

# BUCS LEAGUES AND KNOCKOUTS EVOLUTION 2026 – MODELLING.

This paper outlines a series of potential models for the future development of BUCS leagues and knockouts. The options presented are intended to support discussion with Heads of Sport and institution staff on how the current league and knockout programme could evolve across both national /performance and regional /recreational competition. The models are illustrative rather than exhaustive and are designed to provide a clear starting point for exploring the opportunities and trade-offs associated with different approaches.

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## Section A - Regional / Participation Competition

This section sets out a series of potential models for regional and localised competition, intended to provide a starting point for discussion on how BUCS could evolve its current recreational offer. The options are not exhaustive but instead illustrate a range of ways in which competition could be delivered with reduced travel, greater flexibility, and a stronger local focus, while still maintaining a meaningful and inclusive student sport offer.

	Model A1 – Localised Leagues	Model A2 – Festival-Led Competition	Model A3 – Hybrid
Overview / Purpose	To provide a localised, accessible competition offer for teams who compete at / around Tier 3 and below, reducing travel and time commitment while retaining a familiar league-based structure. This model focuses on increasing participation and flexibility while maintaining a recognisable BUCS competition format.	To provide a highly flexible, low-commitment competition model centred around festival-style delivery, designed to maximise participation, inclusivity, and student experience without the requirement for weekly fixtures.	To combine the structure of localised leagues with the flexibility and engagement of festival-style competition, creating a balanced model that supports both regular competition and enhanced student experience.
Competition Structure	<p><b>Leagues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivered within newly defined local geographic regions. This could be Regions and Nations based, could be based on average distance or equivalent. The makeup would be subject to change annually dependent on entries.</li> <li>Primarily aimed at teams who would be lower down the structure, and value intervarsity competition without the travel.</li> <li>Reduced, flexible fixture model (6-8 Fixtures).</li> <li>Options of additional 'friendly' games to be added in ad hoc.</li> <li>Season to run Oct/Nov – Apr.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Festivals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competition(s) delivered through festival-style events across the academic year (Oct-May).</li> <li>Events could take place in Term 1, 2 or 3.</li> <li>Formats of the competition to be designed per sport (round robin to finals, mini -leagues etc.)</li> <li>Demand led competitions, we could deliver the festivals where demand exists and for the sports we have demand for too.</li> </ul> <p><b>Leagues:</b></p>	<p><b>Festivals:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competition(s) delivered through festival-style events to be delivered at the start and end of the academic year (Sep-Oct and Mar-May).</li> <li>Used to prepare and supplement the league programme</li> <li>Embedded at the start of the season to support club growth / recruitment.</li> <li>Used at the end of the season to bring together league winners.</li> </ul> <p><b>Leagues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivered within newly defined local geographic regions. This could be</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Knockouts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opt-out available for all competitions.</li> <li>• Smaller, regional knockout competitions aligned to new league structures / clusters.</li> <li>• Finals at a 'regional' hub to bring together finalists.</li> </ul> <p>Examples of the structure, season dates and deadlines can be found in <a href="#">Appendix A</a>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No formal weekly league structures in this model, or only minimal use where significant demand exists.</li> <li>• Individual 'friendly' fixtures can be added upon request.</li> </ul> <p><b>Finals / Showcase Events:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional festival finals event to determine winners.</li> <li>• Potential for inter-regional or National showcase festivals.</li> </ul> <p>Examples of the structure, season dates and deadlines can be found in <a href="#">Appendix A</a>.</p>	<p>Regions and Nations based, could be based on average distance or equivalent. The makeup would be subject to change annually dependent on entries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primarily aimed at teams who would be lower down the structure, and value intervarsity competition without the travel.</li> <li>• Reduced, flexible fixture model (6-8 Fixtures).</li> <li>• Options of additional 'friendly' games to be added in ad hoc.</li> <li>• Season to run Oct/Nov – Apr.</li> </ul> <p>Examples of the structure, season dates and deadlines can be found in <a href="#">Appendix A</a>.</p>
<p><b>Governance</b></p>	<p>To support the competition, the following Governance principles would be applied:</p> <p><b>Rules and Regulations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplified competition rules and regulations.</li> <li>• Self-nomination into levels of competition (Beginner &gt;&gt; Novice &gt;&gt; Intermediate).</li> <li>• Removal of fines and walkovers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Match Officials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction (where possible), in the level / requirement for officiating.</li> <li>• Increased use of 'self-officiating'.</li> </ul>	<p>To support the competition, the following Governance principles would be applied:</p> <p><b>Rules and Regulations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly simplified regulations.</li> <li>• Format and rules adapted per event / per sport.</li> <li>• Potential sanctions for 'no-shows' at festivals due to impact on other teams.</li> </ul> <p><b>Match Officials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction (where possible), in the level / requirement for officiating.</li> <li>• Predominantly student-led where possible, or volunteer officials.</li> </ul>	<p>To support the competition, the following Governance principles would be applied:</p> <p><b>Rules and Regulations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simplified competition rules and regulations.</li> <li>• Clear frameworks for if / how leagues and festivals interact.</li> <li>• Removal of fines and walkovers, potential sanctions for 'no-shows' as festivals due to impact on other teams.</li> </ul> <p><b>Match Officials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction (where possible), in the level / requirement for officiating.</li> <li>• Predominantly student-led where possible, or volunteer officials.</li> </ul>

