

Northern Ireland Football League Ltd
Premiership Rules & Regulations
Season 2021/22

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DEFINITIONS

League	The Northern Ireland Football League
NIFL Premiership	The top tier of the Northern Ireland Football League
IFA	The Irish Football Association
Articles of Association	Means the Articles of Association of the Irish Football Association
Close Season	Means the period of the year outside the Season
WADA	World Anti-Doping Agency
UKAD	United Kingdom Anti-Doping
Member Club	Means any club which from time to time is a member of NIFL Premiership
NIFL Championship	Means the 2 nd tier of the Northern Ireland Football League.
NIFL Premier Intermediate League	Means the 3 rd tier of the Northern Ireland Football League.
Laws of the Game	Means the Laws of the Game of Association Football as approved by the International FA Board
FIFA	Federation Internationale de Football Associations
Participation Agreement	An agreement entered into by the member clubs with the NIFL Premiership Management Committee
IFA FMS System	the Irish Football Association Football Management System which all clubs will be required to be registered for.

NIFL PREMIERSHIP

1. Title

(a) For the purposes of Football Competitions, the NIFL Premiership shall be composed of three Sections:

- (i) A Premiership Section which shall consist of no more than 12 clubs who have obtained a Premiership Licence, or in the case of a promoted club a Promotion Licence which will be acceptable for the first season following promotion from the NIFL Championship, in accordance with the IFA Articles of Association, and to be known as the NIFL Premiership.
- (ii) Under 20 Development Section which shall consist of representative teams of the clubs in the NIFL Premiership in the current season.
- (iii) Under 18 and Under 16 Development Sections which shall consist of representative teams of the clubs invited to participate by the Academy Development League Sub Committee.

(b) Membership of the NIFL Premiership shall constitute an agreement between the NIFL Premiership and each Club to be bound by and comply with

- (i) FIFA Regulations
- (ii) The NIFL Articles of Association
- (iii) The Rules of the NIFL Premiership
- (iv) The Rules and Articles of the Irish Football Association,
- (v) Comply with IFA Club Licensing Scheme,
- (vi) The Laws of the Game,
- (vii) The Rules and Regulations of any body of which the NIFL Premiership is a member,
- (viii) The relevant Participation Agreement to be determined by the NIFL Board.
- (ix) The terms of any commercial or broadcast agreement entered into by the NIFL Premiership, and the terms of any Cup or other Competitions conducted or controlled by the League, each of the aforesaid as altered, revoked or added to from time to time.
- (x) WADA/UKAD Code

(c) Each member (club) shall be the legal entity fully responsible for the football team participating in the NIFL and such entity (which may be a legal company, limited liability company, private members club (Registration of club's order 1996) or other like unincorporated association) shall have been in membership of the Irish Football Association for a period of at least one year.

(i) **Procedures for club to change its legal entity**

If any club wishes to change its legal entity, which is the recognised member of the Irish Football Association and the NIFL Premiership, NIFL Championship or NIFL Championship Intermediate League, it must submit full details of the proposed change to the IFA Football Committee and the NIFL Board.

All of the following rules apply in order to change a legal entity:

- (a) Any application to transfer a club's membership of the Irish Football Association to a new entity must be submitted in writing and by Special

Delivery post to the Chief Executive, Irish Football Association, and copied to the Chief Operating Officer, Northern Ireland Football League, at the registered offices of the IFA and the NIFL.

- (b) A club's membership of the Irish Football Association may only be transferred to the new entity with the advance written permission of the Football Committee. Each case will be considered on its own individual merits.

(ii) **Sanction for club experiencing an Insolvency Event**

If any club in membership of the NIFL Premiership, Championship or Premier Intermediate League formally suffers, undergoes or enters into one of the following insolvency events that club shall be deducted 10 points:

1. Administration (Creditor Driven) – normally Bank or large unsecured creditor.
2. Administration (Club Driven) – appointment by the Directors to avoid other legal action e.g., Winding up order.
3. Fixed Charge Receivership – appointment by secured creditor only on fixed assets e.g., property.
4. Have a winding up order made in respect of the club e.g., HM Revenue & Customs.
5. Company Voluntary Arrangement – proposed in advance of or as a response to legal action by an unsecured creditor.
6. Have any proceeding or step taken or any court order made which has a substantially similar effect to any of the foregoing.

(iii) **Where a club takes or suffers such action set out in Rules (ii) above.**

- (a) Prior to 1st March the points deduction shall apply immediately.
 - (b) After 1st March but before the completion of all league matches rule (iv) shall apply:
 - (c) When the league has been completed, the points deduction shall apply to the following season and said club shall commence that season on minus 10 points.
- (iv) Where the circumstances set out in Rule (iii) (b) apply and at the end of that Season, having regard to the number of points awarded (ignoring any potential deduction):
- (a) Should the club be relegated the points deduction will apply in the next following season; or

- (b) Should the club not be relegated the points deduction will apply in that season and that club's points total and final league position for that season shall be recalculated accordingly.

For the avoidance of doubt, when a club is subject to more than one of the events in (ii) during a process of compromising its creditors (for example Administration followed by a Company Voluntary Arrangement), the club shall only be deducted one set of 10 points, such deduction to apply with effect from the first insolvency event.

Notwithstanding the above, if a club suffers, undergoes or enters into a separate, distinct and further insolvency event as per (ii) above, a further 10-point deduction shall be applied.

- (v) The League shall serve a club with written notice of the points deduction.
- (vi) A club may appeal against an automatic deduction of points in accordance with the IFA Articles of Association.

