

8 August 2003

**To:** Regional HA Secretaries, Regional League Secretaries, Regional Consultative Committee, EHL Clubs, EHL Committee, Competitions Review Working Group, World Class Hockey Ltd,  
**Cc** Press contacts.

Dear Colleague

### **REVIEW OF ENGLISH HOCKEY LEAGUE**

Please find attached a proposal from the Board of England Hockey for an amended structure of the English Hockey League.

This proposal emanates from the on-going work of the Competitions Review Group. The group was tasked with improving the competitions structure throughout the sport-this is their first report back. The Board believes the group has done an excellent job on its approach to this complex task and congratulates them for their output to date.

Apart from disseminating this to the above distribution list the proposal will be posted on our website [www.hockeyonline.co.uk](http://www.hockeyonline.co.uk).

The Board would welcome any feedback you might have to this proposal by 15 September. This feedback will then be considered at the 22<sup>nd</sup> September board meeting. Such feedback should be sent by e-mail to [stephen.barlow@englandhockey.org](mailto:stephen.barlow@englandhockey.org) or posted to him at the above address.

Kind Regards

Yours faithfully

Philip Kimberley  
Executive Chairman



## **PROPOSAL FOR AN AMENDED STRUCTURE OF THE ENGLISH HOCKEY LEAGUE.**

### **1. BACKGROUND**

This paper outlines proposals by the England Hockey Board based on the work of the Competitions Review Group. It is in respect of outdoor league hockey in England with particular reference to the English Hockey League. This area has been reviewed before others in order that any changes, which would be for season 2004-05, can be agreed prior to season 2003-04 so that all clubs are aware of what they are playing for at the beginning of the season. The Competitions Review findings took into account the feedback received from clubs in response to the competitions questionnaire and an analysis of best practice from other sports.

Feedback on this paper is requested by the Board by 15 September so that it may be considered at its meeting on 22 September.

A further paper with proposal in respect of other competitions, including youth competitions will be distributed in October 2003.

### **2. BASIC PRINCIPLES**

The following principles for leagues should be applied.

- If you win your league you should be automatically promoted and not have to go into play offs or feeder/conference leagues in order to progress.
- If you finish bottom of your league you should be automatically demoted.
- The English Hockey League should be for clubs not teams.
- Clubs want 22 fixtures, usually based on 12 clubs playing home and away.
- Clubs should be able to progress upwards through a pyramid structure where ideally no more than two divisions are below any higher division.
- Where divisions are linear promotion and relegation should be 2 up 2 down. Where two divisions feed into one higher division promotion and relegation should be 2 up from each and 4 down from the higher division.
- The Premier Division of the EHL always needs to be separately considered due to its relationship with the international game. The Board fully support the desire from WCHL that this Division must be as competitive as possible at the highest level attainable so that the skill habits practised by players and the intensity of matches offer preparation for the international game.  
In addition Premier Division clubs are usually involved in additional fixtures with extended runs in the Cup and consequently more 'double header' weekends.

### **3. ENGLISH HOCKEY LEAGUE**

In considering the current English Hockey League structure the following issues arise given the principles identified above.

- Regional League winners do not automatically gain promotion to the EHL
- 5 out of the 6 Divisions are based on 10 clubs playing Home & Away, ie 18 fixtures.