	<p><b>Promotion and Relegation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linked to the number of entries and level of competition in each geographic cluster.</li> <li>More fluid structures than the current national programme.</li> </ul> <p><b>Eligibility:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of Eligibility (<a href="#">REG 4</a>) to allow for greater flexibility in students able to compete.</li> <li>Review of requirements to sign up as an institution team and instead explore individual sign up / barbarians style teams.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NGB opportunities to support growth of new / upcoming officials in more relaxed recreational environment.</li> </ul> <p><b>Promotion and Relegation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No formal structures.</li> <li>Competition levels are determined by annual entries.</li> </ul> <p><b>Eligibility:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High flexibility eligibility rules, including a review of <a href="#">REG 4</a> requirements.</li> <li>Mixed, socials or 'barbarians' teams are encouraged.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NGB opportunities to support growth of new / upcoming officials in more relaxed recreational environment.</li> </ul> <p><b>Promotion and Relegation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retained where appropriate in leagues; linked to entries annually within the geographic clusters.</li> </ul> <p><b>Eligibility:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of Eligibility (<a href="#">REG 4</a>) to allow for greater flexibility in students able to compete.</li> <li>Review of requirements to sign up as an institution team and instead explore individual sign up / barbarians style teams.</li> </ul>
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### Section B - National / Performance Competition

This section sets out a series of potential models BUCS could explore for the future shape of the weekly league and knockout programme. The models are intended to provide a framework for discussion and development and are not presented as an exhaustive list of all possible approaches. Instead, they have been designed to illustrate a range of options that could be considered when refreshing or changing the current National competition programme.

	Model B1 – Minimal / No Changes	Model B2 – Enhanced Standards	Model B3 – Conference Wide Competition.	Comments
Overview / Purpose	To provide a national competition pyramid cascading to localised 'conference' competitions. Teams can compete against more localised	To elevate the standards in Model A1 to deliver high quality competition with established links	Restructure of our weekly programme to provide more opportunity for best vs best competition, conference wide	This column outlines some of the key changes that are proposed within each of the model's vs the current

