

# **BUCS NATIONAL COMPETITIONS GROUP**

## **NOTICE OF CHANGE – WOMEN’S RUGBY UNION**

### **WOMEN’S RUGBY UNION NATIONAL LEAGUE**

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#### **SUBJECT**

Increasing the size of the BUCS Women’s Rugby Union National League by one team to a seven team structure.

#### **AUTHORS**

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#### **BACKGROUND**

The BUCS Rugby Union Women’s National League was formed in the 2019-20 season due to the successful implementation of the Women’s Rugby Union Sport Review proposal during [Cycle One of the Sport Review process](#). As the Women’s National League comes to a close in its third season (with a single year absence due to covid) the BUCS Executive has assessed the impact of the competition and has now explored the expansion of the league with those directly impacted including our League Management Committee, Sport Advisory Group, Home Nation National Governing Bodies, The Student’s Rugby Football Union, current National league teams and current North/South league teams.

\*To note, this change is in line with the original proposal’s expectations around the programme’s review captured on page three of the document under ‘Format of League’.

#### **CHANGE**

The following changes will be made to the current structure for the 2023-24 season:

- Increasing the BUCS Women’s Rugby Union National League by one team to become a seven team league.
- The adding of an extra team will result in two additional rounds of league fixtures to be captured within Appendix 2a, with 12 total league games per team in the 2023-24 season as opposed to the current 10 league fixtures that have been in place since the inception of the league in 2019-20.
- The National Championship will move to a seven team format, retaining the current three week schedule with the only adaptation being the team who wins the league will get a bye into a home semi-final. 2<sup>nd</sup> (H) v 7<sup>th</sup> (A), 3<sup>rd</sup> (H) v 6<sup>th</sup> (A), 4<sup>th</sup> (H) v 5<sup>th</sup> (A) will complete round 1.
- All leagues and knockout competitions below the National League and National Championship will remain as per their current structure and will be reviewed in line with the National League in December 2023 (captured in the monitoring and review section below). There will be no impact for any league outside of the National League competition.
- Appendix 1 ([BUCS Competition Offer and Associated BUCS Points](#)) will be adjusted in line with the addition of a 7<sup>th</sup> team.
- As per the BUCS Super Rugby expansion model, there will be no relegation at the conclusion of the 2023-24 season. The first stage of discussion around the need for a North and South promotion play-off game to create an eight team league will be scheduled for December 2023.

## JUSTIFICATION

The original National League proposal arose due to both the Premier North and Premier South League structures being unfit for purpose resulting in a significant amount of blowout scorelines (whereby teams conceded more than 35 points) and or in several cases, where walkovers were conceded (teams being unable to field a team to complete a fixture). **Figure 1** displays the position of our Women's Rugby Union offer during 2016-17, 2017-19, and 2018-19 seasons.

Year	Premier League Fixtures	Blowouts (+35 points)	Walkovers	Total Games Played	Blowout %	Average points difference per game
2016-17	60	31	0	60	52%	35
2017-18	60	35	1	59	58%	50
2018-19	60	33	1	58	55%	37
Total	180	99	2	177	55%	40

**Figure 1: Displays the blowouts, walkovers and average points difference per game during the 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 seasons for our Premier North and South teams (recognised as our top tier of competition at that point)**

Over the past three seasons, and with the introduction of the Women's National League, we have seen some excellent progress in the competitive nature of our Premier Tier competitions. **Figure 2** (North and South) and **Figure 3** (National) display how the associated data has been impacted via the Sport Review process:

Year	North/South League Fixtures	Blowouts (+35 points)	Walkovers	Total Games Played	Blowout %	Average points difference per game
2019-20	60	24	0	60	40%	35
2021-22	60	19	1	59	32%	29
2022-23	60	18	1	59	30%	26
Total	180	61	2	178	34%	30

**Figure 2: Displays the blowouts, walkovers and average points difference per game during the 2019-20, 2021-22, and 2022-23 seasons for our Premier North and South teams (the North and South leagues sit below our National league)**

