

GOLF PREMIER LEAGUES - SPORT REVIEW PROPOSAL



PREPARED BY M. Bridge on behalf of Golf SAG+ | October 2019

CYCLE TWO

SUMMARY

This document outlines changes to the current BUCS Golf league competition that will allow for the development of a more competitive league structure. A proposal is made for the creation of two new Premier leagues that encompass the whole of the UK. The proposal is designed to create the basis for a highly competitive top tier league competition offering.

The proposed changes would develop the top level of BUCS Golf leagues into a structure which would support the development of the best student golfers, attract the best British students to attend UK institutions and potentially attract more international students to study and compete at UK Institutions (Type 3-5 student-athletes).

1. INTRODUCTION

Student golf outside of the NCAA competition in the United States is not well recognised, this is exemplified in the Arnold Palmer Cup Teams¹ largely consisting of students studying at US institutions with the exception of the places reserved for the winners of the annual R&A Foundation Scholars tournament. This lack of awareness and recognition is in part historic but also is the result of the competition format and standard being lower in other countries compared to the US. As well as the lack of international recognition this results in a talent drain with golf's best young players being drawn away from UK and European universities by the lure of the glow of the NCAA.

However, many of these student golfers do not win a place at the top NCAA Division 1 universities instead competing in the lower divisions where they are often seen as a player there to win points rather than to be developed to be the best player that they can be. Members of the SAG, England Golf and The R&A have discussed this player drain, and feedback from players suggests that it is the level of weekly competition that is not as high in the BUCS leagues compared to the NCAA leagues. This, along with the great number of World ranking points available is a major factor in the choice that students make to go to the US, particularly for female golfers (In 2018 this constituted 19 male and 12 female Type 5 student-athletes from the UK & EU).

2. BACKGROUND AND PROPOSALS

PURPOSE

The purpose of this proposal is to develop a highly competitive performance offering within BUCS Golf for type 4 & 5 student-athletes. It is hoped that the proposal will help BUCS institutions to recruit more type 4 & 5 golfers enhancing the standard of golf played within BUCS competitions, leading to them becoming better recognised internationally.

- To revise the structure of the top tier of BUCS league competition so that it is fit for purpose with competitive matches every week.

This proposal has no effect on teams below the current Premier Leagues or Tier one in Scotland

BUCS Team Matchplay leagues

BUCS Golf is currently organised into Team Matchplay leagues and individual strokeplay tournaments, The BUCS Golf Tour. The Tour is an individual competition with students competing over 3-4 days with the lowest overall score over 54 or 72 holes winning.

The BUCS leagues use a matchplay format where a student competes against an opponent to win holes by taking the least number of shots on a particular hole i.e. if a student takes 3 shots to put the ball in the hole and their opponent take 4 then the student wins the hole. Over 18 holes the student who wins the most holes wins a point for their team. Teams consist of male and female golfers with six team members in the current

¹ The Arnold Palmer Cup is an annual International Competition held between United States qualified students and the rest of the World. It is seen as being the pinnacle of student representative golf beyond that of events organised by FISU.

Northern and Southern Premier Leagues and ten in the Scottish Tier 1 league. These three leagues collectively constitute the highest level of performance and feed the BUCS Team Championship knockout competition.

The season is currently structured as shown below with the BUCS leagues taking place through the winter months where weather can have an adverse effect on fixture completion and league outcome.

September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	
Strokeplay events		Team Matchplay leagues				Strokeplay events & Championship Knockout Rounds		Team Matchplay Championship Finals

The current format of the BUCS Golf Leagues presents the three problems outlined below which the proposal provides a solution for.

Team size

A number of BUCS institutions have strong golf performance programmes (e.g. Stirling, Exeter, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Northumbria). At premier league institutions this results in many type 4 players having to play in lower leagues as the size of the teams is limited to six players and an institution may not have more than one team in a premier league. In the Scottish Tier 1 league this problem is lessened through the use of teams consisting of 10 players and 8 players in Tiers below this.

Problem 1:

Team size at the current highest level of the BUCS Golf Leagues does not allow all type 4 golfers at an institution to compete.