	institutions and earn their way up the pyramid to high performance national competitions.	to performance pathways with a high-profile league programme.	competitions at all levels within the pyramid.	league and knockout programme.
<b>Competition Structure</b>	<p>Sport Specific solutions with the following key principles applied.</p> <p><b>Leagues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Premier Tier competition with National Travel.</li> <li>Tier 1 separates to 5 Conference based leagues (Scottish, Northern, Midlands, Western and South Eastern)</li> <li>Tier 2 and below splits into A and B strands within Conferences to support regionalisation.</li> <li>6 Team Leagues were possible playing twice with 10 fixtures (5x Home, 5x Away).</li> <li>Scheduled between Sep – Apr.</li> </ul> <p><b>Knockouts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Type of competition (National or Conference based) determined by Tier of league competition.</li> <li>Finals of National competitions to take place at BUCS Big Wednesday or equivalent.</li> <li>Finals of Conference competitions to conclude at</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to the Competition Structure in B1, the following would be applied:</p> <p><b>Leagues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Top league(s) in the Premier Tier are aligned with the NGB performance calendar where possible. All other leagues competing Sep-Apr.</li> <li>Aspiration to have a 'National' league at the top of the pyramid for all programmes.</li> <li>Enhanced regulations / Minimum operating standards (MOS) are in place for all National Leagues.</li> </ul> <p><b>Knockouts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aspiration for as many 'standalone' finals as possible, to be played at sport specific arenas.</li> <li>All other National Finals to be played at BUCS Big Wednesday or equivalent.</li> </ul> <p>Examples of the structure, season dates and deadlines can be found in <a href="#">Appendix A</a>.</p>	<p>Changes made to the pyramid to reflect the following:</p> <p><b>Leagues:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Premier Tier competition with 6 teams and National Travel.</li> <li>Tier 1 and below separates to 5 Conference based leagues (Scottish, Northern, Midlands, Western and South Eastern).</li> <li>Tier 2 and below A and B strands are removed with only one league in a Conference at each Tier.</li> <li>9 Team leagues within the conference where possible playing once (4x home and 4x away).</li> <li>Scheduled between Sep – Apr.</li> </ul> <p><b>Knockouts:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Type of competition (National or Conference based) determined by Tier of league competition.</li> <li>Finals of National competitions to take place at BUCS Big Wednesday or equivalent.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Model B2:</b></p> <p>Proposes similar league and knockout structures to Model A, but adds proposal to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aspire to have National leagues as the pinnacle of all programmes.</li> <li>Have enhanced minimum operating standards (MOS) for all those top leagues.</li> <li>Play standalone finals at sport specific venues where possible (away from BUCS Big Wednesday).</li> </ul> <p><b>Model B3:</b></p> <p>Proposed more radical changes to our competition structure and model, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing league sizes at Tier 1 and below to 9 teams with 8 fixtures (vs 6 teams 10 fixtures currently).</li> <li>Removal of A and B regional strands at Tier</li> </ul>

	<p>member delivered Conference Finals event.</p> <p>Examples of the structure, season dates and deadlines can be found in <a href="#">Appendix A</a>.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Finals of Conference competitions to conclude at member delivered Conference Finals event.</li> </ul> <p>Examples of the structure, season dates and deadlines can be found in <a href="#">Appendix A</a>.</p>	<p>2 and below replaced by single leagues per tier.</p>
<b>Governance</b>	<p>To support the competition, the following Governance principles would be applied:</p> <p><b>Rules and Regulations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The current Rules and Regulations would be retained to support the running of the programme.</li> </ul> <p><b>Match Officials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Appendix 5</a> would remain at its current level for match officials.</li> </ul> <p><b>Promotions and Relegations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tier 1 to Premier Tier via a Playoff process.</li> <li>Tier 1 and below via automatic promotion and relegation post season.</li> </ul> <p><b>Eligibility:</b></p>	<p>To support the competition, the following Governance principles would be applied:</p> <p><b>Rules and Regulations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The current Rules and Regulations would be retained to support the running of the programme.</li> <li>Enhanced MOS would be created to drive standards at the performance end of our competition.</li> </ul> <p><b>Match Officials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Appendix 5</a> would remain at its current level for match officials, with the potential exploration of increasing these at the performance end of our competition.</li> </ul> <p><b>Promotions and Relegations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tier 1 to Premier Tier via a Playoff process.</li> </ul>	<p>To support the competition, the following Governance principles would be applied:</p> <p><b>Rules and Regulations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The current Rules and Regulations would be retained to support the running of the programme.</li> </ul> <p><b>Match Officials:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">Appendix 5</a> would remain at its current level for match officials.</li> </ul> <p><b>Promotions and Relegations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tier 1 to Premier Tier via a Playoff process.</li> <li>Tier 1 and below via automatic promotion and relegation post season.</li> </ul> <p><b>Eligibility:</b></p>	<p><b>Model B2:</b></p> <p>Retains large amounts of overlap with the current model, but with the following additions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhanced MOS's for National League sports.</li> <li>Potential increasing of official's requirements for National Leagues.</li> <li>Potentially adds a cap on the number of teams an institution can enter into the programme.</li> </ul> <p><b>Model B3:</b></p> <p>Retains large amounts of overlap with the current model, but with the following addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potentially adds a cap on the number of teams an institution can enter into the programme.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As per our current regulations for individuals.</li> <li>Could explore a cap / removal of cap for number of teams in a competition / tier.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tier 1 and below via automatic promotion and relegation post season.</li> </ul> <b>Eligibility:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As per our current regulations.</li> <li>Could explore a cap / removal of cap for number of teams in a competition / tier.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As per our current regulations.</li> <li>Could explore a cap / removal of cap for number of teams in a competition / tier.</li> </ul>	
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### Section C – Key, Acronyms etc.