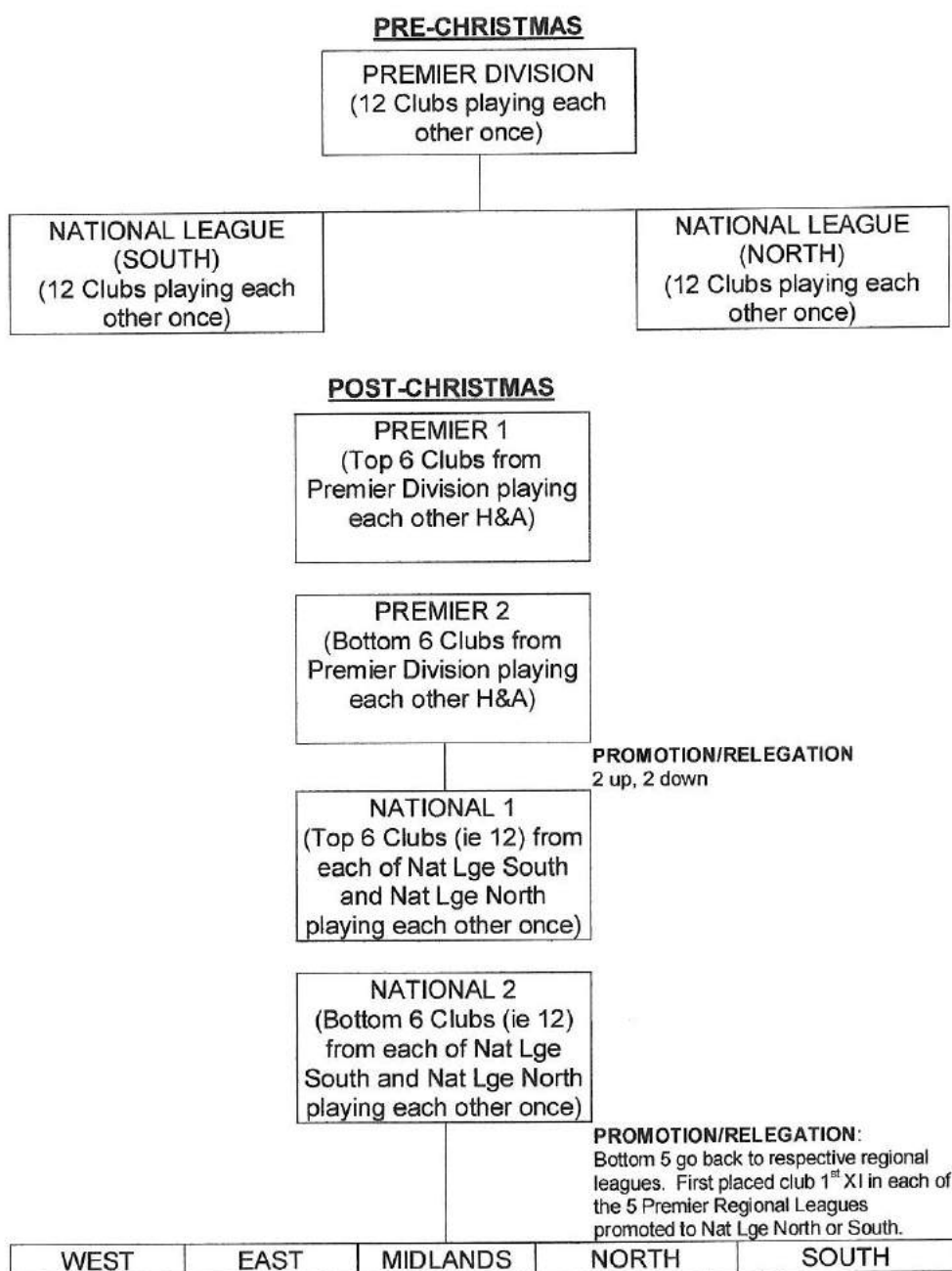
An additional point, specific to the EHL, is as follows:

- There is concern that the travelling involved in the EHL, particularly for clubs in the lower Divisions, is expensive and also a factor in why players stop playing at this level.

#### 4. ENGLISH HOCKEY LEAGUE 2004-05

##### i. Proposal

Having taken into account the above the Board recommends the following structure for implementation in season 2004-05.