League Calendar

The current premier league season runs from mid-October until the end of February which results in matches being attempted to be played in poor weather conditions after the Christmas break with resultant golf course closures and the use of temporary greens required. This can result in the outcome of matches being determined more by the weather than the play. There are also regularly fixtures that are not fulfilled by the league deadline due to weather.

This problem is largely the result of these leagues playing home and away matches and whilst there are some spare weeks in the schedule these are often lost to weather themselves. The Scottish Tier 1 league only has one fixture against each team allowing them to largely schedule the entire league before the Christmas holidays and to avoid the worst winter weather in January and February.

Problem 2:

A crowded fixture calendar and inclement weather has the potential to alter the outcome of the BUCS leagues and results in fixture rescheduling or cancellation each year.

League Structure

The top tiers of the matchplay leagues are currently made up of the Northern and Southern Premier leagues in England and Wales and Scottish Tier 1. The Scottish Tier 1 league merits at least the same premier league status as the English and Welsh leagues with many international squad players at Universities in this league.

In addition, the current league structure typically results in a large number of competitive mismatches in the Southern Premier and Scottish Tier 1 leagues with the Northern Premier league being more evenly matched. This mismatched competition reduces the weekly competitiveness that we know that type 4 & 5 student-athletes want from their competition and currently seek overseas in the NCAA. An analysis of Premier League and Scottish Tier 1 results over the last three seasons show that the average points differential in matches is

2.9 and 3.75 (corrected for team size) respectively out of a possible total difference of 6 indicating that these leagues suffer from numerous mismatches in competitive standard.

Problem 3:

The highest levels of the BUCS leagues are currently too weak with too many competitive mismatches occurring and the desire for weekly competitive fixtures from students not being met.

New Premier League Proposal

This proposal is for the creation of two new Premier Leagues that encompass the whole of the UK. These new leagues (Premier League North and Premier League South) will start in 2020/21. Teams in these leagues will be drawn from the existing Premier Leagues and Tier 1 in Scotland with league entry to be determined by geographical location and performance².

Following guidance from the BUCS Office and the Sport Review Implementation Group, we will be following a three-stage process to populate the new league structure.

- Firstly, we would invite members to evaluate this proposal on its merits, and the benefits to student-athletes that are outlined within this document.
- If following member feedback, the proposal is approved to move to implementation by National Competitions Group, we would like to invite all teams in the current Premier and Tier 1 leagues to express whether they would like to be considered for the new Premier leagues. Teams expressing an interest will then be invited to a league meeting, hosted by BUCS, to discuss in further detail the structure and potential requirements associated to the league.
- Finally, if there is expression of interest from enough teams to facilitate the new league, then the BUCS Office and the Golf SAG will utilise a framework of criteria, based on discussions at the league meeting, to select teams for the new league. These criteria will be presented at the initial league meeting, and there will be an opportunity for all interested parties to provide feedback on these. Please note, in line with the aims of creating a competitive structure, a prominent part of the selection criteria will be performance-based.

The new leagues will incorporate institutions from across the UK for the first time and so travel distance for fixtures will be used to assign teams to either the North or South league in order to minimise travel for institutions.

In order to minimise disruption to student academic study, along with the restructuring of the leagues the new Premier League fixtures will move from a default Wednesday afternoon to a Sunday, although institutions may request for their home fixtures to be on Wednesdays in the first season of the new leagues where difficulty in securing a weekend venue occurs³. This change has already been adopted by the Scottish Conference and has proven very successful. Playing at weekends will also allow institutions to play back-to-back matches over a weekend against geographically close institutions, saving travel costs. Where both teams agreed, playing fixtures on a Wednesday would still be an option.

Current Premier League teams contain 6 players with Tier One in Scotland having 10 players. It is proposed that the new Premier Leagues will consist of teams of 8 players striking a balance between each of the current leagues. This change in team size will only occur in the new Premier Leagues. For some current premier league universities this expansion may present a difficulty in the first season as they look to develop additional squad size but at the same time this ensures that the best Scottish university players are still in the highest level of competition.

² Further information on the structural change is provided in Appendix A. Consultation about, and development of, a Golf Super League will be covered in a future competition review cycle if appropriate.

³ It is expected that in the second season of the league all teams will have had enough time to negotiate a weekend fixture venue.