To support with understanding of our current rules, regulations and processes, a key / summary of those referenced within this document is below:

**General Regulation 4** – Covers the Individual Eligibility requirements a student needs to meet to compete in any BUCS competition (league, knockout or event). This includes things like the level of qualification they are studying and the number of credits they are completing.

**General Regulation Appendix 5** – This is our Match Officials Requirements, which breaks down the quantity and qualification level appointed officials need to be to officiate a BUCS fixture. These typically vary by Tier and have higher requirements at the Premier Tier then they typically do at Tier 2 and below.

Appendix A

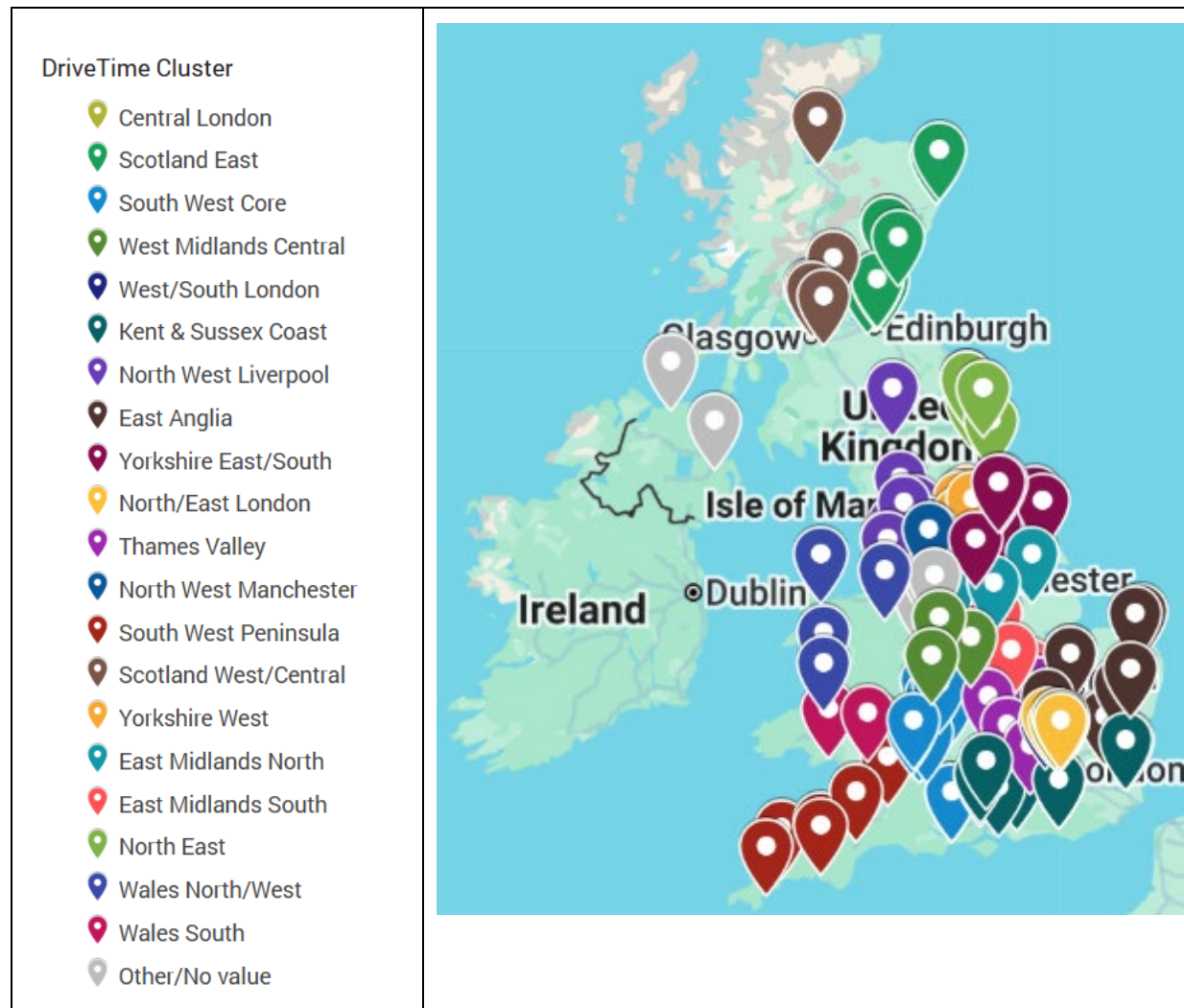
Section A – Model A1

Geographical Clusters

We could utilise current Regions and Nations borders for the new competitions, or explore other methods of ‘grouping’ institutions such as smaller ‘sub regions’.



Another route we could use to 'cluster' our member institutions is by distance / estimated drive time:



### Season Dates and Deadlines

Tier	24-Sep	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	05-Nov	12-Nov	19-Nov	26-Nov	03-Dec	10-Dec	17-Dec	07-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	04-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	04-Mar	11-Mar	18-Mar	25-Mar	01-Apr
Regional Cluster			Friendly Week	Friendly Week	L1	R 64	L2	R 32	L3	R 16	L4	Friendly Week				Friendly Week	L5	L6	QF	L7	SF	L8	Friendly Week	League Deadline	F	Friendly Week

### Section A - Model A2

#### Season Dates

Tier	24-Sep	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	05-Nov	12-Nov	19-Nov	26-Nov	03-Dec	10-Dec	17-Dec	07-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	04-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	04-Mar	11-Mar	18-Mar	25-Mar	01-Apr
Regional Cluster			Friendly Week	Friendly Week	Festival #1	Friendly Week	Friendly Week	Friendly Week	Friendly Week	Festival #2	Friendly Week	Friendly Week				Friendly Week	Friendly Week	Festival #3	Friendly Week	Friendly Week	Festival #4	Friendly Week	Friendly Week	Final's Festival	Friendly Week	Friendly Week

