

21 November 2025



**TO: SPFL CLUBS
SCOTTISH HIGHLAND FOOTBALL LEAGUE CLUBS
SCOTTISH LOWLAND FOOTBALL LEAGUE CLUBS**

**Circulated by email
only and posted on
SPFL website**

Dear Colleagues

**The Scottish Professional Football League Limited (“the Company”)
The Scottish Professional Football League (“the SPFL”)
Membership of the League for Season 2026/27**

A. Introduction

Following the commencement of each Season it has, for a number of years, been the practice of the SPFL to issue a letter in the same general form as this letter, adjusted in appropriate terms from Season to Season, setting out to member “**Clubs**” and clubs which might potentially become a member of the SPFL through promotion (“**Candidate Club**”), the Membership Criteria of the SPFL and other related considerations for the following Season.

The relevant Season to which this letter primarily relates is Season **2026/27** although some of the information updates on matters which may require attention during the current season, Season **2025/26**.

Copies of the Articles of Association of the Company and the Rules & Regulations of the SPFL are available on the SPFL website at <https://spfl.co.uk/pages/rules-and-regulations>. Unless otherwise indicated, capitalised words and phrases defined in the Articles and Rules have the same meanings in this letter.

The requirements of the current Membership Criteria are detailed within the SPFL Rules and summarised within this letter. This introduction contains a brief summary of amendments to the Membership Criteria which are being implemented for the first time in Season 2026/27, an overview of what the Membership Criteria covers, as well as outlining key terminology which will be referenced throughout this letter.

Summary of Amendments

In the Close Season prior to Season 2024/25 a written resolution was passed by William Hill Premiership Clubs, which prohibited all Clubs participating in the William Hill Premiership from playing on a synthetic or artificial surface from the beginning of Season 2026/27. This resolution also included provisions that enhanced Rule H10 regarding winter pitch protection in the William Hill Premiership, which will again be implemented from the beginning of Season 2026/27. Clubs are permitted to apply for a period of grace to comply with these requirements under the usual process, detailed below, which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

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There has also been one addition to the Membership Criteria for Season 2026/27, approved at the November 2025 SPFL General Meeting. All Clubs and the Candidate Club must provide an authority (in a form specified by the Board) which permits HMRC to disclose certain information to the SPFL regarding a club's compliance with their tax liabilities. This is already required under SPFL Rules for all current SPFL member clubs and the extension to the Candidate Club allows the Membership Criteria to be assessed by the SPFL Board on a level playing field across all Clubs and the Candidate Club.

The SPFL Membership Criteria set out at **Rule D4** and referred to in this letter, apply to membership of the SPFL in both Seasons 2025/26 and, unless further amended, 2026/27. Any changes in the SPFL Membership Criteria that may be later adopted during Season 2025/26 will be notified to you.

SPFL Membership Criteria

Below is a summary of the principal provisions of the Rules as they relate to: the SPFL Membership Criteria, Financial Fair Play, winter pitch protection, ground registration, stadia requirements, stadium tenure and occupation arrangements and artificial pitch requirements. Reference is also made to the SPFL's Unacceptable Conduct Guidance and to the use of VAR in the William Hill Premiership.

The Membership Criteria of the SPFL and related Rules are to be found in **Sections D and H** of the SPFL Rules. Your attention is drawn, in particular, to **Rules D1 to D8** (inclusive) and **Rules H1 to H24** (inclusive). In addition, there are requirements in **Section B**, which must be complied with as a condition of being permitted to play in the SPFL and in **Section G** in relation to fixtures. **Section C** of the Rules describes the structure and operation of the League and **Rule E28** contains the SPFL financial Rules regarding No Overdue Payables and Compliance with Employee Remuneration Requirements.

"Candidate Club" and the Pyramid Play-Off Competition

The term **Candidate Club** is used to identify a club which is a member of the Scottish Highland Football League (SHFL) or the Scottish Lowland Football League (SLFL), which, on sporting merit and if such competition is run, may become eligible to participate in the Pyramid Play-Off Competition at the end of a Season.