2. HMRC Reporting

a) Provision of Authority

Each club must have provided to the Irish Football Association prior to the commencement of the season, an original irrevocable authority (which shall not be time constrained) in the form prescribed by the Irish Football Association and signed by a director and the company secretary of the Club (Chairman and Club Officer for Member's Clubs), addressed to HMRC authorising HMRC to provide to the Irish Football Association information relating to amounts of PAYE, NIC and VAT payable, paid and overdue from the Club to HMRC from time to time including, by way of example and without limitation, the amount of Arrears (if any), the existence of and current position in respect of any Time to Pay Agreement and if a club defaults on any such agreement. The Irish Football Association shall be entitled to forward to HMRC the Authority without having to seek the consent of the club.

b) Current HMRC Debt

Any Club which has not within 28 (twenty-eight) days of the relevant due date paid to HMRC the amounts due to be paid to HMRC to discharge:

- (i) The Club's full liability for PAYE & NIC due in respect of any and all employees or former employees of the Club for the immediately preceding payment period.
- (ii) The Club's full liability for VAT due in respect of goods and services charged to the Club for the immediately preceding payment period; and/or
- (iii) Defaults on the terms of any Time to Pay Agreement.
 - a. That club shall be subject to a registration embargo such that it shall not be permitted to register any professional player with that Club without the prior written permission of the Irish Football Association CEO for the period that the club is subject to a default event.

i, ii and iii above are all classed as default events.

c) Disputed Amounts

Any amount which HMRC claims to be due to it, but which has been formally contested by the Club shall not be considered as due to HMRC for the purposes of these regulations until such time as a final determination is made on HMRC's claim.

3. Membership Fees

- a) The Annual Subscription of each Club to the NIFL Premiership shall be £1500.
- b) All Annual Subscriptions shall be deducted on or before the first game of the season by the NIFL upon receipt of the Participation Agreement which has been signed off by each club.

4. Dual Interests in Clubs

This rule should be read in conjunction with the IFA Football Regulations.

- (a) Except with prior written consent of the NIFL Board, no club, or nominee of a Club, may at one time either directly or indirectly:
 - (i) Hold or acquire or deal in the securities or shares of another Club, or
 - (ii) Be a member of another Club, or
 - (iii) Be involved in any capacity whatsoever in the management or administration of another Club, or
 - (iv) Have any power whatsoever to influence the management or administration of another club.
- (b) Except with the prior written consent of the NIFL Board, no person, whether absolutely or as a trustee either alone or with one or more associates, may at one time, either directly or indirectly:
 - (i) Hold or acquire or deal in the securities or shares of more than one club, or
 - (ii) Be a member of more than one Club, or
 - (iii) Be involved in any capacity whatsoever in the management or administration of more than one Club, or
 - (iv) Have any power whatsoever to influence the management or administration of more than one Club.
- (c) For the purposes of Paragraph (b) of this Rule 'person' includes anybody corporate and a partnership.
- (d) In considering whether to give any such consent the NIFL Board shall have regard to the need to promote and safeguard the interests and public profile of Association Football, its players, spectators and others concerned with the game and shall have regard also to the Constitution and Rules of the NIFL and those bodies to which the NIFL is affiliated.
- (e) For the purposes of this Rule an 'Associate' means: -

- (a) If the person referred to in Paragraph (b) of this Rule is an individual:
 - (i) A close relative of that individual, including that individual's spouse, parents, stepparent, child, stepchild, uncle, aunt, nephew or niece, or a child or stepchild, of such parent or spouse or anyone else of close relationship to the individual who in the opinion of the NIFL Premiership is or is likely to be acting in conjunction with the individual.
 - (ii) Any Company of which the individual is a director or over which the individual is able to exercise control or influence.
 - (iii) Any individual who is an employee or partner of that individual or a close relative of any such employee or partner.
- (b) If the person referred to in Paragraph (b) of this Rules or any associate of that person is a body corporate:
 - (i) Any other body corporate associated with either through the holding of shares in it or by reason of control by contact or other form of agreement and
 - (ii) Any director or employee of that body corporate or any close relative of such director or employee, and
- (c) Where any person has an agreement or arrangement, whether legally binding or not, with any other person in relation to the exercise of their voting power in a Club or in relation to the holding or disposal of the interest of the Club, that other person.
- (d) For the purposes of Paragraph (c) above, the word 'person' shall fall to be defined under reference to Paragraph (c) above.

5. Clubs Ceasing to be Members

If any club is expelled or resigns from the NIFL Premiership without the consent of the NIFL Premiership the players who are registered with that club shall be granted 'free agent' status in accordance with the FIFA regulations governing the Status and Transfer of Players. Clubs must notify the NIFL Chief Operating Officer on or before 31st March of their intention to discontinue membership of the Premiership. The NIFL Board will consider all such matters and reserve the right to sanction a club as they deem necessary.

6. Notices

A notice may be given by the NIFL Premiership to any Club or any Club representative either personally or via email.

7. League Competitions

- a) The League shall, each Season, conduct and in every respect control a football competition to be called the NIFL Premiership.
- b) The NIFL Premiership shall consist of 12 teams who shall play each other on three occasions (either 2 at 'home' and 1 'away' or vice versa as determined by the fixture schedule).

- c) When all teams have completed 33 matches, or when standings permit, the league shall be split into two sections. Teams ranked in positions 1 to 6 shall comprise Section A and teams ranked in positions 7 to 12 shall comprise Section B. Points achieved during the first phase of 33 matches are carried forward to the second phase. Teams shall then compete in a further 5 matches (i.e., one match against all other teams within their respective sections).
- d) The venues for these final matches shall be determined by the previous meetings in the initial 33 matches to provide, where possible, a balance of fixtures which ensures all teams complete two matches at 'home' and two matches 'away' against the teams in their respective sections.
- e) The winners of the NIFL Premiership shall qualify for the UEFA Champions League, subject to being awarded a UEFA Licence.
- f) The club finishing in second position in the NIFL Premiership shall qualify for the UEFA Conference League (depending on UEFA co-efficient standings), subject to being awarded a UEFA Licence.
- g) In the event of the club winning the Irish Challenge Cup having already qualified for European competition by finishing in 1st or 2nd position the second Conference League place will be awarded to the club finishing in 3rd position, subject to being awarded a UEFA Licence.
- h) After 38 matches have been played by all clubs the clubs finishing from 3rd to 7th position (3rd to 6th in Section A and the top team in Section B) will participate in a playoff system as follows:

Quarter Final (Match A)

6th placed club v Winner of 'bottom 6 section' i.e., 7th placed team

Semi Finals

1. 3rd placed club v Winner of Match A
2. 4th placed club v 5th placed club

Final

Winner of Semi Final 1 v Winner of Semi Final 2

The winner of these play offs will qualify for the UEFA Conference League.