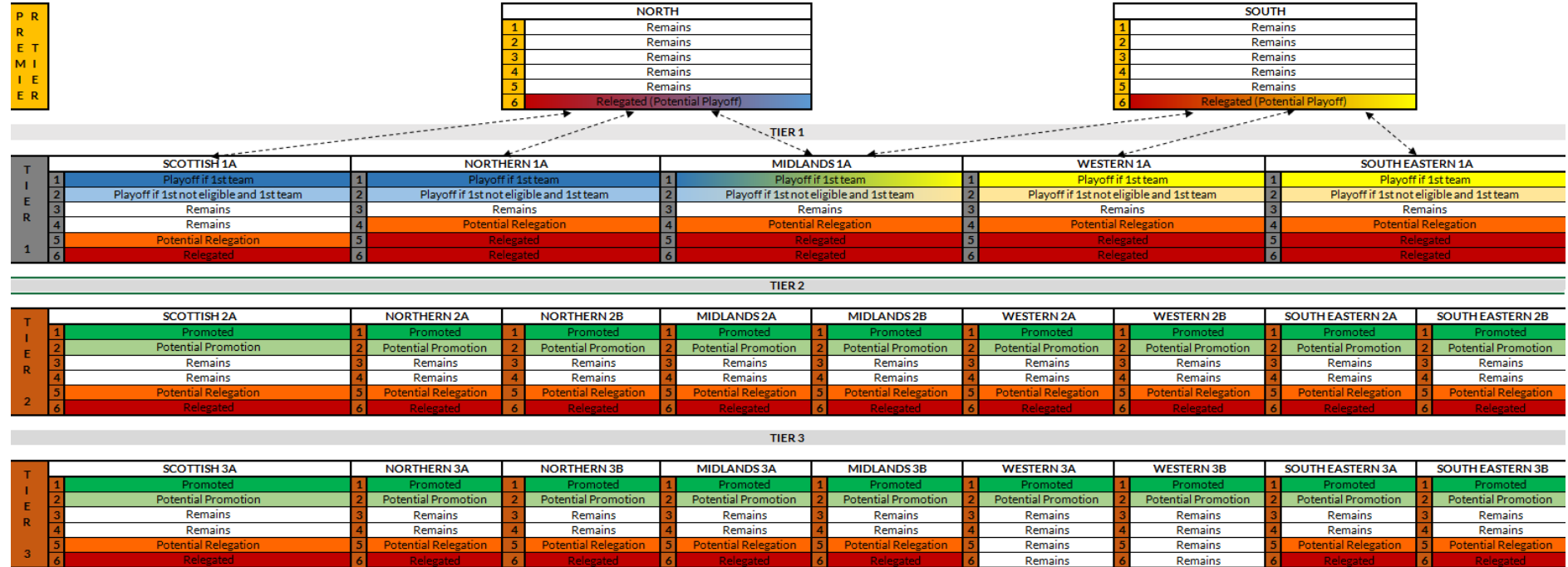
### Section A - Model A3

#### Season Dates

Tier	24-Sep	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	05-Nov	12-Nov	19-Nov	26-Nov	03-Dec	10-Dec	17-Dec	07-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	04-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	04-Mar	11-Mar	18-Mar	25-Mar	01-Apr