Provision is made in **Rule C34** to allow for a Pyramid Play-Off Competition to take place at the end of each Season between the Club in 42nd place in the SPFL and the winner of a Play-Off Match (over two legs) between the champion clubs of the SHFL and of the SLFL.

The SPFL are cognisant of the upcoming proposed changes to the SLFL, to create Lowland League East and Lowland League West, and are working with the SHFL and SLFL to document the new Pyramid Play-Off Competition process for the end of Season 2026/27. As this letter relates to SPFL members for Season 2026/27, it will focus on the current competition.

Please note that the current version of the Pyramid Play-Off rules are reproduced for convenience at **Annex 6** of the SPFL Rules & Regulations document, available as above. These rules may be amended before the Season 2025/26 Pyramid Play-Off Competition and any updates to these rules will be communicated to Clubs in good time.

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In order to be entitled to participate in Pyramid Play-Off Competition Matches each of the SHFL and SLFL champion clubs must first have either complied with the SPFL Membership Criteria and related requirements by not later than **31 March 2026** or have secured from the Board of the SPFL any necessary approval, waiver and/or period of grace. If a SHFL and/or SLFL champion club fails to so comply and/or secure, then it/they are prohibited from participating in the Pyramid Play-Off Competition.

All clubs in membership of the SHFL and SLFL are potentially the Candidate Club and each should carefully consider now what measures/steps each would require to take to meet the SPFL Membership Criteria and/or any approvals/waivers/period(s) of grace each would require in order for it to be permitted to: (i) participate in any Pyramid Play-Off Competition, which may be run at the end of Season 2025/26; and (ii) be promoted to William Hill League 2 of the SPFL, if successful as the winner of the Pyramid Play-Off Competition, for Season 2026/27.

Waiver, Relaxation, Period of Grace etc

Reference is made throughout this letter to the potential for Clubs and the Candidate Club to apply to the SPFL Board for a waiver, relaxation, period of grace and/or approval in relation to certain aspects of the SPFL Membership Criteria and related requirements. Please note that each such application is considered on its own merits and no assurance is given that any waiver, relaxation, period of grace and/or approval will be granted by the SPFL Board in the event that such an application is received.

All existing waivers, periods of grace and approvals previously given will, unless expressly stated otherwise, expire at the end of Season 2025/26 and will not apply to Season 2026/27. All Clubs and the Candidate Club must therefore carefully consider whether they require approval(s)/waiver(s)/periods of grace etc. for Season 2026/27 and make any required written applications to the Company Secretary for consideration by the SPFL Board on or prior to **31 March 2026**.

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B. Summary of SPFL Membership Criteria

For full details of the SPFL Membership Criteria and related requirements, reference should be made to the Rules.

1. **Rule C3:** the 42 Clubs eligible to participate in the SPFL in any Season shall be the 42 leading football clubs in Scotland. The same 42 Clubs will, subject to the result of any Pyramid Play-Off Competition run at the end of Season 2025/26 and the provisions of the Rules summarised below, be the members of the Company during Season 2026/27.
2. At the end of Season 2025/26 there is provision for a Pyramid Play-Off Competition to potentially be run in terms of **Rule C34**, in which the Club occupying the 42nd position in the SPFL will, subject to at least one of the SHFL and SLFL champion clubs meeting the SPFL Membership Criteria and having regard to SPFL Board decisions on approvals, waivers and/or period(s) of grace, be required to take part. The currently applying Regulations for the operation of the Pyramid Play-Off Competition are available at **Annex 6** of the SPFL Rules and Regulations document.
3. **Rule D2:** if the Candidate Club, in the opinion of the SPFL Board, fails or would fail to fully comply with the SPFL Membership Criteria as at **31 March 2026** and no relevant approval, waiver and/or period of grace is granted by the SPFL Board, then the Candidate Club shall not be promoted to nor admitted entry to the SPFL.
4. **Rule D3:** if a Club, in the opinion of the SPFL Board, fails or would fail to fully comply with the SPFL Membership Criteria if it participates or were to participate in the SPFL in any Season and no relevant approval, waiver and/or period of grace is granted by the SPFL Board, then that Club is liable to such sanction or action as may be decided on by the SPFL Board, except that any expulsion from the SPFL will require the approval of the members in General Meeting.
5. **Rule D4: the Membership Criteria of the League are:-**
 - membership of the Scottish FA;
 - Registration of a Club's and Candidate Club's Home Ground with the SPFL in accordance with **Rule H13**;
 - a Club and Candidate Club when participating in the SPFL must either own its Registered Ground, whether by itself or through a Group Undertaking, or have such rights of occupation or tenure in its Registered Ground as may be approved by the SPFL Board. See below for more detail on stadium tenure and occupation arrangements;
 - Clubs' and Candidate Club's Registered Grounds for a Season must comply with the stadia criteria at the Scottish FA Bronze Standard;