The creation of these new leagues will on average result in an institutional cost saving in Matchplay League and Championship costs. Full details of these structural changes are associated costings are given in Appendices A and B.

Summary Proposal:

Two new BUCS Premier leagues of seven teams of eight players for the 2020/21 season.

Premier league teams will play each other once in the league season with home and away

3. STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The proposal outlined in this document comes under the Inter University Competition and Performance strands of the BUCS Strategy 2017-21. It is focused on creating world-class competition at the top end of BUCS golf competitions.

- Inter University Competition – The proposed changes to the competitive structures for BUCS Golf with the incorporation of Scottish team into premier leagues will allow students to clearly identify the premier level competition as the pinnacle of BUCS League golf. In doing this it will be meeting vision aim 1 – structure of this strand of the BUCS Strategy 2017-21.
- Performance Sport – Vision aim 3 –the performance sport strategy strand seeks to provide opportunities for students to compete at the highest level of sport whilst studying at university. The change proposed here will increase the standard of competition in the upper Tier of the BUCS Golf Leagues. It is hoped that this may lead to increase selection of more UK based students for the International Palmer Cup team and open up the possibility of future UK student selection for the Walker Cup⁴. With the increased competitiveness of the new Premier Leagues and potential subsequent retention of type 5 golfers in Europe and BUCS competition the playing standard in both BUCS stroke play and match play league golf competitions will be increased something that the Palmer Cup selectors see as being important in selection.⁵
- Profile and Influence – Vision Aim 2 – Commercial; Increasing the standard of competition in the BUCS Leagues will potentially make them a more attractive sponsorship proposition to golfing companies as they will be accessing the top students golfers in the UK and this will allow BUCS and the SAG to explore this. This would allow for further improvements in the quality of the offer provided to students.

4. CONSULTATION AND SUPPORT

This proposal has been developed through the Golf SAG and as such has support of the members of the group which includes, The R&A and England Golf.

- The R&A Golf Development Committee already provide substantial monetary and in-kind support for the BUCS Golf Tour. A discussion on the future development of student competition took place at the past meeting between The R&A and the HE institutions it supports⁶. The proposals presented here align with the outcomes of that discussion.
- Consultation with staff from both the men’s (Talent Pathway Manager) and women’s (Performance Lead) performance pathways in England Golf has taken place and feedback received has helped to shape this proposal. A key priority for England Golf is that student golfers would be exposed to a high level of competition every week. The provision of a gap in the BUCS schedule in January and February was highlighted as being important for national squad training camps.
- Feedback for the Scottish Golf Performance Group has been received from a member of the SAG who sits on this group.

⁴ The Walker Cup is the amateur golf equivalent of the Ryder Cup with the difference being that only British & Irish players compete against the US team rather than all European players.

⁵ Dean Robertson (Stirling, is a member of the Palmer Cup International team selection committee and had provided this feedback)

⁶ UK institutions receiving a current institutional grant from The R&A: Birmingham, Bournemouth, UCLAN, Durham, Exeter, Hartpury, Loughborough, Northumbria, St Andrews, Stirling, Strathclyde, Ulster, UHI.

- At the BUCS Golf Tour Final in April 2019 in which seventy-two type 4 & 5 golfers compete all participants were asked to complete a questionnaire around development of the BUCS leagues. The following responses (45% response rate) around the proposed changes were received:

Proposal element	For	Undecided	Against
2 new premier leagues of 7 teams	64%	25%	11%
8 Players per team	64%	25%	11%
One fixture against each opposition per season	64%	29%	7%
Fixtures at weekends	64%	25%	11%

It is evident from the responses of the Type 4 and 5 student golfers, who these changes are targeted at that there is support for the changes. This provides a strong rationale for adopting them.