LEAGUE (8 Mens S WALES)	LEAGUE	LEAGUE	LEAGUE	LEAGUE
----------------------------	--------	--------	--------	--------

## ii. Comments on structure of Leagues in Proposal.

- In the National League the match schedules for the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the season will be drawn up so that clubs who have played 6 home games and 5 away games in the first half will play 5 home games and 6 away games in the second half wherever possible. In the Premier Leagues clubs who play 6 home games in the first half of the season will play 5 home games in the first half of the subsequent season and vice-versa. Clubs will be advised of this and the *proposed* schedule for their home/away games in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the season to assist with pitch bookings. It is recognised that it will not be possible to confirm clubs actual home/away schedule until the make up of the Divisions is known – it is proposed that the higher a club finishes in the first half of the season will have a bearing on the fitting of fixtures into their proposed schedule.
- All clubs will start the second half of the season in the newly formed divisions with 0 points.
- There will be awards for the clubs finishing top of Premier 2 and National 2 to add incentive.
- A restriction on the number of transfers will need to be drawn up to prevent a large degree of player movement at the mid-season break.
- The formation of the National League North and South will be determined on a geographical basis annually, based on which clubs are playing at that level.
- There will still be an end of season tournament to determine which club will qualify for the European Club Championships. As before this will be between the top three clubs in Premier 1 and the Cup winner. The winner of Premier 1 will qualify for the European Cup Winners Cup. To avoid confusion this should be renamed the Super Cup instead of the Premiership.
- The number of clubs qualifying for the Super Cup may vary from season to season dependent on the demands of the International programme.

## iii. Perceived benefits of this structure

(in addition to meeting the criteria shown within basic principles)

- All clubs will play at least 21 matches in a season.
- Travel in the National divisions will be minimised for half a season as they are semi-national at this stage.
- It offers successful clubs a clear pathway of progression.
- It means that the top sides in the Premier Divisions will play more competitive matches against each other. (Currently 10 out of 18 matches are against other sides in the top six. This will now be 15 out of 21.)
- It means that sides progressing to the Premier Divisions have the opportunity to consolidate at that level.
- It does not add greatly to the number of clubs currently playing above regional level.
- In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the season National One will offer clubs as competitive hockey as possible to prepare the promoted sides for the step up to the Premier Division the following season. The group felt that a structure which merely offered two semi-national divisions feeding into a Premier Division would not prepare clubs for the step up.
- A club is promoted each season from each Regional League which guarantees that each region will continue to have representation in the EHL.

## iv. Perceived weaknesses of this structure

- In the post Christmas period the clubs in Premier 2 and National 2 are ultimately only playing to avoid relegation.
- 5 clubs are perceived to be relegated out of division of 12 (*although this is actually 5 out of 24*)
- Clubs will not be able to plan for the season ahead but will have to do so in two segments.

- There may be confusion outside of the game as the structure is not a traditional one.

**v. How would the Divisions for 2004-05 be formed?**

**MEN**

**12 clubs in Premier Division**

- 10 clubs in EHL Premier Division 2003-04 (ie no relegation)
- 2 top clubs promoted from EHL Division One in 2003-04

**24 clubs in National Division** (regional split to be based on actual clubs involved)

- 8 Clubs finishing 3<sup>rd</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> in EHL Division One in 2003-04
- 11 Clubs finishing 1<sup>st</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> in EHL Division Two in 2003-04 (12<sup>th</sup> club relegated)
- 5 clubs (1<sup>st</sup> XIs) finishing top of Regional Leagues in 2003-04

**WOMEN**

**12 clubs in Premier Division**

- 10 clubs in EHL Premier Division 2003-04 (ie no relegation)
- 2 top clubs promoted from EHL Division One in 2003-04

**24 clubs in National Division** (regional split to be based on actual clubs involved)

- 8 Clubs finishing 3<sup>rd</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> in EHL Division One in 2003-04
- 10 Clubs finishing in EHL Division Two in 2003-04 (ie no relegation)
- 5 clubs (1<sup>st</sup> XIs) finishing top of Regional Leagues in 2003-04  
*plus either*
- 1 club winning a play off between the 5 clubs (1<sup>st</sup> XIs) finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> top of Regional Leagues in 2003-04  
*or*
- 1 Club top of Welsh Womens League in 2003-04. (nb this would be a one off opportunity for a Welsh club to progress in the EHL which unlike their male counterparts they do not have.)

Working proposal based on how the leagues would look based on final standings in 2002-03 follows on next pages.