Year	National League Fixtures	Blowouts (+35 points)	Walkovers	Total Games Played	Blowout %	Average points difference per game %
2019-20	30	6	0	30	20%	20
2021-22	30	7	5	25	23%	24
2022-23	30	2	0	30	7%	16
Total	90	15	5	85	17%	20

**Figure 3: Displays the blowouts, walkovers and average points difference per game during the 2019-20, 2021-22, and 2022-23 seasons for our National League teams (recognised as our top tier of competition in our current programme)**

The headline findings for each data set are:

- The National League has reduced the average blowout percentage of our top tier competition from 55% to 17%.
- To note, the 2022-23 season recognised only two of 30 games (7%) where the deficit was more 35 points.
- The National League has reduced the average points difference within our top tier competition from 40 to 20.
- To note, the 2022-23 season recognised an average points difference of 16. During the 2017-18 Premier League season the average gap was 50 points.
- The current North and South Premier Competition has seen a reduction of 20% in blowouts in comparison to the 2016-19 seasons, also reducing the average points deficit from 40 to 30.
- It must also be noted, that in the 2021-22 season one team accounted for each of the five walkovers in the National League alongside four of the blowouts which impacted completion and blowout percentages for that year.
- In 2022-23, Cardiff wins accounted for seven of the 18 (39%) associated combined North/South league blowouts and 63% of all associated South League blowouts.

The above data we now believe is significant enough evidence to support the introduction of a 7<sup>th</sup> team into the National League.

## THE CURRENT LEAGUE FORMAT

Since inception in the 2019-20 season the Women’s National League has hosted seven different institutions with the following flux of teams being promoted and relegated within the six team competition.

\*As the National League was a completely new structure in 2019, all teams are seen as promoted (in green in **Figure 4**) due to their original selection:

- Year 1 (2019-20): Exeter were relegated with Loughborough being promoted
- Year 2 (2021-22): Northumbria were relegated with Exeter being promoted
- Year 3 (2022-23): Durham are currently bottom of the league and were due to face Cardiff in the National League playoff game

The following playoff games for the National League have also taken place:

- Year 1 (2019-20): Loughborough (W) v Cardiff; Loughborough (Promoted) V Exeter
- Year 2 (2021-22): Exeter (W) v York; Exeter promoted due to Northumbria default
- Year 3 (2022-23): Cardiff (W) v Northumbria; Durham V Cardiff (will now not take place)

No	National League (2019-20)	National League (2021-22)	National League (2022-23)
1	Cardiff Met	Cardiff Met	Cardiff Met
2	Durham	Durham	Durham
3	Edinburgh	Edinburgh	Edinburgh
4	Exeter	Northumbria	Loughborough
5	Hartpury	Hartpury	Hartpury
6	Northumbria	Loughborough	Exeter

**Figure 4: The progression of the National League since 2019**

## SELECTION OF TEAM SEVEN INTO THE COMPETITION STRUCTURE

In future seasons, for all instances whereby a National League proposes to increase the number of teams in the league structure by one team, the BUCS Executive advise that the winner of the Premier North v Premier South fixture be confirmed as that promoted team.

Given the point at which this change is being raised in the season, there were three options to be considered:

- **Option 1:** That the current teams within the National League playoff (Cardiff and Durham) are adopted into the league. Durham will remain as the bottom placed team and Cardiff will gain automatic promotion.
- **Option 2:** That the former Sport Review selection mechanism be used, accounting for BUCS Points attained over the past three seasons with the 2022-23 season accounting for double weighted points. As of March 30 2023 and by assessing those currently eligible (and former National League teams) for the competition those points are as seen in **Figure 5** below.

Women’s Rugby Union Associated BUCS Points Per Season					
Team	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	Total
Cardiff	70	0	72	170 (double)	312
Durham	58	0	104	148 (double)	310
Northumbria	86	0	0	98 (double)	184

**Figure 5: As per the Sport Review Cycle One selection mechanism all associated BUCS Points have been accounted for**

- **Option 3:** To be discussed with the National Competitions Group chair based on feedback from consultation.