- i) Should the winner of the Irish Challenge Cup finish in 3rd to 7th position then there will be no quarter final in the play offs and remaining clubs finishing in 3rd to 7th position

will play against each other in the following format with their league position determining their ranking:

Semi Finals

1. 1st ranked club v 4th ranked club
2. 2nd ranked club v 3rd ranked club

Final

Winner of Semi Final 1 v Winner Semi Final 2

- j) Should a club finishing in 3rd to 7th position not receive a UEFA licence then they will not be permitted to participate in the play offs for UEFA Conference League qualification. In this event there will be no quarter final in the play offs and the remaining clubs finishing in 3rd to 7th position will play against each other in the following format with their league position determining their ranking:

Semi Finals

3. 1st ranked club v 4th ranked club
4. 2nd ranked club v 3rd ranked club

Final

Winner of Semi Final 1 v Winner Semi Final 2

- k) In the event of any other scenario the NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall schedule the play off competition as it considers appropriate.
- l) The play offs for the UEFA Conference League shall be played on a knockout basis. All ties shall be played to a finish. If at the end of normal playing time the scores are equal, then two periods of fifteen (15) minutes each way will be played. If there are no goals scored during extra time the tie shall be decided by kicks from the penalty mark in accordance with the conditions approved by the International FA Board.
- m) In all ties of the play offs for the UEFA Conference League, the home club must provide a minimum of 20% of its permitted attendance to away supporters. For all ties the gate receipts after payment of the costs pertaining to referees, professional security company, turnstiles, ambulance/first aid cover, hospitality and ticketing shall be equally divided between the two (2) competing clubs. (The home club shall ensure that copies of the receipts for such costs are furnished to the away team upon request)
- n) In the event that the season should be required to halt due to unforeseen circumstances, and it is deemed not possible by government authorities, the Irish FA or NIFL Board to complete the season, the final standings will be determined in

accordance with the 2021/22 Curtailment Policy as directed by the NIFL Board in advance of the season commencing.

- o) The NIFL Premiership Development Under 20 League shall consist of 12 teams who shall play each other on three occasions (either 2 at 'home' and 1 'away' or vice versa as determined by the fixture schedule.
- p) For NIFL Under 18 & Under 16 Development League please refer to Academy League Rules.

8. Ranking of Teams

- a) Teams shall be awarded 3 points for a win, 1 point for a draw and 0 points for a defeat. In the case of equality of points teams shall be ranked in accordance with the following criteria:
 - i. Goal Difference (Goals scored less goals conceded in all matches)
 - ii. Goals scored in all matches
 - iii. Superior points gained in matches between the teams in question
 - iv. Superior goal difference in matches between the teams in question
 - v. Drawing of lots by the NIFL Premiership Management Committee
- b) At the end of the season the winners of the NIFL Championship shall be promoted to the NIFL Premiership and the club finishing in bottom position of the NIFL Premiership shall be relegated to the NIFL Championship.
- c) The club finishing in 11th position in the NIFL Premiership shall be obliged to play in a play-off against the highest ranked club finishing in 2nd to 6th place in the NIFL Championship who has been awarded a Promotion Licence and the winner of the play-off will be promoted to or remain in (as the case may be) the NIFL Premiership.
- d) If the winners of the NIFL Championship do not conform with the Promotion Licence criteria they will not be promoted to the NIFL Premiership, in this instance the highest ranked club finishing in 2nd to 6th place in the NIFL Championship who has been awarded a Promotion Licence would then play against the team finishing bottom of the NIFL Premiership and the winner of that play-off, which will be on a 'home' and 'away' basis', will be promoted to or remain in (as the case may be) the NIFL Premiership.
- e) If this procedure does not produce a result, i.e., if both teams score the same number of goals at home and away, two 15-minute periods of extra time will be played at the end of the second leg. If the score is still level after extra time, penalty kicks from the penalty mark in accordance with the Laws of the Game shall determine which team is declared the winner.
- f) The loser of the play-off will be relegated to or remain in (as the case may be) the NIFL Championship.

- g) The play-off matches to determine the final composition of the NIFL Premiership and the NIFL Championship shall be played on a date to be determined by NIFL Premiership Management Committee who will be responsible for all arrangements in respect of the play-off matches which will be played under the jurisdiction of the NIFL Premiership.
- h) The first match shall be played at the ground of the NIFL Championship Club whilst the second match shall be played at the ground of the NIFL Premiership Club, unless otherwise agreed and confirmed in writing to the NIFL by both competing teams.
- i) If none of the clubs finishing in 2nd to 6th position in the NIFL Championship conform to the Promotion Licence criteria, then the Promotion/Relegation Play Off match will not be required and in such circumstances the 11th placed club in the NIFL Premiership shall remain in the NIFL Premiership.
- j) Notwithstanding the above criteria in respect of promotion and relegation the NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall have the power to maintain a full membership of 12 teams in each Season, which may in exceptional circumstances require the selection of the top 12 ranked teams who conform with the Premiership/Promotion/Championship Club Licence criteria.

THE NIFL PREMIERSHIP MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

9. NIFL Premiership Management Committee

- a) The NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall be formed in accordance with the appropriate Articles of the Association and shall have powers to deal with all matters delegated to it by the Board.
- b) The Committee shall appoint annually a Chairman and Vice-Chairman who may serve for a period not exceeding two years. A Chairman retiring after a period of two years may not seek election either to the office of chairman or that of Vice-Chairman until a further period of two years has elapsed. Notwithstanding the above, the Committee reserve the right to extend the terms of the Chairman and/or Vice-Chairman by one year on an annual basis.

A club which is entitled to appoint one representative to the NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall do so not later than the 1st June in each year and the Secretary of the club shall notify such appointment, including dates of birth, in writing to the NIFL Premiership within one week from election. Clubs shall also be entitled to appoint an additional representative who will be permitted to attend a maximum of two meetings of the NIFL Premiership Management Committee in the event of the regular representative, for whatever reason, being unable to attend. A club may request dispensation for an additional representative to attend more than two

meetings which will be at the discretion of the Management Committee. Such additional representative must be notified to the NIFL upon request in advance of the season. Any representatives so appointed may only retain their position as long as they remain a representative of the club that appointed them.