## WORKING EXAMPLE FOR PROPOSAL

MEN'S FINAL TABLES 2003/2004

Premier Division										Division in 04/05
Club	PI	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts		
Cannock	18	16	0	2	91	33	58	48		PD
Reading	18	15	1	2	67	27	40	46		PD
Surbiton	18	11	2	5	57	30	27	35		PD
Loughborough Stu	18	10	2	6	56	36	20	32		PD
Guildford	18	8	4	6	44	37	7	28		PD
Canterbury	18	7	2	9	39	45	-6	23		PD
Teddington	18	6	2	10	34	56	-22	20		PD
Hampstead	18	5	1	12	32	72	-40	16		PD
St Albans	18	3	0	15	26	68	-42	9		PD
Doncaster	18	1	2	15	35	77	-42	5	No relegation from Prem	PD

Division One										
Club	PI	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts		
Old Loughtonians	18	16	2	0	82	26	56	50	Promoted to Prem	PD
Beeston	18	10	4	4	58	40	18	34	Promoted to Prem	PD
Firebrands	18	10	1	7	55	40	15	31		NL(S)
Belper	18	8	5	5	44	40	4	29		NL(N)
Chelmsford	18	9	1	8	40	41	-1	28		NL(S)
Southgate	18	7	2	9	49	52	-3	23		NL(S)
Bourville	18	6	2	10	33	54	-21	20		NL(N)
Stourport	18	5	3	10	35	43	-8	18		NL(N)
Barford Tigers	18	4	2	12	26	61	-35	14		NL(N)
Brooklands MU	18	4	0	14	31	56	-25	12		NL(N)

Division Two										
Club	PI	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts		
Bowdon	22	17	4	1	78	29	49	55		NL(N)
Nottingham	22	14	3	5	81	47	34	45		NL(N)
Havant	22	14	2	6	73	50	23	44		NL(S)
Hounslow & Ealing	22	13	4	5	43	25	18	43		NL(S)
Indian Gymkhana	22	12	3	7	69	57	12	39		NL(S)
East Grinstead	22	10	3	9	54	45	9	33		NL(S)
Bath Buccaneers	22	7	7	8	61	49	12	28		NL(S)
Oxford Hawks	22	8	4	10	39	54	-15	28		NL(N)
Formby	22	6	5	11	33	48	-15	23		NL(N)
Lewes	22	5	3	14	32	69	-37	18		NL(S)
Peterborough Town	22	4	1	17	33	65	-32	13		NL(N)
Blueharts	22	2	1	19	24	82	-58	7	Relegated to Regional Lge	

## REGIONAL QUALIFIERS 02/03

North	Sheffield Bankers	NL (N)
South	Old Georgians	NL (S)
East	Croxtyn	NL (S)
West	Whitchurch	NL (S)
Midlands	Leek	NL (N)

## LEAGUE FORMATION FOR 2004/2005 (All 12 clubs)

PREMIER DIVISION	NATIONAL LEAGUE (NORTH)	NATIONAL LEAGUE (SOUTH)
Beeston	Barford Tigers	Bath Buccaneers
Cannock	Belper	Chelmsford
Canterbury	Bourville	Croxtyn
Doncaster	Bowdon	East Grinstead
Guildford	Brooklands MU	Firebrands
Hampstead	Formby	Havant
Loughborough Stu	Leek	Hounslow & Ealing
Old Loughtonians	Nottingham	Indian Gymkhana
Reading	Oxford Hawks	Lewes
St Albans	Peterborough Town	Old Georgians
Surbiton	Sheffield Bankers	Southgate
Teddington	Stourport	Whitchurch

## WOMEN'S FINAL TABLES 2003/2004

Premier Division										Division in 04/05	
Club	Pl	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts			
Slough	18	14	1	3	65	17	48	43			PD
Olton & West Warks	18	12	2	4	44	24	20	38			PD
Canterbury	18	11	4	3	40	27	13	37			PD
Ipswich	18	7	5	6	42	34	8	26			PD
Chelmsford	18	6	8	4	28	30	-2	26			PD
Fyffes Leicester	18	7	4	7	34	38	-4	25			PD
Clifton	18	7	2	9	37	34	3	23			PD
Hightown	18	6	5	7	41	48	-7	23			PD
Sutton Coldfield	18	2	2	14	25	57	-32	8			PD
Trojans	18	0	3	15	19	66	-47	3	No relegation from Prem		PD