- Feedback from Sport Review Cycle One indicated that there were some concerns around playing at weekends, playing each team once in the new league and the increase in team size for some English and Welsh institutions. From the student feedback at the BUCS Tour Finals it would seem that these are not fears shared by the golfers at whom this proposal is aimed. There were also a number of supportive comments from students about weekend fixtures reducing the need to miss degree classes. However, in the first season of the new premier leagues teams will be allowed to opt to have their home matches on Wednesdays where there is difficulty in securing a weekend venue⁷.
- The proposal submitted in cycle one of the Sport Review was split into three separate proposals which gained between 71 and 75% support from the consulted member institutions. Based upon this considerable support and the feedback from the institutions parts of the current proposal have been amended.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

In reshaping the leagues and the teams that play in the proposed top tier it is important to consider the cost implications for BUCS, its members and for students in terms of travel time if fixtures are spread over a wider area. A detailed analysis of the cost implications for the change is provide in Appendix B with the outcomes summarised here. The savings presented are based upon the adoption of all three proposals put forward above.

BUCS MEMBER COSTS - £89 SAVING

The data presented here represent the average change in cost to an institution competing in the new premier league structure. For institutions below the new premier leagues costs would remain the same as 2019/20.

- Reduced number of matches and change in team size – Institution saving of £85 per year**

For English and Welsh BUCS members there will be a reduction in the number of fixtures played compared to the current premier leagues. For Scottish institutions there will be no impact upon the number of fixtures but there will be a reduction in team size in the new league structure that will reduce fixture costs. Taken together these amount to an average institutional saving of £163 per year.

- Travel and accommodation costs – Institution increase of £111 per year**

With the new premier league structure incorporating all UK universities, there will be some change in distance that each institution has to travel for league fixtures. The overall change results in an average saving of £76 in travel costs per institution. With the new Premier League fixtures taking place on a weekend schedule⁸, allowing for the option to play two fixtures against opponents located near to each other, there is further scope to reduce expenditure on travel. As an example, a Scottish university could choose to travel to the

⁷ It is expected that in the second season of the league all teams will have had enough time to negotiate a weekend fixture venue.

⁸ Universities would be scheduled to play on Sundays but could move to a Saturday if requested at start of the year or to a Wednesday if agreed by both teams as for current fixture changes in BUCS regulations.

North East of England to play Durham and Northumbria on the same weekend or an English university could play St. Andrews and Edinburgh in the same weekend. The forecast saving on travel is offset by an average increase of £175 in overnight accommodation costs ahead of fixtures that are too far to travel to on the day of play and for the central venue for the Championship knockout rounds.

- **Student time commitment**

The changes in travel distances and overnight accommodation needs also has an associated time cost for students. This is offset by the reduction in the overall number of fixtures and if a university decides to play two opponents in the same weekend when travelling this would again reduce the time commitment. It is also important to consider that the BUCS research on student-athlete types 4 & 5 whom this proposal is aimed at were identified as having no issues with committing the necessary time travel for fixtures.

- **Knockout fixture costs – Institution saving of £115**

With the proposed change to the entry to the BUCS Championship from a round of 16 to the top four from each proposed premier league entering the quarter finals and all rounds through to the final being played over three days at a neutral venue there will be an average reduction in knockout fixture costs for institutions.

BUCS costs - £1,350 increase

The costs presented here have been calculated from 2017-18 costs of running the central venue for the Championship for the current two days of competition. The increase in the use of this central venue for a further day is estimated to increase BUCS costs by £1,100. This consists of increases of £1000 in venue hire, £100 in official's costs and staff expenses and accommodation of £250. In addition to this monetary cost there would be an additional day of BUCS events staff time at the venue.

This costs increase could be offset by an increase in the entry fee to premier league institutions (increase of ~£110) and/or the allocation of additional funds from The R&A grant to the Championship knockout stages. How this will be addressed will be confirmed during the implementation phase which would follow the successful adoption of this proposal.

6. WIDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The development of a world-class offering from BUCS for golf would have a wider impact upon the game within the United Kingdom.

- With league competition ending earlier there would be provision for a clear window for overseas tournaments in the new Europe wide R&A Student Tour. These events are currently mixed in with the BUCS league weeks and will result in the best players playing overseas and missing some matches in 2019/20 if league fixtures cannot be rearranged.
- A highly competitive BUCS golf competition would increase the awareness of the BUCS brand globally and the offering of high-performance competitive sport with UK institutions. With increased awareness key title sponsors for the BUC golf competitions could be sought and there would be greater chance of selection in the Arnold Palmer Cup teams for UK based students.
- The development of a highly competitive programme would also provide an alternative to studying in the US and playing lower division NCAA golf for students that do not receive an offer to play at an NCAA division one college.
- The improved competitive golf offering may help institutions to recruit international students who are attracted to the high-quality education offering in the UK but currently choose the United States as a destination as it better meets their golfing aspirations. This coupled with BUCS university dual-career pathways will allow students to gain a good UK degree and develop their high level of golf achieving world ranking points in the UK whilst doing so.