- c) In the event that a club representative shall not be able to attend any meeting in person provision shall be made to allow the member to attend via videoconference.
- d) 50% of any members present at any meeting of any Committee or Sub-Committee shall form a quorum.
- e) The NIFL Premiership Management Committee may appoint Sub-Committees as appropriate and delegate power to them. Any Sub-Committee so formed shall, in the exercise of the power so delegated, conform to any regulations that may be imposed upon them by the Committee appointing them.
- f) The NIFL Premiership Academy League Sub Committee shall be formed to oversee the management of the Academy League and shall have powers to deal with all matters delegated to it by the NIFL Premiership Management Committee and will provide regular reports to the NIFL Premiership Management Committee.
- g) The NIFL Premiership may call upon clubs, members and players of clubs to produce any books, letters, documents and other evidence the Committee may require.

10. NIFL Premiership Powers

- a) The NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall have full power to act as it thinks fit, including power to suspend, fine or expel any club, club official or player guilty misconduct not provided for within the IFA Articles and/or Disciplinary Code and contrary to the best interests of the NIFL Premiership as a whole. The NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall also have powers to deal with any other matter not provided for in the Rules.

This rule will not apply to any field offences or any other matter which would normally be dealt with by the Irish Football Association.

- b) All clubs participating in any Competition under the auspices of the NIFL Premiership shall as a prerequisite of entry into such Competitions agree to be bound by this Rule.

OFFENCES, INQUIRIES AND COMMISSIONS THEREON, DISPUTES AND APPEALS

11. Inquiry into and Punishment of Offences

- a) The NIFL Premiership Management Committee, and any Commission or Sub-Committee duly appointed by the Board or Premiership Management Committee,

shall have power of enquiry into all financial arrangements between clubs and players, and into all matters constituting or pertaining to breaches or a breach of Regulations of the NIFL Premiership, and they shall be entitled for that purpose to require the attendance of all officials, players and other persons (as defined in Rule 4.e.a) and for the production of all books, letters and other documents.

- b) The NIFL Premiership irrespective of whether or not it shall have appointed a Commission or Sub-Committee to hold an inquiry shall have full power to deal with all clubs, officials, and players which they shall deem guilty of having offended against or committed a breach of the Regulations of the NIFL Premiership, and they shall be entitled to take such action and award such punishments either by way of reprimand, fine, suspension, expulsion or any other form of punishment as they may think fit in the circumstances.

Note – This rule will not apply to any field offences or any other matter which would normally be dealt with by the IFA Disciplinary Committee.

12. Commissions and Reports

- a) The NIFL Premiership Management Committee may at any time appoint a Commission or Sub-Committee consisting of such number of persons as they deem the circumstances warrant for the purpose of inquiring into any matter appertaining to the NIFL Premiership or its affairs.
- b) The NIFL Premiership Management Committee or any duly appointed Commission or Sub-Committee shall be entitled to publish in the public press or in any other manner they shall think fit report of their proceedings, acts, resolutions, and findings whether the same shall or shall not reflect on the character or conduct of any club, official or player and all evidence tendered on such inquiries, and all such inquiries and reports shall be privileged and every such club, official, player or shall be deemed to have assented to such inquiry and to such publication, and to regard the same as privileged in law. On any inquiry such order may be made as to payment of expenses by clubs, players, or officials as the NIFL Premiership may think fit.

13. Misconduct in Pre-arranging Results/Gambling on NIFL Premiership matches

- a) Any club, official or player offering or receiving a payment or any form of undeclared inducement from any other person or organisation to un-sportingly influence the result of a match shall be referred to the IFA Disciplinary Committee. If deemed guilty of misconduct the club, official or player shall be liable to a fine of £5000 and shall be subject to such further sanction as the NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall see fit.
- b) All players, technical staff and club officials are forbidden from taking part, either directly, or indirectly, in betting, gambling, lotteries and similar events and transaction

connected with football matches under the control and organisation of the NIFL Premiership.

- c) The NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall have the power to investigate any such allegations brought to their attention and if deemed necessary/applicable shall pass the case, including all evidence relied on to the IFA Disciplinary Committee.

14. Protests

- a) Protests by all clubs must be sent by email to protests@nifootballleague.com within four days after the cause of the protest, accompanied by a deposit of £100 which shall be forfeited in all cases where the Protest has not been sustained. A copy of the Protest must also be sent by the appellant club by email to the secretary of the club protested against within four days after the cause of the Protest. Clubs must also transfer the £100 deposit to NIFL via bank transfer. Any club submitting a protest must retain proof of delivery that the protest was lodged within the required timescale.
- b) Upon receipt of a Protest the NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall, in accordance with Rule 12, appoint a Sub Committee or a Commission consisting of a minimum of three persons to hear and determine the Protest. No person shall sit on a Protest which involves himself/herself or any club in which he/she may have an interest. All Protests shall be heard, where possible, within fourteen days of receipt of the Protest.
- c) In the case of a Protest, if the NIFL has any doubts as to the qualification of any player taking part in any competition it shall have power to call upon such player, or the clubs to which he belongs or for which he played, to prove that he was qualified according to the Rules and Regulations of the NIFL Premiership.
- d) A club may be represented at the hearing of a Protest or Inquiry. Any person summoned to attend a Protest or Inquiry must attend personally.
- e) All questions of eligibility or qualification of clubs or players, or of the application of the Laws of the Game, or of the Articles of Association or Rules shall be referred for a ruling to the NIFL Board.

15. Appeals against Decisions of the NIFL Premiership

All appeals against a decision of the NIFL Premiership must be made to the IFA in accordance with the relevant IFA Articles of the Association.

MATCHES

16. Matches and Kick-off times

- a) Matches may be played on natural turf or artificial turf, provided that such artificial turf meets the “FIFA Quality Standard”.

The owner of the artificial turf and the home club must be in receipt of a valid FIFA Certificate.