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- William Hill Premiership and Championship Clubs must have in place adequate pitch protection as required by **Rule H10**. Note this Rule also applies to William Hill League 1 and League 2 Clubs and the Candidate Club, but is not a SPFL Membership Criterion for those Clubs;
- in order to be eligible to participate in the William Hill Premiership, under **Rule H4.1**, Clubs must not have a synthetic or artificial playing surface, and must have as part of their winter pitch protection system either a subsurface heating system or full pitch frost and snow covers;
- all Clubs and the Candidate Club must comply with the floodlight requirements contained in **Rule H18** relevant to their Division for Season 2026/27. For Clubs in the William Hill Premiership and Championship this is the Scottish FA Silver Standard for floodlights, and for Clubs in William Hill League 1 and League 2 this is the Scottish FA Bronze Standard for floodlights;
- all Clubs and the Candidate Club must comply with the pitch dimensions relevant to their Division for Season 2026/27, contained in **Rule H22**;
- all Clubs are required to take such steps as the SPFL Board considers necessary to implement the development of youth football in Scotland in accordance with the requirements, philosophy and recommendations of the Company;
- Clubs in the William Hill Championship, League 1 or League 2 and the Candidate Club intending to make use of a synthetic or artificial playing surface for SPFL matches must comply with the requirements in **Rule H4.2** and obtain the appropriate approval from the SPFL Board, as set out in **Rule H4.2.3**, with such application for approval having been made on or before **31 March 2026**;
- all Clubs and the Candidate Club must have sent to and had received by the Company Secretary, a fully completed and signed declaration and certificate confirming compliance with the No Overdue Payables and Compliance with Employee Remuneration Requirements Rules in **Rule E28**, as at 31 January 2026, in a form specified by the Board and in accordance with **Rule E28.7**. The date by which the required declaration and certificates must be provided for Season 2026/27 is **31 March 2026**;
- all Clubs and the Candidate Club are required to have achieved, **as at 31 March 2026**, at least a Bronze level overall Licence award as granted by the Scottish FA; and
- all Clubs and the Candidate Club must provide an authority (in a form specified by the Board) which permits HMRC to disclose certain information to the SPFL regarding their compliance with their tax liabilities.

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Approvals, Waivers and Periods of Grace

Any application for an approval, waiver, relaxation or period(s) of grace from compliance with any part of the SPFL Membership Criteria, or for an extension of the period within which a ground may be registered with the SPFL in relation to Season 2026/27, must be made in writing to the Company Secretary, by not later than **31 March 2026**. This time limit is specified in **Rule D5**.

Rule D6: The SPFL Board may, in its absolute discretion, waive, relax or grant a period of grace in respect of any Club or the Candidate Club's requirement to comply with any part of the SPFL Membership Criteria and related requirements and/or the time limit for applications for approval, waiver, relaxation or period(s) of grace etc. and/or for registration of a ground with the SPFL.

Verification of Compliance with SPFL Membership Criteria

The SPFL Board is given wide ranging powers of investigation and verification in **Rule D7** in order to ensure that there is compliance with the SPFL Membership Criteria and related requirements by Clubs and by the Candidate Club.

C. Summary of Key Home Ground Related Matters

Winter Pitch Protection

Rule H10: each Club in the SPFL must ensure that there is an efficient and effective system of winter pitch protection at its Registered Ground and that the system is efficiently and effectively operated. Clubs are required to fully utilise those systems where there is a reasonable possibility of a pitch otherwise being frozen or covered in snow or ice such that a SPFL Match may be compromised.