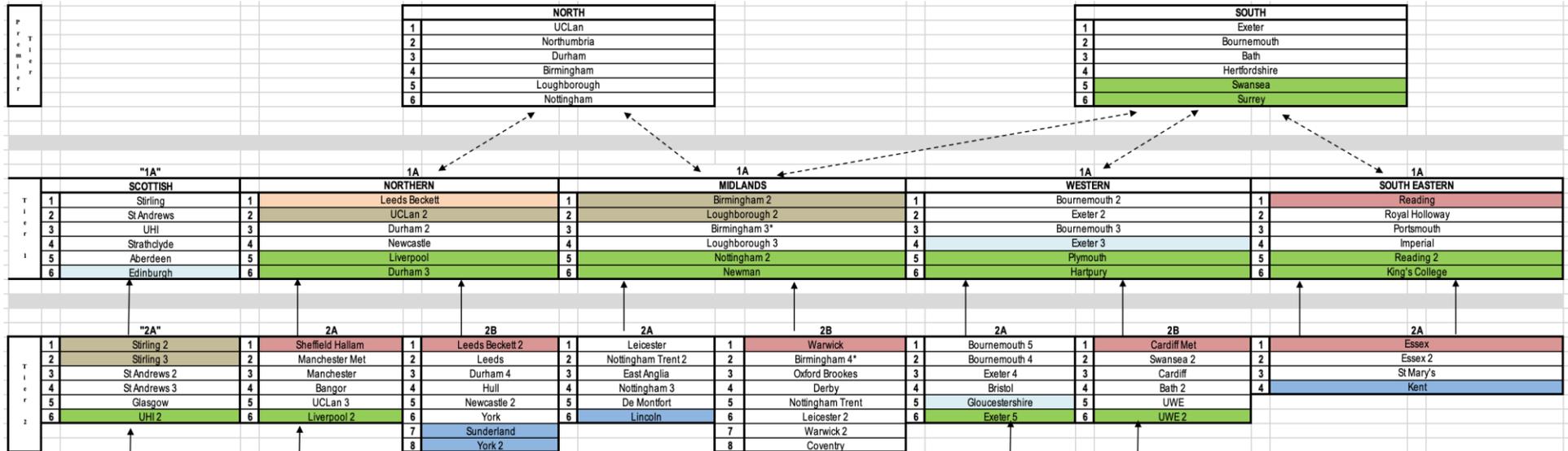
7. CONCLUSION

There is a clear need to revise the competitive league structure at the top of the BUCS Golf in order to develop a world-class competitive student sport offer. This restructuring will meet the playing and development needs of types 4 - 5 student athletes providing them with competitive golf of a high standard every week. This will be achieved through the adoption of this proposal.

For any technical questions about this proposal please contact Matt Bridge, Chair of the Golf SAG m.bridge@bham.ac.uk

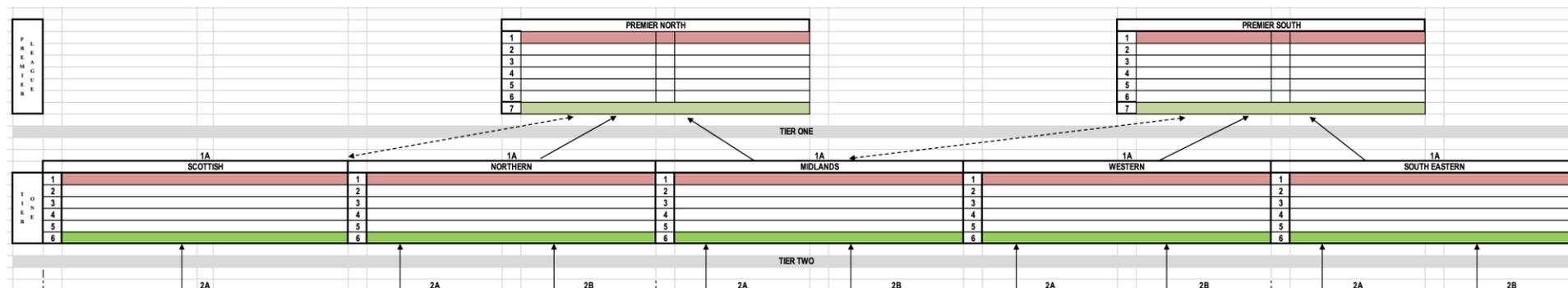
8. APPENDIX A – Restructure of BUCS top tier leagues

