

England Hockey Leagues Structure from 2019-20



Appendix Two – ORIGINAL ENGLAND HOCKEY PROPOSAL

1. Proposed Changes

The following paper has been amended from the original document circulated in August 2017 to reflect changes in the intervening period.

The proposed new structure is expanded upon beneath but the key points and differences for clubs to note are as follows:

The leagues will include 60 teams. The top 24 will be involved in nationwide competition and 36 teams would play in 3 conferences split geographically.

The top 24 teams would play in a new structure that runs in two separate phases at different times in a year. These are designed around two competitions that will encourage the best teams to rise to the top and ensure high stakes games throughout the season. The aim is to ensure that those clubs who have the best culture and programme of training and development succeed.

The top of the England Hockey League (i.e. involving the top 24 teams) will be in two phases, commencing in January of each year. Phase 1 will run between January/February and April/May and will not generally include senior international players, encouraging clubs to develop a broad, high-quality talent base. Phase 1 will qualify clubs for Phase 2, which will run between September and December with all senior international players available. This will be the pinnacle of domestic hockey and a truly 'best versus best' competition.

The following detail is to be read in conjunction with the diagram in section 4:

Phase 1 will be a 2 division league competition in two tiers (Premier and Division One). The divisions will have 12 teams, playing each other once either home or away (11 matches). The 'extra' home fixture will be given to the clubs finishing highest in the previous phase of the competition. International players will not generally be available for any of Phase 1.

Phase 1 will determine the qualifiers for Phase 2. Phase 2 has a new division of 8 ('Top 8') and 2 parallel lower divisions also of 8, North and South, based on the geographic spread of teams

The 'Top 8' (working title) will be the pinnacle of England Hockey's domestic competition and will determine the England Hockey League champion. In the Top 8 and North and South divisions each team will play each other twice, home and away, to give 14 fixtures. International players will be available for this competition. The competition is likely to require three double header weekends (or midweek matches) over this period.

A single-game playoff structure is proposed between each Phase and more detail is provided below. Promotion and relegation from the top 24 will happen in April/May at the end of the normal season.

Conferences –The Conferences will be expanded from their current size to 3 divisions of 12 teams. This will reduce the current level of travel at this level. They will be determined each season based on the geographic spread of teams, rather than set into a fixed structure based on hockey's Regions.

The Conferences would run during a standard hockey season from September – April with 12 teams playing 22 fixtures home and away. The 3 Conference winners would be promoted into the top 24 at the end of the normal season. The teams that finish bottom in the Conferences would be relegated to the Regional Leagues with a playoff for the final two relegation spaces between the three teams finishing second from bottom in each of the Conferences.

The winners of the Regional Leagues would qualify automatically for the Conferences Clubs' 2nd XIs would be allowed to compete at Conference level (but not at the same level as their 1st XI, i.e. the first team would have to be playing in the top 24).

Transition – Getting from the existing structure to a new structure will require a period of transition. The overall league size will increase from 40 to 60 teams and this will necessitate a net movement of 4 teams playing in Regional Leagues moving into the England Hockey Leagues at the end of the 2018-19 season.

2. The Structure

The proposed overall structure is as follows. This diagram aligns to the calendar year.



2.1 Top 24 teams

Phase 1: January to April/May

Premier 12 teams 11 games <i>(higher ranked team in previous phase gets extra home game)</i>	
Winner	European Club competition playoff (in Dec)
Pos 1-4	Qualify for Top 8 in next Phase

Pos 5	Play off v Div 1 Runner Up
Pos 6	Play off v Div 1 Winner
Pos 7-10	Play offs for two Top 8 spaces Pos 7 v 10 and Pos 8 v 9
Pos 11 & 12	Relegated to North/South 8

Division 1 12 teams 11 games <i>(higher ranked team in previous phase gets extra home game)</i>	
Winner	Play off v Pos 6 in Premier
Pos 2	Play off v Pos 5 in Premier
Pos 3-9	Qualify for North/South 8
Pos 10-12	Relegated to Conference

Top 8 Playoffs (May)

As indicated in the table above, the finishing position will lead to a playoff structure which would be single game playoffs with the higher ranked team playing at home. The last 4 spaces in the Top 8 would be determined by these matches.

Match 1	Premier Pos 5	v	Division 1 Runner Up
Match 2	Premier Pos 6	v	Division 1 Winner
Match 3	Premier Pos 7	v	Premier Pos 10
Match 4	Premier Pos 8	v	Premier Pos 9

Phase 2: Pre Christmas – September to December

Top 8 14 games (home and away)	
Winner	England Champion & European Place
Pos 2	European Place
Pos 3	European playoff v Premier winner (in December) or v Place 2 if we only have two European places
Pos 1-6	Qualify for Premier Division in next Phase
Pos 7-8	Playoff v North/South 8 third pos teams

North 8 14 games (home and away)	
Winner & 2nd	Automatic Place in Premier
Pos 3	Playoff for Premier v Top 8 pos 7/8
Pos 4-8	Qualify for Division 1

South 8 14 games (home and away)	
Winner & 2nd	Automatic Place in Premier
Pos 3	Playoff for Premier v Top 8 pos 7/8
Pos 4-8	Qualify for Division 1

Phase 2 Playoffs (December)

These one off playoff games would be played in December. The first named team would be the home team.