Regional Cluster			Friendly Week	Friendly Week	Festival #1	Friendly Week	Festival #2	L1	L2	L3	L4	Friendly Week				Friendly Week	Friendly Week	L5	L6	L7	L8	Friendly Week	Friendly Week	Final's Festival	Friendly Week	Friendly Week

## Section B – Model B1

### League and Knockout Structure



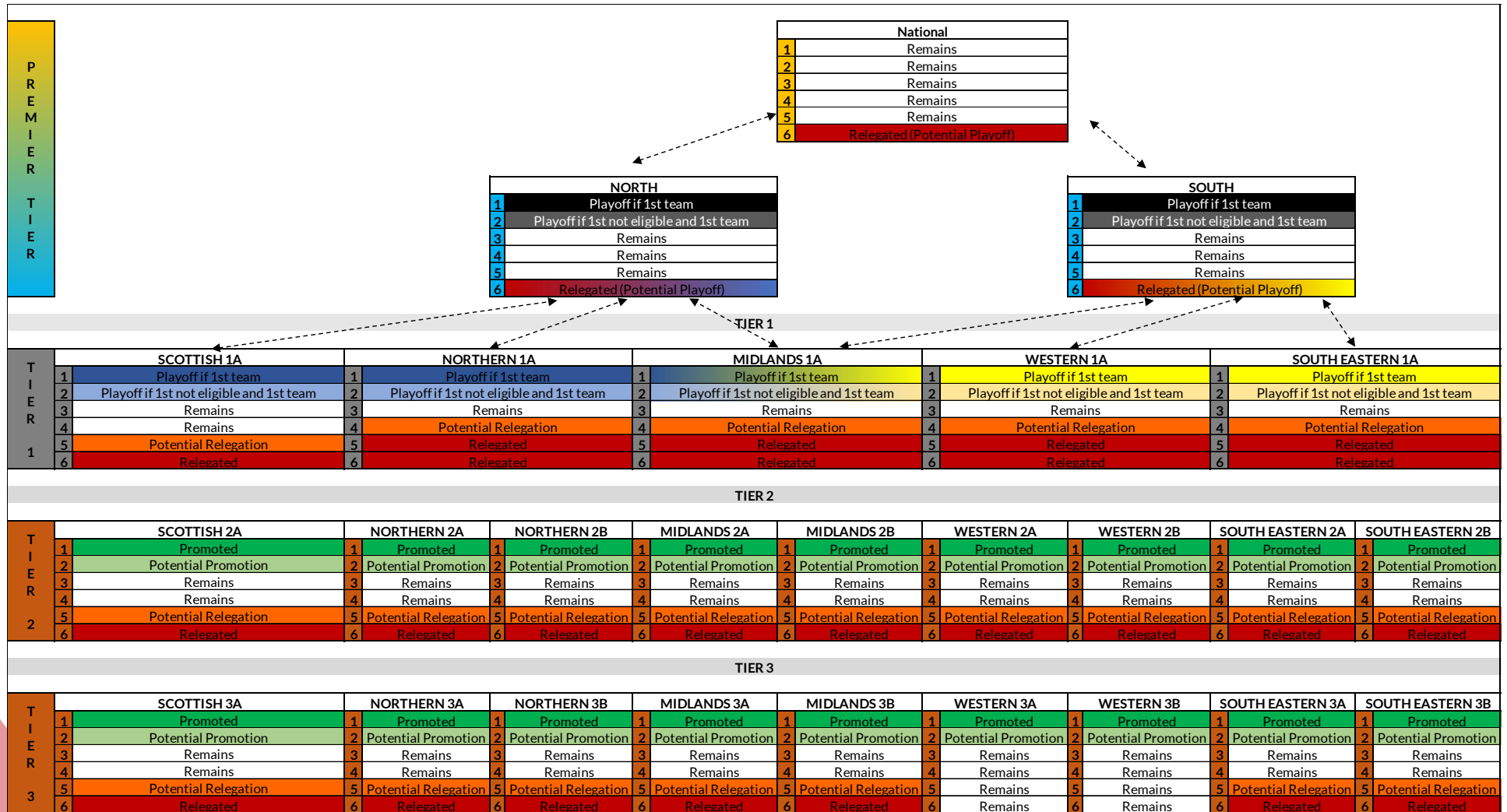
Key: Gold = National Championship, Silver = National Trophy, Bronze = Conference Cup / Trophy / Shield.