The NIFL Premiership cannot be held responsible for any damages to third parties resulting from the use of artificial turf.

All pitches, including grass pitches, must be maintained in a standard acceptable to the Premiership Management Committee. Should a Protest be made in regard to the condition of a pitch by a club, or should it come to the attention of the Committee by other means, the Premiership Management Committee reserve the right to have said pitch inspected by such competent persons as they may appoint.

A club whose pitch is deemed to be unfit for play shall then be responsible for arranging an alternative venue(s) which meets all Premiership requirements, until such time as the work deemed necessary to make the pitch suitable for play has been carried out, the pitch has been re-inspected and the Premiership Management Committee has given approval for matches to take place on the pitch.

- b) All matches shall be played under the Laws of the Game as approved by the International Football Association Board and in accordance with the Articles and Rules of the IFA and also of the NIFL Premiership. All NIFL Premiership matches shall be played on the dates scheduled at the commencement of the season, except:
- i. When otherwise directed by the NIFL Premiership Management Committee; or when
 - ii. A club is engaged in a competitive fixture under the auspices of UEFA (either ‘home’ or ‘away’) and receives permission after making application to rearrange its fixture to provide 3 days between fixtures
 - iii. National and regional association senior cup ties take precedence.
- c) In the event of a home club wishing to change from the date or time of a scheduled fixture, advance notice must be served in writing to both the Secretary of the away club and the NIFL Chief Operating Officer four (4) weeks prior to the scheduled date of the tie. The NIFL Premiership Fixture Sub Committee shall consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected.
- d) However, notwithstanding the above, no match shall be played on a Sunday unless the two (2) participating clubs are in agreement.
- e) Matches shall not be played out of sequence unless with the prior approval of the NIFL Premiership.

- f) The kick-off time for all Saturday matches shall be 3.00pm unless otherwise directed by the NIFL Premiership Management Committee or agreed by the two competing clubs and approved by the NIFL Premiership.
- g) The kick-off time for all midweek matches (including Friday fixtures) shall be 7.45 pm unless otherwise directed by the NIFL Premiership or agreed by the two competing clubs and approved by the NIFL Premiership. This does not include Public Holidays or Bank Holidays.

Also, in the event of a club failing to fulfil an arranged fixture the NIFL Premiership Fixtures Sub Committee shall be empowered to grant compensation to the other club for actual expenses incurred for such match.

17. Postponed or Abandoned Matches

Postponed or abandoned matches shall be played on a date to be determined by the NIFL Premiership Fixtures Sub Committee. The NIFL Premiership Fixtures Sub Committee shall have the power to direct clubs to play on the following day following the original date of the fixture if required to maintain the fixture schedule.

18. International Duty

- a) In the event of a club having two or more players, who have made their first team debut, selected and/or on standby to represent their National Association representative team(s), in matches recognised by the FIFA International Calendar, they shall be permitted to request a postponement of their scheduled fixture during the period of release in respect of such International Duty. Furthermore, a club whose goalkeeper is selected for such International Duty shall also be permitted to request a postponement due to the specialist position.
- b) In the event of a club having three or more players, who have made their first team debut, selected and/or on standby to represent their National Association representative team(s) in matches not recognised on the FIFA International Calendar or Development and Schools FA squads, they shall be permitted to request a postponement of their scheduled fixture during the period of release in respect of such International Duty. Furthermore, a club whose goalkeeper is selected for such International Duty shall also be permitted to request a postponement due to the specialist position.
- c) The NIFL Premiership Fixtures Sub Committee shall consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected.

19. Substitute Players

- a) A club may at its discretion use five substitute players at any time in any match, except to replace a player who has been dismissed from the game by the Referee. The substitutions can be made in accordance with Law 3 of the Laws of the Game.
- b) Only five substitutions by each side will be permitted in any match and clubs may nominate up to a maximum of seven substitute players prior to the commencement of the match.
- c) Substitutions may only be made on at most 3 occasions during the game (excluding half time).
- d) If a player suffers a concussion (or potential concussion), a club shall be permitted to use additional substitution(s) in accordance with the relevant protocol adopted by NIFL. A maximum of 2 concussion substitutions shall be permitted to be used in addition to the substitutions listed above. The protocol shall be communicated to competing clubs in advance of the season.
- e) Exceptionally, a sixth substitute may take part exclusively during extra time in any play off fixture outlined in Rule 8.
- f) A substitute player shall be construed as taking part in the game for which he was nominated only if he has actually played in such game.
- g) Should any nominated player or substitute sustain an injury or become otherwise incapacitated after the submission of the team sheet to the referee and before the kick-off he may be replaced provided that the referee and the opposing club are informed prior to kick-off.

20. Player Identification

- a) NIFL Premiership - Squad numbers must be assigned to all players. These numbers must be retained and used, and not reallocated, on shirts throughout the season. The players shirts must be clearly named and numbered on the back and must correspond exactly with the instruction input into the IFA FMS system or the team sheet handed to the referee should the match venue not have a data signal.
- b) Clubs must name and number playing shirts in accordance with the UEFA Kit Regulations.
- c) The team captain shall wear a distinguishing armband to indicate his status.
- d) All clubs must have the availability of a 'blood shirt' which is clearly numbered and is not a number that has been allocated to any squad player.

- e) Clubs shall be fined a minimum of £50, for each offence, where they fail to observe this rule.

21. Team Line Ups

- a) Each Club shall input their Team Line Up including the names of players and club officials and their functions taking part in each match (including the name of the nominated substitutes) via the IFA Football Management System not later than 75 minutes prior to kick-off.
- b) Should a match venue not have a data signal Secretaries or other responsible persons acting for competing clubs shall 75 minutes prior to kick-off notify in writing the names of players taking part in each match under the jurisdiction of the league (including the name of the nominated substitute or substitutes and club officials and their functions) to the referee.
- c) The home club shall be responsible for distributing copies of the official team sheet (automatically generated by the IFA FMS System) to both clubs and representatives from the media not later than 45 minutes prior to kick off.
- d) Any club failing to provide such documentation by the stipulated deadlines will be fined in the sum of £50 for each offence.