European Playoff *(This is dependent on future European Club Hockey structure)*

Top 8 - Position 3 <i>(or Place 2 if only two European spaces)</i>	v	Premier Division Winner
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Premier Division Promotion/Relegation Playoffs – opposition determined by points won

Match 1	Top 8 - Pos 7	v	North or South Div Pos 3
Match 2	Top 8 - Pos 8	v	North or South Div Pos 3

3. Conferences

As outlined above, the proposal includes three conferences beneath the top 24 competition. These would be geographically distributed rather than regionally organised. They would each include 12 teams playing 22 games.

Club second teams would be eligible to play as long as the club 1st XI is in the top 24. If a 1st XI is relegated to the Conference the 2nd XI would be automatically demoted to the relevant Regional Premier Division. A 2nd XI that won a Regional Premier Division would not be able to be promoted if their 1st XI was in a Conference division. The next highest placed (and eligible) Regional Premier Division team would be promoted instead.

North Conference 12 teams 22 matches	East Conference 12 teams 22 matches	West Conference 12 teams 22 matches
Winner – Promoted to Top 24	Winner – Promoted to Top 24	Winner – Promoted to Top 24
Pos 2-10 retained in Conference	Pos 2-10 retained in Conference	Pos 2-10 retained in Conference
Pos 11 – Playoff with bottom two teams relegated to regional league	Pos 11 – Playoff with bottom two teams relegated to regional league	Pos 11 – Playoff with bottom two teams relegated to regional league
Pos 12 – Relegated to Regional Leagues	Pos 12 – Relegated to Regional Leagues	Pos 12 - Relegated to Regional Leagues

1. Regulations

The following proposed regulations would be phased in over an agreed period allowing clubs who play at the top level but do not currently meet the regulations to implement changes.

In each case the online feedback will ask for your level of support for each regulation:

	Proposed Regulation	Reason
1	Clubs must be joint gender	To fit the identity of the sport as equal gender equal and accessible to all.
2	Clubs must have a junior section and have teams participating in the England Hockey U14 and U16 Championships	To ensure that young player development is a factor in all high level clubs
3	Clubs must have a specific programme for talented young players under the age of 18 providing an agreed level of contact time over a season (further details to be agreed with clubs)	To ensure that young player development differentiates for high ability players.

4	Clubs must have an open membership policy in their constitution and accept members of all ages and any background/status.	To create opportunities to maximise coaching resource and create talent pools through the full range of ages.
5	<p>Overseas players – Clubs in the Top 24 will be able to employ a maximum of three non-EU players through the UK Border Agency Points Based system for migrant workers. Criteria will be put in place to ensure this will only be open to players who are internationally established at the highest level (Pro League or Top 12 ranking at time of application) and whose employment will make a significant contribution to the development of the sport.</p> <p>This will mean that other non-EU nationals (based in the UK) will not be able to participate at this level unless they have relevant status – ancestry or family of settled person visa; permanent right of abode; dual nationality with a UK or EU passport.</p> <p>This regulation is subject to change in line with any new immigration laws introduced in respect of Brexit</p>	To create a high level of competition without compromising British player development
6	2 nd XIs will be eligible to play at Conference level as long as their 1 st XI is not also playing at that level	To create talent pools in clubs to support high quality training and competition for places in teams
7	European Outdoor Club Hockey competition will take priority over English Club competition and participating clubs will be able to reorganise where fixtures clash	To retain the status of European Club Competition
8	<p>EH contracted player restrictions: There will be a cap on the number of full-time England Hockey contracted players at one club – this will be restricted to 4. Exceptions will be made for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Players that played at the club for 4 full seasons before the age of 18. - Players that previously played for the club for 3 full seasons between the age of 18-23 (as of 1 Jan in the given season) 	To support clubs to systematically develop players
9	Clubs must have a minimum of 3 GB eligible players aged 23 or under in a match day squad.	To ensure future internationals are immersed / developed in the highest quality training and competition environments

10	Teams' head coaches to be engaged in EH led EHL CPD programme (4 days per year)	To promote high quality coaching and greater relationship between the domestic and international game
11	All top 24 clubs to attend an annual planning session in June each season prior to Sept-Dec period.	To ensure consistent year on year engagement of top clubs.

2. **Summary**

These proposals aim to support the development of domestic hockey in England for years to come. In designing a strong and highly competitive league structure, aligned to the demands of international hockey, we hope to create competition for places and clubs that continue to strive to play at the highest levels.

Linked to the broader objectives of the Bridging the Gap project, this is intended to be part of a clear vision for domestic club hockey in England.