### Season Dates and Deadlines

Tier	24-Sep	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	05-Nov	12-Nov	19-Nov	26-Nov	03-Dec	10-Dec	17-Dec	07-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	04-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	04-Mar	11-Mar	18-Mar	25-Mar	01-Apr	08-Apr	15-Apr	22-Apr	29-Apr	06-May	
PREM(NORTH/SOUTH)			L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9						L10	League Deadline		R 16	QF		SF		F	Playoff 1			Playoff 2	Playoff 3		Playoff Deadline
TIER 1			L1	L2	R 64	L3	R 32	L4	R 16	L5						L6	L7	L8	QF	L9	SF	L10	League Deadline	F	Playoff 1			Playoff 2	Playoff 3		Playoff Deadline	
TIER 2 & BELOW			L1	L2	R 64	L3	R 32	L4	R 16	L5						L6	L7	L8	QF	L9	SF	L10	F	League Deadline								

## Section B – Model B2

### League and Knockout Structure



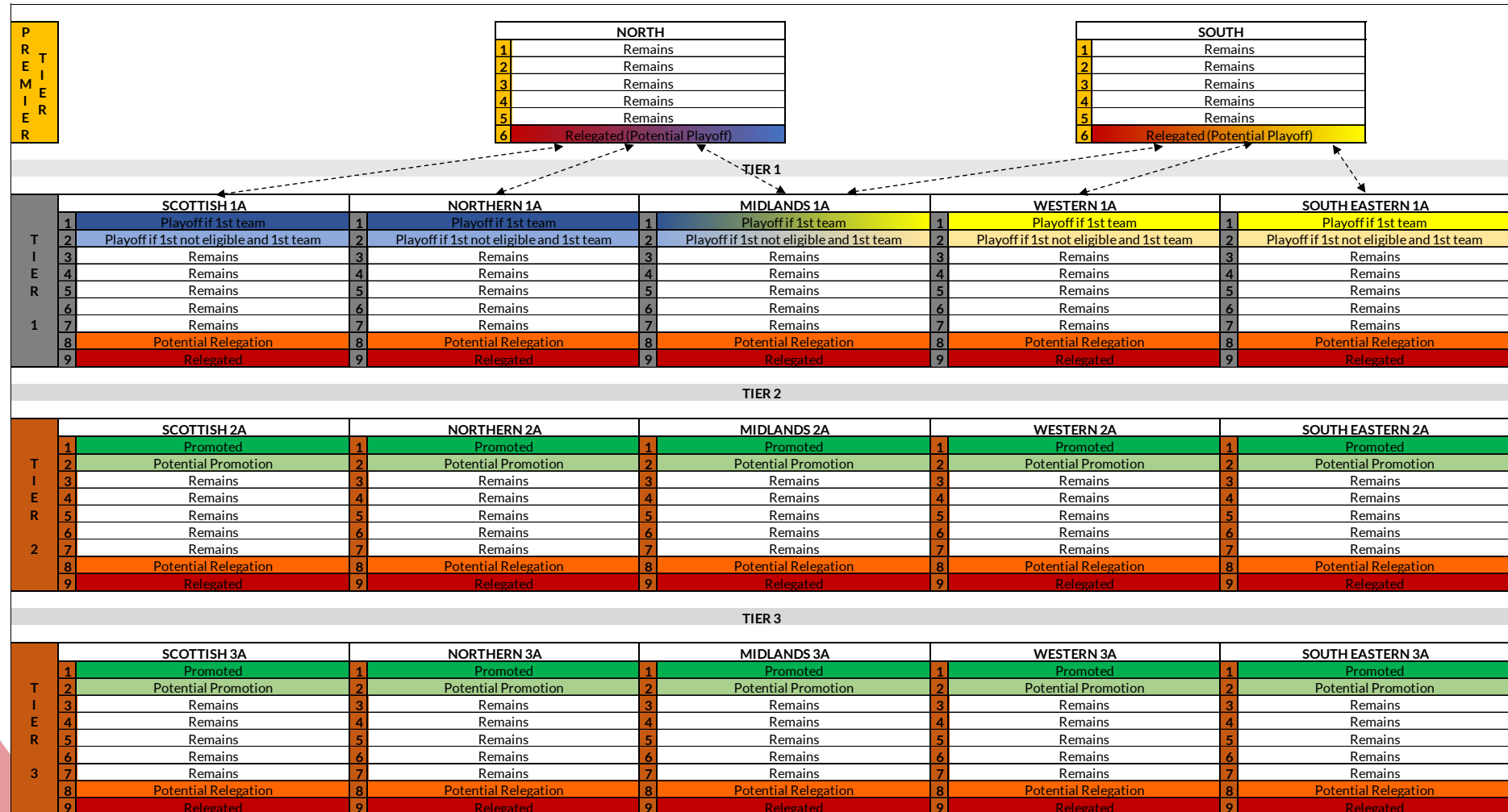
Key: Gold = National Championship, Blue = National Vase, Silver = National Trophy, Bronze = Conference Cup / Trophy / Shield.