The current 2019/20 league structure of top three tiers of the BUCS Team Matchplay Golf is shown below.



There are currently 6 teams in each of the 3 'top' leagues – Premier North, Premier South and Scottish Tier One (1A). These three leagues have been selected to form the basis for the two new 2020/21 Premier Leagues as they represent the highest level of performance in the current league structure. Teams from these leagues enter the BUCS Team Championship and the Scottish Tie 1 league is a premier league in all but name which teams from this league regularly winning the Championship.

The proposed change for the 2020/21 season is to form two premier leagues each consisting of 7 teams selected on merit from these existing top leagues. This would result in the following league structures at the top two levels.



These leagues would be constituted for 2020/21 through the following process.

Following guidance from the BUCS Office and the Sport Review Implementation Group, we will be following a three-stage process to populate the new league structure.

- Firstly, we would invite members to evaluate this proposal on its merits, and the benefits to student-athletes that are outlined within this document.
- If following member feedback, the proposal is approved to move to implementation by National Competitions Group, we would like to invite all teams in the current Premier and Tier 1 leagues to express whether they would like to be considered for the new Premier leagues. Teams expressing an interest will then be invited to a league meeting, hosted by BUCS, to discuss in further detail the structure and potential requirements associated to the league.
- Finally, if there is expression of interest from enough teams to facilitate the new league, then the BUCS Office and the Golf SAG will utilise a framework of criteria, based on discussions at the league meeting, to select teams for the new league. These criteria will be presented at the initial league meeting, and there will be an opportunity for all interested parties to provide feedback on these. Please note, in line with the aims of creating a competitive structure, a prominent part of the selection criteria will be performance-based.

Northern Premier (7 teams)

Top 4 from current Scottish 1A

2 of the top 4 most Northern teams from the 19/20 Premier North

Northern most team finishing 1st or 2nd in a round robin playoff between the 5th placed teams in each of the 2019/20 Premier South, Premier North and Scottish Tier 1 leagues. This would take place under BUCS Regulation 13.5.4

Southern Premier (7 teams)

Top 4 from current Premier South

2 of the top 4 most Southern teams from the 19/20 Premier North

Southern most team finishing 1st or 2nd in a round robin playoff between the 5th placed teams in each of the 2019/20 Premier South, Premier North and Scottish Tier 1 leagues. This would take place under BUCS Regulation 13.5.4

There would be no promotion from Tier 1 leagues (Tier 2 in Scotland) to the new Premier Leagues at the end of the 2019/20 season.

Teams finishing 6th in the 2019/20 premier leagues and Scottish Tier 1 would be relegated along with the 5th placed team from these leagues that did not qualify for the 2020/21 Premier Leagues in the process detailed above.

All promotion and relegation beyond this would use the current [BUCS REG 13](#) provision and as detailed in the section of [Appendix 10](#) covering the implementation of these regulations in golf in non-Scottish leagues as an exemption due to the differences in league tiering between Scotland and England & Wales will no longer be required with the changes to the leagues for 2020/21.

With the incorporation of the Scottish institutions into the new Premier Leagues the leagues below this in Scotland will start with Scottish Tier 1A in 2020/21. This will necessitate a change in the Tier level of the current Scottish leagues to align them with the English and Welsh leagues. Once the 2019/20 season has concluded, the BUCS Competition Team will be able to discern how the lower Scottish tiers will be populated.