Division One										Division in 04/05	
Club	Pl	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts			
Doncaster	18	13	4	1	48	24	24	43	Promoted to Prem		PD
Harleston Magpies	18	11	2	5	35	15	20	35	Promoted to Prem		PD
Loughborough Stu	18	10	2	6	31	22	9	32			NL(N)
Wimbledon	18	7	6	5	27	20	7	27			NL(S)
Old Loughtonians	18	7	4	7	31	31	0	25			NL(S)
Reading	18	7	4	7	24	24	0	25			NL(S)
Hounslow & Ealing	18	6	3	9	33	36	-3	21			NL(S)
Woking	18	6	2	10	19	36	-17	20			NL(S)
Sunderland	18	4	5	9	21	34	-13	17			NL(N)
Liverpool Quilter	18	2	2	14	15	42	-27	8			NL(N)

Division Two										Division in 04/05	
Club	Pl	W	D	L	GF	GA	GD	Pts			
Poynton	18	12	3	3	54	23	31	39			NL(N)
Birmingham Uni	18	12	3	3	39	25	14	39			NL(N)
Bedford	18	10	2	6	37	32	5	32			NL(S)
Bradford Newitts	18	9	4	5	27	23	4	31			NL(N)
Exmouth	18	5	7	6	29	31	-2	22			NL(S)
St Albans	18	5	5	8	24	30	-6	20			NL(S)
Aldridge	18	5	5	8	20	27	-7	20			NL(N)
Leyland Motors	18	5	2	11	37	54	-17	17			NL(N)
Rover Oxford	18	4	4	10	29	39	-10	16			NL(N)
Deeside Ramblers	18	2	7	9	13	25	-12	13	No relegation		NL(N)

## REGIONAL QUALIFIERS 02/03

North	Ben Rhydding	NL (N)
South	Epsom	NL (S)
East	Letchworth	NL (S)
West	St Austell	NL (S)
Midlands	Worcester	NL (N)
PLUS	Play-Off/Wales	NL (S)

## LEAGUE FORMATION FOR 2004/2005 (All 12 clubs)

PREMIER DIVISION	NATIONAL LEAGUE (NORTH)	NATIONAL LEAGUE (SOUTH)
Canterbury	Aldridge	Bedford
Chelmsford	Ben Rhydding	Epsom
Clifton	Birmingham Uni	Exmouth
Doncaster	Bradford Newitts	Hounslow & Ealing
Fyffes Leicester	Deeside Ramblers	Letchworth
Harleston Magpies	Leyland Motors	Old Loughtonians
Hightown	Liverpool Quilter	Reading
Ipswich	Loughborough Stu	St Albans
Olton & West Warks	Poynton	St Austell
Slough	Rover Oxford	Wimbledon
Sutton Coldfield	Sunderland	Woking
Trojans	Worcester	+ Play Off / Wales qualifier

## 5. OTHER ISSUES THAT ARISE FROM THESE PROPOSALS

### i. League Pyramid

In all of these proposals the link between the English Hockey League and Regional Leagues is considerably strengthened by the new structures. In addition the recommendations that feeder/conference leagues or play offs are replaced by a pyramid structure would improve the pathway from County to Regional Leagues in some Womens' regions. The Board propose that the concept of all leagues coming under the umbrella of the EHL title be addressed with regions – ie there is one league pyramid for hockey in England. This in no way should be seen as England Hockey taking over the running of leagues – authority would remain with the regional and county leagues but would strengthen the governing body's links with its clubs. Through this forum a greater degree of communication and commonality of regulations, through agreeing examples of best practice, would be addressed.

### ii. 2<sup>nd</sup> XIs

Although strong representation has been received from the South women where their league is structured so that 2<sup>nd</sup> XIs may play in their top Division (the one that qualifies clubs for the EHL) the basic principle is that what forms the existing (and proposed changes to) EHL, ie national or semi-national divisions should only be for 1<sup>st</sup> XIs because of the status and profile of the EHL.

As part of the review of adult competitions which will follow is a proposal that 2<sup>nd</sup> XI knockout competitions be introduced for all clubs and that EHL clubs be offered entry into a 2<sup>nd</sup> XI knockout competition for 2003-04 to give a high level competition for EHL clubs 2<sup>nd</sup> XIs.

August 2003