### Season Dates and Deadlines

Tier	24-Sep	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	05-Nov	12-Nov	19-Nov	26-Nov	03-Dec	10-Dec	17-Dec	07-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	04-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	04-Mar	11-Mar	18-Mar	25-Mar	01-Apr	08-Apr	15-Apr	22-Apr	29-Apr	06-May	13-May	20-May	27-May
PREM (NATIONAL)			L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9						L10	League Deadline		R 16	QF		SF		F			Potential Playoff National vs N1/S1						Playoff Deadline
PREM (NORTH/SOUTH)			L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9						L10	League Deadline		R 16	QF		SF		F	Playoff North 1 vs South 1		Potential Playoff National vs N1/S1		Playoff 1	Playoff 2	Playoff 3		Playoff Deadline
TIER 1				L1	L2	R 64	L3	R 32	L4	R 16	L5					L6	L7	L8	QF	L9	SF	L10		League Deadline	F				Playoff 1	Playoff 2	Playoff 3		Playoff Deadline	
TIER 2 & BELOW				L1	L2	R 64	L3	R 32	L4	R 16	L5					L6	L7	L8	QF	L9	SF	L10	F		League Deadline									

## Section B – Model B3

### League and Knockout Structure



### Season Dates and Deadlines

Tier	24-Sep	01-Oct	08-Oct	15-Oct	22-Oct	29-Oct	05-Nov	12-Nov	19-Nov	26-Nov	03-Dec	10-Dec	17-Dec	07-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	04-Feb	11-Feb	18-Feb	25-Feb	04-Mar	11-Mar	18-Mar	25-Mar	01-Apr	08-Apr	15-Apr	22-Apr	29-Apr	06-May	
PREM (NORTH/SOUTH)			L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	L8	L9						L10	League Deadline		R 16	QF		SF		F	Playoff 1			Playoff 2	Playoff 3		Playoff Deadline
TIER 1					L1	R 64	L2	R 32	L3	R 16	L4						L5	L6	QF	L7	SF	L8		League Deadline	F	Playoff 1			Playoff 2	Playoff 3		Playoff Deadline
TIER 2 & BELOW					L1	R 64	L2	R 32	L3	R 16	L4						L5	L6	QF	L7	SF	L8	F		League Deadline							