period and protected weekend breaks (at points to be determined through the season).
 - f. Revised National Knockout Cups and Championships will be introduced (per level) from Level 5 down with optional entry for teams, occurring after the league season completes, removing the conflict of league and cup rugby and offering additional home games culminating in a 'Community Game finals' day.
 - g. A focused review of specific features of the competition structure will take place every three years.
 - h. An increase in the numbers of leagues (and therefore teams) at certain levels, whilst ensuring the quality of experience of league rugby with an overall objective of reducing net travel times.
 - i. Lower XV teams should be permitted entry to RFU Leagues up to Level 7 on a National scale subject to strict criteria (to be determined in implementation phase).
- 1.5 The intent of all the above is to address the declining metrics in Adult Male rugby and to ensure more rugby is played.
- 1.6 The next stage in the process is the April 16th RFU Council meeting where Council Members will cast their votes on the proposals.
- 1.7 Following a successful vote at Council, we envisage an implementation group (established by CGB and Governance) would manage the detail and any changes required to bring the new structure into place.

PLEASE NOTE THAT FOR ANY QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE MODELS PREVIOUSLY SHARED, IT SHOULD BE REINFORCED THAT THESE ARE ILLUSTRATIVE ONLY AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT WHERE A CLUB WILL BE IN SEASON 2022/23

FAQs

1. League sizes, Structure, Travel

1.1 What happens if our league sizes are 10 now, can we stick with it and who decides?

A: The FCS framework makes the point that the league size is a maximum of 12 and therefore could be less. Additionally, league size will be flexible depending on number of team entries and local need, and at the relevant level the make-up can be determined by relevant organising committees aligned to the overall framework. This will be decided during the implementation work of finalising leagues for the start of the 2022 season. In short, maintaining league size of 10 is possible.

1.2 Will the North West clubs come back in and if not does this undermine whole thing?

A: North West teams returning to the RFU league structure can be managed at various levels i.e., if all or some teams return, this can be worked through in implementation to ensure that this does not undermine the whole structure at Level 7 and below.

1.3 What is the anticipated reduction in travel for clubs?

This question is mostly aimed at Levels 3-7

A: Given this is only an illustrative model the exact impact will not be able to be determined until closer to full implementation. However, indicative modelling has shown that there is a net mileage reduction for the whole level at each level L3-6, with most clubs travelling less, and of those being asked to travel more, most of them being promoted clubs (most of whom would expect to travel further). There will always be outliers who may be travelling further in a new structure, mitigation for this where possible, will form part of implementation work.

At Level 7, given most leagues are based on existing CB boundaries, and even accounting for increased mileage for some clubs promoted in the model, indicative modelling has shown there is no overall increase in net mileage. However, at these levels there are several assumptions especially around inclusion of additional Lower XV's or not.

A decrease in travel for clubs at Level 7 and below will ultimately depend on the number of leagues per level. In turn, this is dependent upon the number of teams playing in leagues. So, travel distances will be minimised by more teams entering the pyramid, which can be delivered through Lower XV's coming into RFU leagues.

2. Additional / Lower XV's

2.1 What happens if a Lower XV at L7 wins league?

A: The current proposal would not permit a Lower XV team playing higher than Level 7. Implementation work carried out after FCS recommendations are presented to Council in April 2020 will determine what the process will be if this scenario occurs. However, it is the 2nd place team in the league (in question) at Level 7 would be promoted (if this team were a 1st XV). As part of the FCS work there is a commitment to review the proposed ceiling of Level 7 for Lower XV's within three years and, if this situation was occurring regularly, then it could be amended.

2.2 What happens if a 1st XV gets relegated into same league as one of its Lower XV's?

A: In this scenario the lower team would be relegated.

2.3 What happens to the structure if we get a small number (say fewer than 25) Lower XV entries?

A: The league structure is flexible against the number of (confirmed) Lower XV entries received. In the case of limited numbers of Lower XV's, options may be to promote more teams from league below or run smaller leagues. This would be decided during the implementation work, with the league structure able to absorb any number of Lower XV entries in readiness for start of 2022 season.

2.4 Will inclusion of Lower XVs be embedded in the whole debate or taken and voted upon as a separate issue?

A: It is expected that the FCS resolutions will be put to Council as separate resolutions.

3. General

3.1 Will promotion & relegation be maintained at current levels? If so, with smaller leagues churn will surely increase. Is this right? If so, is it beneficial?

A: Where possible the desire from the FCS work would be to reduce churn through amended promotion and relegation, which with smaller leagues could mean smaller numbers of promotion and relegation. This will be a particular focus for implementation work once a new structure is approved.

3.2 Was the modelling based on final league tables at end of 2019/20 or the opening leagues for 2020/21?

A: The modelling was based on league tables at end of 2019/20 thus the structure may look different if implemented in 2022/23 and is therefore illustrative only.

3.3 What will happen with Level transfers?

A: Level transfers may still happen however it is not expected to increase significantly in the short term at Level 7 and below. In some regions where it makes sense to have more porous boundaries to allow teams to travel less, this would ideally be encouraged but will need more discussion in implementation work.

3.4 Will the Cup Competition conflict the existing County Championship and player availability?

A: The cup model has been designed not to conflict significantly with the County Championship as it will only be a few clubs in the latter rounds where any conflict may occur. Additionally, at Levels 3 and 4, there is no Cup and there are smaller leagues than previous years, therefore in theory this should enhance player availability for many CBs. This is a matter of which the County Championship review group is aware and is looking into.

3.5 Does a team have to accept being promoted to a higher league in the new competitions structure?

A: Teams can refuse promotion for the 2022-23 season if the new league structure (adopted from FCS recommendations) has promoted them over and above the usual conditions of league promotion i.e., through winning a league or winning a playoff match to earn a promotion.

3.6 Who will organise the new competition structure?

A: This is still to be determined but it is envisaged organising committees will be required to manage the delivery of the new competitions structure. After the April Council meeting where a decision on the FCS work is expected, an Implementation Group will be established to review the operational responsibilities of existing organising committees and propose changes to ensure the new competitions structure is managed effectively in the future. It is expected that existing knowledge and expertise will still be an important part of this.

*Future Competitions Structure Working Group
Updated: 30 March 2021*