22. Kit Approval

- a) Details of club playing kit(s), including the goalkeeper's kit(s), colours shall be notified by clubs to the NIFL on the official club information questionnaire which shall be completed annually and returned not later than 30th June.
- b) In addition, each club shall deliver to the referee's dressing room a sample of their playing kit (shirts, shorts and socks) including goalkeeper kit not later than 75 minutes prior to kick-off. In the case of a clash of colours the referee shall have the right to request clubs to change any item of their presented kit. In such cases the away team shall change as directed by the referee.
- c) Clubs must input their kit colours, including goalkeeper kit, on the Comet System not later than 72 hours prior to kick off in their next fixture.
- d) In accordance with the Laws of the Game clubs must have the availability of additional kit should any item of the kit sustain blood coverage.

23. Late Start

The NIFL Premiership Management Committee may fine clubs up to £500 for late start of matches except in exceptional circumstances. Referees must report late starts to the NIFL.

24. Objection to Field of Play etc.

Any objection to the field of play or field equipment must be lodged with the Referee before the game is started, and the Referee shall have power to have such objections made right before the match is started.

25. Pitch Inspections

- a) In case of unfavourable weather conditions or concerns regarding the playing surface the Home Club must request the NIFL for an early inspection not later than five hours before kick-off. The Match Referee or an alternative Referee appointed by the NIFL must inspect the ground at least three hours or more previous to the advertised time of kick-off and shall decide as to the fitness of the ground not later than three hours prior to the pre-arranged time of kick-off, his decision being final after consultation with the Club Secretary and the NIFL.
- b) No game shall be postponed without an inspection by a referee appointed by the NIFL, who shall take due cognizance of local advice and the travelling supporters.
- c) Notwithstanding the above, in the event of extreme weather conditions the NIFL Chief Operating Officer, in consultation with the NIFL Premiership Chairman, may declare any match or matches postponed without a formal pitch inspection.
- d) Where possible the officially appointed match referee should carry out the pitch inspection but if he/she should not be available for an inspection then the NIFL will appoint an alternative official from a panel approved by the committee, who will decide on the state of the pitch. If obviously 'playable' he will then declare his decision.
- e) It is agreed that in addition to the £5 fee an allowance of £5 per hour be paid up until 2pm when the referee would be due to arrive at the ground in normal circumstances. This will only apply when the match referee has had to travel 30 miles or more (single journey/one way). Any distances shorter than this would result in the match referee returning home following the inspection and travel back to the ground at the normal time and he would of course be entitled to add this extra travel and £5 inspection fee onto his expenses for the game.
- f) The Referee, Assistant Referees and 4th Official shall be paid half match fee and expenses for a postponed match which they have arrived at and inspected.

26. Referee to wait before abandoning a match

- a) In the case of matches where it is found necessary to stop play owing to weather conditions, or floodlight failure, the referee must wait for a period of 15 minutes before deciding upon abandonment.
- b) If through any cause a match has been abandoned before the completion of the full playing time the Committee shall have power at its discretion to allot the points according to the goals scored at the time of such abandonment, or order the unfinished time to be played, or to order the match to be re-played in its entirety, on a subsequent date to be fixed by the NIFL Premiership Management Committee under such terms and conditions as it may impose.

27. Medals

The NIFL Premiership shall award up to twenty medals to the winning clubs for presentation to their players each of whom shall have taken part in a minimum of 12 games constituting the NIFL Premiership. Additional medals may be purchased by the clubs concerned, if so warranted and the Committee shall consider all such requests.

28. Trophies

The club declared Champions shall receive a trophy, which shall at all times remain the property of the NIFL and must be returned in good order when requested by the NIFL. It is the responsibility of the Champion Club to abide by the conditions imposed by the NIFL Insurers in respect of the safe keeping of the trophy throughout the period it is held by the club and arrange appropriate insurance cover for the trophy throughout the period when it is held by the Club.

FINANCE

29. Admission to Grounds

- a) The admission policy for all NIFL Premiership matches shall be determined by the NIFL Premiership Management Committee annually.
- b) Each club shall furnish the NIFL a list of no more than 15 directors that shall receive a Director's pass. The bearer shall be entitled to admission to the ground, Director's Box and Board Rooms at matches in which their club are participating under the jurisdiction of the NIFL, excluding semi-finals and finals.
- c) The NIFL Premiership at its discretion may issue passes to any other persons as it sees fit.

30. Gate Receipts

- a) The admission charges to the ground in all NIFL Premiership matches shall be retained by the home clubs, unless otherwise determined by the NIFL Premiership Management Committee.
- b) In any match where admission to the ground is by ticket, all revenue generated from the sale of tickets by the away team shall be paid to the home team within 7 days following the date on which the match was played together with a reconciliation of unsold tickets.
- c) Non-payment shall result in an automatic increase of 10% of the monies due to the home club for up to 7 days late payment and 20% between 7 to 14 days late payment. All other cases shall be referred to the Committee who will deal with the matter as they consider appropriate.

31. Season Tickets

Clubs may issue season tickets for admission to all home "League" matches, unless otherwise directed.

32. Fines

- a) All fines imposed by the NIFL Premiership, unless appealed against, shall be paid within 21 days from the date of the letter imposing the fine unless a payment plan has been agreed with the club.
- b) Otherwise, offending clubs will be fined £50 per week or part of a week that a fine is outstanding.
- c) If any club fails to make any payment to the NIFL Premiership in accordance with the requirements of these rules NIFL shall be empowered to deduct the amount of any such payment(s) from any money payable to the debtor club.

PLAYERS, SQUADS AND ASSOCIATED REGULATIONS

33. Player Registration Regulations

- a) All players must be registered in accordance with the IFA Professional Game Player Registration Regulations and the NIFL Player Registration Regulations.
- b) Where a Professional or amateur player is paid expenses, then payments are to be supported by expenses claim form, signed by the player and club official/accountant, in a format acceptable to HMRC and that such forms are retained by the Club; Such payments must comply with HMRC "Tax treatment of Association footballers".
<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/manuals/eimanual/EIM64100.htm> Expenses paid to a player of amateur status must not exceed HMRC scales that would render such

status invalid. Claim forms must be retained for 2 complete seasons and may be requested for inspection by NIFL at any time.