Options 1 and 2 would result in the 7-team structure looking as per the below for the 2023-24 season:

No	National League (2023-24)
1	Cardiff Met
2	Durham
3	Edinburgh
4	Loughborough
5	Hartpury
6	Exeter
7	Cardiff

**The BUCS Executive recommendation** is that **Option1**, those teams involved in the 2022-23 Women's Rugby Union National League final playoff match, namely Cardiff and Durham, be selected for the 2023-24 season (Durham to remain and Cardiff to have automatic promotion) and the current scheduled National League playoff game be voided.

*\*As per consultation this recommendation was adopted.*

### IMPACT ON THE 2022-23 PLAY OFFS

As the change will go ahead for the 2023-24 season, there will be a reduced need for playoff games to take place with neither Durham being relegated and or Cardiff remaining in the Premier South competition.

### CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

In line with the new process outlined in the '**Competitions Structures - Proposal for Change**' document, the following stakeholders were consulted as to their opinion for this proposal with all associated responses below. Due to the full support of each stakeholder group, and as per the new process, the '**Proposal for Change**' has now moved to a '**Notice of Change**'.

Stakeholder	Supportive / Not supportive	Commentary
<b>BUCS Executive:</b> Competitions and Performance Team Engagement Team Sport Governance and Compliance Team Senior Leadership Team	Supportive	BUCS has consulted across the Competitions and Performance Team, alongside our Engagement Team and Sport Governance and Compliance Team. All agree we can support this change.
BUCS Competitions Group Chair	Supportive	To be ratified in consultation with National Competitions Group Chair
Women's National League Management Committee (LMC)	Supportive	After consultation the group supported the change
BUCS Rugby Union Sport Advisory Group (SAG)	Supportive	After consultation the group supported the change
The Rugby Football Union	Supportive	The RFU have allowed more resources dedicated to the Women's National League from 2023 via the BUCS Rugby Union Coordinator. There is also additional referee funding to be made available to cover the additional games as well as to increase the number of referees allocated to fixtures
The Welsh Rugby Union	Supportive	After consultation with the WRU they are supportive
The Scottish Rugby Union	Supportive	After consultation with the SRU they are supportive
The Student's Rugby Football Union	Supportive	The SRFU are supportive of the change
Current Women's National League Teams	Supportive	All six teams are supportive of the change
Current Women's South League Teams	Supportive	All six teams are supportive of the change
Current Women's North League Teams	Supportive	All six teams are supportive of the change

## **FUTURE LEAGUE EXPANSION MONITORING AND REVIEW**

Our aspiration with the programme is to increase the size and structure of the Women's National League for as long as performance will allow. With evidence-based research on how both the National League and North and South Leagues are performing (to be assessed in December 2023) we will begin the discussions around the following themes:

- Is the seven team structure fit for purpose (data assessment as per this notice of change).
- Are the North and South Leagues still operating as expected.
- If the above leagues are continuing to create positive change, can we further expand the National League to eight teams whilst assessing the needs of our North and South Leagues for the 2024-25 season.
- How will we work with our Home Nation NGBs to ensure we continue to embed BUCS Women's Rugby Union within their respective performance pathways.

## **CONSULTING ON THE 2023-24 SEASON STRUCTURE**

The BUCS Executive will work alongside the following groups to ensure we create a best fit season structure for our teams. The fixtures provisional timeline, as per usual process will be released to the membership via Appendix 2a on June 2, 2023, as first draft, with the season going live on BUCS Play on 21 July 2023:

- As this competition sits across three Home Nations, we will consult with each NGB (RFU, SRU and WRU) to ensure we are aware of the performance programmes that may need to be mapped against.
- We will consult with our Rugby Union Sport Advisory Group to ensure we capture all information related to the season.
- We will consult with our Women's National League, League Management Committee to ensure we capture the input of the respective programme managers and associated staff.
- Internally the BUCS Competitions and Performance team will work alongside the Engagement team to action and align all profile and influence opportunities in tandem with BUCS Super Rugby. To note, six of the seven teams in the proposed expanded Women's National League will also have a team competing in BUCS Super Rugby (Cardiff, Cardiff Met, Durham, Exeter, Hartpury and Loughborough).

## **DATE OF CHANGE**

Immediate (The 7<sup>th</sup> team (Cardiff) will be adopted for the 2023 – 24 season). The Chair of National Competitions Group has now ratified this notice of change.