Promotion and Relegation from 2019/20

For the 2019/20 season onwards promotion and relegation would work as per the current [BUCS Reg 13](#) and as detailed in the section of [Appendix 10](#), as the differences in league tiering between Scotland and England & Wales will no longer be required. Where more than two teams from Tier 1 are eligible for promotion to one of the Premier Leagues a playoff would take place. The winning team would then playoff for promotion against the 7th place premier league team that their Tier 1 league feeds. This process is designed to ensure that the competitiveness of the Premier Leagues remains as high as possible, whilst still providing a promotion route to institutional first teams.

For a team winning their Tier 1 league promotion to the appropriate premier league would be decided by the existing provisions made in the BUCS general regulations with Scotland, Northern and Midlands 1A feeding the North and Midlands, Western, South Eastern feeding the South.

Changes in the BUCS Golf Calendar

The revised premier league structure would result in the following changes to the BUCS Golf season for Premier League teams from 2019/20 onwards.

Year	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April
2018/19	Strokeplay events	Premier Matchplay leagues					Strokeplay events & Championship Knockout rounds	Matchplay Championship Finals
2019/20	Strokeplay events	Premier Matchplay leagues			Player development window/National Squad training camps		Strokeplay events	Matchplay Championship Finals

9. APPENDIX B – Costings of the proposal

The following costings have been calculated using information supplied by two English and two Scottish institutions on the current costs associated with fulfilling their league fixtures. The results of the 2017/18 league season have been used to model the change in costs that would occur at an institutional level with member institution names being anonymised in the table.

The change in costs associated with league fixture venue hire is based upon current English and Welsh premier league institutions changing to alternate 3/2 home fixture years and an increase in team size for these institutions. The inclusion of a reduced team size for Scottish institutions is also calculated. A 2018/19 base match of cost of £120 was used for English and Welsh institution and £178 for Scottish institutions, the difference resulting from the different team size in each of these leagues in 2018/19

Mileage calculations were based upon the current home venue of each institution and allowed for a cost of £0.40 per mile for two vehicles. Accommodation costs were calculated based upon any venue that required a drive longer than 2.5 hours would necessitate an overnight stay.

The table below show the modelling of the change in costs for BUCS members who would move to the new premier leagues, a red number indicates a saving from the current structure.

Institution	Old League	New League	2018/19 Mileage	2019/20 Mileage	Travel Cost @40ppm for two vehicles	Change in League Tee bookings	Change in Knockout tee bookings	Accommodation costs	Total Cost
E&W 1	Premier North	Premier North	635	493	-£113.60	-£120.00	-£120.00	£200.00	-£153.60
E&W 2	Premier North	Premier North	719	490	-£183.20	-£120.00	-£120.00	£200.00	-£223.20
SCOT 1	Scottish 1A	Premier North	228	316	£70.40	-£106.80	-£106.80	£200.00	£56.80
SCOT 2	Scottish 1A	Premier North	236	315.5	£63.60	£106.80	-£106.80	£200.00	£263.60
SCOT 3	Scottish 1A	Premier North	284	331.5	£38.00	-£106.80	-£106.80	£100.00	-£75.60
SCOT 4	Scottish 1A	Premier North	501.5	625.5	£99.20	£106.80	-£106.80	£0.00	£99.20
SCOT 5	Scottish 1A	Premier North	257	315	£46.40	-£106.80	-£106.80	£200.00	£32.80
E&W 3	Premier South	Premier South	425	312	-£90.40	-£120.00	-£120.00	£200.00	-£130.40
E&W 4	Premier North	Premier South	654	328.5	-£260.40	-£120.00	-£120.00	£200.00	-£300.40
E&W 5	Premier South	Premier South	472	371	-£80.80	-£120.00	-£120.00	£200.00	-£120.80
E&W 6	Premier South	Premier South	670	426	-£195.20	-£120.00	-£120.00	£300.00	-£135.20
E&W 7	Premier South	Premier South	630	382.5	-£198.00	-£120.00	-£120.00	£100.00	-£338.00
E&W 8	Premier North	Premier South	609	527.5	-£65.20	-£120.00	-£120.00	£200.00	-£105.20
E&W 9	Premier North	Premier South	450	353	-£77.60	-£120.00	-£120.00	£200.00	-£117.60
Average					-£67.63	-£84.77	-£115.29	£178.57	-£89.11