34. Squad Size Limits

a) Clubs will be permitted to register a maximum of 20 (twenty) players aged 21 and over to play in the NIFL Premiership.

b) An Under 21 player means a Player under the age of 21 as at the 1 January in which the Season concerned commences (i.e., for Season 2021/22 born on or after 1 January 2001).

c) The following exceptions may apply:

*Neither a “club-trained player” nor an “association trained player” will be classified as an over-age player in the squad calculations.

*A “club-trained player” is a player who, between the age of 15 (or the start of the season during which he turns 15) and 21 (or the end of the season during which he turns 21), and irrespective of his nationality and age, has been registered with his current club for a period, continuous or not, of three entire seasons.

*An "association-trained player" is a player returning from another jurisdiction and under 21 at the date of registration with their current club. They will be viewed as 'association-trained' if they have previously been registered with a club or with other clubs affiliated to the Irish FA for a period, continuous or not, of three entire seasons or of 36 months between the age of 15 (or the start of the season during which he turns 15) and 21 (or the end of the season during which he turns 21), and irrespective of his nationality and age.

d) Clubs are permitted to register an unlimited number of players under the age of 21.

e) Clubs must submit a copy of their first team playing squad, using the appropriate form, to the NIFL before the first match of the season. Thereafter the clubs must submit the changes to their squad, using the appropriate form, each time they register, transfer, loan or cancel a player.

35. Undisclosed Payments

a) It is strictly forbidden to make any payment to a player, either directly or via a related party, which has not been detailed in the official players' contract, lodged with the Irish Football Association, or at variance to the requirements of Regulation 33 b).

b) A related party transaction is a transfer of resources, services or obligations between related parties, regardless of whether a price is charged. Any related party transaction involving players must be documented by the club in writing to the NIFL Board.

These shall include, but not be limited to:

- A player in any other paid service within the club (e.g., coach, barman)
- Payments made to players by club directors, management committee or staff members
- Payments made to players by companies or organisations owned or controlled by a club director, management committee or staff members
- Payments made to players by sponsors
- Payments made to players by supporters clubs, trusts or organisations

A club may at any time submit a written request to the NIFL to put all instances of doubt or uncertainty to the NIFL Board for decision. Any practice or procedure which, in the opinion of the NIFL, is calculated to defeat in anyway the overriding objective of these requirements will be deemed to have been deliberately concealed unless previously documented by the club in writing.

Clubs and players must declare that any other paid employment and the duration of such employment either within the club or via a related party transaction, is not dependent on the individual's engagement as a player for the club in question.

- c) The Board or Chief Operating Officer of the NIFL or its appointees may at any time, in order to:
- satisfy itself as to the accuracy of the contractual / registration information provided to it by a club.

and / or to

- consider any suspicion of undisclosed payments made by or on behalf of a club

carry out such investigations, interviews and/or audits it considers (in its sole and absolute discretion) appropriate and shall be entitled to take such action and award such punishments as detailed in Rule 36(i) where a player and/or club has acted contrary to the best interests of the league and its member clubs.

c) In any investigation, any person if requested shall:

- i) provide the NIFL or its appointees with all information, documents and/or records that the NIFL or its appointees considers relevant to an investigation.
 - ii) cooperate fully with any interview process carried out by the NIFL or its appointees.
 - iii) verify the accuracy (or otherwise) of any information or document provided.
 - iv) provide written confirmation of all offers made to a player regardless of whether the player subsequently concludes a professional contract or amateur registration with the club.
- d) Where a party to an investigation fails to comply with i) to iv) above, that party shall be liable to be fined not less than £5,000 and the investigation shall continue with a

reasonable adverse inference being drawn from any failure to comply with i) to iv) above.

- e) An investigation into any suspected breach must be initiated within a period of two seasons from the suspected season of any such breach.
- f) For the avoidance of doubt, this provides the scope to initiate an investigation into any suspected breach having occurred in the five seasons prior to any current season.
- g) Similarly, following the close of any investigation, the case can be reopened should new information become available which alters the status of previous conclusions within this same two season period.
- h) The standard of proof to be applied is that of the balance of probabilities. That is to say that the Committee that the Committee is satisfied an event occurred if the Committee considers that, on the evidence, the occurrence of the event was more likely than not.
- i) *Any **club** found to have breached Rules 33(b) and 36(a) will be subject to the following sanctions by the NIFL Board or its appointees:*
 - Automatic demotion
 - *Immediate points deduction for current season*
 - *Fine*
 - *Prize money from the season to be withheld / returned and redistributed.*
 - *The return of prize money from any previous season(s) during the course of the player's / football staff member's contract with the club.*
 - *Withdrawal of any future competition place earned*
 - *Suspension / disqualification of individuals from involvement in the running of a football club*
 - *Removal of any competition title wins*
 - *Reporting of club to HMRC*

36. Ineligibility of Players

Failure to comply with any of the conditions relating to the IFA Professional Game Player Registration Regulations, the NIFL Player Registration Regulations or the rules of the NIFL Premiership will render the player ineligible to play for the club concerned as not being a bona-fide player.

37. Penalty for Playing Unregistered or Ineligible Players

- a) Any club playing an ineligible player or players in any match under the auspices of the NIFL Premiership shall be fined a sum of £500 per player for the first offence and £50 for subsequent offences involving the same player. In addition, should the match(es) in question result in a win for the offending team, or end in a draw, then such points shall be forfeited by the offending club and its opponents awarded three points in respect of that match and a score-line of 3-0 recorded in its favour.

- b) Should the match(es) in question result in a defeat for the offending team a score line of 3-0 shall be recorded in the favour of their opponents. If the goal difference at the end of the match is greater than three, the result on the pitch is upheld.
- c) Should both clubs play an ineligible player or players in any match under the auspices of the NIFL Premiership then both clubs will be fined, in the case of each Premiership club a sum of £500 per player for the first offence and £50 for subsequent offences involving the same player. In the case of each Premiership Development League club a sum of £250 per player for the first offence and £25 for subsequent offences involving the same player. In addition, neither club will be awarded any points for the fixture and both clubs shall have a minus three (-3) goal difference recorded against them.
- d) Nothing in these Regulations shall entitle the NIFL Premiership to deduct points or impose fines for registration committed by any club during any previous season. (For the purpose of all NIFL Premiership regulations a season will be deemed to end on 31st May in each year, or any other date determined by the Irish FA for the end of the football season).

MISCELLANEOUS

38. Condition of Membership of Clubs comprising the NIFL Premiership

- a) All clubs in membership of the NIFL Premiership acknowledge that they are bound by the rules of the NIFL Premiership and the decisions of its committees which are final and binding, except insofar as an appeal may lie to the appropriate committee of the IFA.
- b) Clubs shall be obliged to sign a participation agreement and to abide by the conditions contained therein.
- c) Any club not adhering to this rule, or the terms of the agreement shall be dealt with as the NIFL Premiership Management Committee consider appropriate.

39. Registration of Ground

- a) Each club shall register its ground with the NIFL, and no club shall register another ground without first obtaining the consent of the NIFL. Clubs with teams playing in the NIFL Under 20 Development League will be permitted to register an additional venue for such matches which must be of IFA Intermediate standard with floodlighting, (300 Lux) as a minimum.
- b) Ground sharing will only be approved at the discretion of the NIFL Premiership Management Committee not later than 31 March for the following season.

- c) All facilities (including playing facilities and changing rooms) must be available to both competing clubs and referees on match days at least 90 minutes prior to kick off (60 minutes for Under 20 Development League) and 30 minutes following the completion of the match.
- d) Where clubs have the provision of a pitch watering system the pitch watering schedule must be provided by the home club and communicated to the referee 90 minutes prior to kick off. The pitch must be watered evenly and not only in certain areas. As a general rule, pitch watering must finish 60 minutes before kick-off. However, the home can direct for pitch watering to take place after that time, provided it takes place: a. between 10 and 5 minutes before kick-off, and/or b. during half-time (for a maximum of 5 minutes). The referee is entitled to request changes to the schedule.
- e) Clubs must register their pitch dimensions with the NIFL prior to the start of each Season, which must adhere to the Laws of the Game. The registered pitch dimensions must not be altered during the course of a season, without the consent of the NIFL Premiership Management Committee. Such request for consent can only be made in exceptional circumstances and must be served in writing to the NIFL Chief Operating Officer. The NIFL Premiership Management Committee shall consider all such requests and determine whether or not such requests are approved or rejected. Should a club make such alterations without the required consent and a match or matches take place that result in a win for the offending team, or end in a draw, then such points shall be forfeited by the offending club and its opponents awarded three points in respect of that match and a score-line of 3-0 recorded in its favour. Notwithstanding the above the winning team shall not be disadvantaged if the original score line was of greater benefit to that team's goal difference. A fine of up to £500 per match played will also be levied.

40. Technical Areas

- a) Each club shall provide separate areas adjacent to the pitch for the sole use of team officials, medical staff and substitute players for both teams in accordance with the Laws of the Game. Such areas shall be clearly marked 'Home' and 'Away', shall have direct access onto the pitch, shall be located equidistant from the halfway line on the same side of the pitch (unless not possible), shall be under cover and a maximum of 13 persons (seven substitute players and five club officials) shall be permitted. In addition, clubs may nominate a physio and club doctor to take up a position in the technical area.
- b) Any player who is dismissed from the field of play shall proceed immediately to a suitable location as directed by a club steward.
- c) Smoking/Vaping is not permitted in the Technical Area. Any club found in breach of this will be dealt with by the NIFL Premiership.

41. Playing Kit

- a) Each club in any NIFL Premiership Competition shall register its playing kit colours with the NIFL on a kit approval form to be provided by the league. In all cases the first choice (home) kit and the second choice (away) kit must provide an alternative colour of all garments. In the event of a clash of colours the visiting team shall change. Goalkeepers must wear a playing kit which distinguishes them from the other players and the match officials.
- b) In the event of two clubs whose registered playing kits are the same having to play a match on a neutral ground both clubs shall change their kits unless otherwise agreed.

42. Ball Tenders

- a) The colours of clothing worn by ball tenders must not clash with the colours of either of the competing clubs.
- b) Clubs may utilise a multiball system to the immediate replacement of a match ball when it has left the field of play. Clubs who adopt this procedure must ensure that the system is used consistently for the duration of the match, and for both teams, unless directed otherwise by the referee and/or the host club safety officer following permission from the 4th official.

43. Referees

- a) The NIFL Premiership shall keep a list of Referees whose names have been approved by and also registered with the Association, or persons designated by the NIFL Premiership. Referees shall be appointed by the NIFL. Once an appointment has been made no objections to such appointment can, under any circumstances, be entertained by the NIFL Premiership. Two Assistant Referee's and a 4th Official will be appointed for All NIFL Premiership matches. Their role and duties are as outlined in the guidelines approved by the International F.A. Board In the event of the Referee or an Assistant Referee having to retire during the progress of the match, the 4th Official will assume responsibility of the referee or the retired Assistant Referee (retired official) to completion.

44. Official Match Ball & Goal Nets

- a) The official match ball to be used in all matches shall be the ball approved by the NIFL and supplied to the clubs at the commencement of the Season. Additional match balls, if required, may be purchased from the NIFL.

b) Goal nets must be used.

45. Half-time Interval

In all matches the half time interval shall be 15 minutes.

46. League Structure

The NIFL Board may at any time during the present season implement and make changes to the league format and structure which would then become affective prior to the commencement of the following playing season and nothing in these rules and regulations will so prevent the board from introducing and formulating any such structure provided that the board hereby undertakes to enter into a full consultation exercise with the member clubs of the league before any such changes are made.

47. Alterations to Rules

Alterations to these rules shall only be considered during the closed season, except in the case of exceptional circumstances as determined by the NIFL Board. Any club wishing to have a proposal considered, must forward same in writing to the NIFL Premiership no later than 31st May.