From Season 2026/27, Clubs in the William Hill Premiership will require to have either a subsurface heating system or full pitch frost and snow covers in order to be compliant with **Rule H4.1.2**.

Ground Registration

Rule H13: all Clubs and the Candidate Club must have registered or be deemed to have registered their Home Ground for SPFL Matches for Season 2026/27, in writing, with the Company Secretary, by not later than **31 March 2026**. If a Club's Home Ground is already registered with the SPFL for Season 2025/26 that registration will be deemed, providing there has been no relevant change in circumstances, to continue for Season 2026/27 (**Rule H16**).

Other Stadia Requirements

Clubs and the Candidate Club are reminded of the continuing requirements of:

- **Rule H11:** Each Club is under an obligation to ensure that the pitch at its Registered Ground or other ground at which it is authorised by the SPFL Board to play its Home Matches is smooth and in good condition and repair and that it has an efficient and effective drainage system so that it does not become unplayable due to flooding;

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- **Rule H12:** The SPFL Board is entitled to direct a Club to take such steps as the SPFL Board considers necessary in order that the pitch at its Registered Ground or other ground where it is authorised to play its Home Matches is put into, and maintained, in good condition and repair and is equipped with an efficient and effective drainage system;

- **Rule H18:** Registered Grounds or other grounds authorised by the SPFL Board for the playing of Home Matches are required to have floodlights which comply with the following minimum standards based on the Division in which the Club plays: Scottish FA Silver Standard (William Hill Premiership and William Hill Championship Clubs) and Scottish FA Bronze Standard (William Hill League 1 and William Hill League 2 Clubs); and

- **Rule H22:** there are minimum and maximum pitch dimensions, based on the Division in which a Club is entitled to participate, as specified in Rule H22.

Stadium Tenure and Occupation Arrangements

Rule D4.3.2: if a Club or Candidate Club wishes, in Season 2026/27, to have as its Registered Ground, one which it does not own or which is not owned by a Group Undertaking of that Club or Candidate Club concerned, then, pursuant to Rule D5, any application for approval of a basis of tenure or occupancy, other than such ownership, must be made to the Company Secretary for consideration by the SPFL Board, by not later than **31 March 2026**.

In considering an application for approval of such an arrangement covering Season 2026/27, which includes but is not limited to “ground sharing”, the SPFL Board is likely to regard the following as relevant:-

- a. any such arrangement would require to be constituted in the form of a legally binding written agreement in formal legal terms with the owner, or such other appropriate party who shall have a right of occupation of the ground in question;
- b. the term (duration) of any such agreement must be at least for the whole of Season 2026/27;
- c. such an agreement must contain provisions, satisfactory to the SPFL Board, that the Club in question will be able to fulfil each and all of its Home fixtures in the SPFL, Scottish Cup, League Cup and Challenge Cup (if eligible to participate) and make adequate provision for any European competition in which that Club may be involved in the Season, including whether the agreement contains provisions satisfactory to the Board concerning the consequences of failure on the part of a party to the agreement to comply with its obligations in terms of the agreement;
- d. the terms of such an agreement are such as will satisfy the Board that the Club in question will be able to fulfil each and all of its relevant obligations as regards facilities, including for the recording, transmission and broadcasting of Home matches, as set out in the Rules and Regulations and such other football organisations in whose competitions the Club in question will take part during the Season;

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- e. whether the Board is satisfied that there will be compliance with **Rule H11** (Pitch Condition);
- f. that the relevant ground shall satisfy each and all of the requirements of the Rules, or alternatively, that the Club shall have obtained such waiver, relaxation or period of grace from the Board that may be required;
- g. whether a like application has been made by the same Club for a previous Season;
- h. whether there is a prohibition on other activities taking place within the footprint of the ground on the day of each Official Match;
- i. whether the Club has access to the ground for the full day on the day of each Official Match;
- j. whether there is a provision that permits the tenant Club to be able to postpone any non-SPFL activities scheduled to take place on the pitch at the ground in the 48 hours before an Official Match, where it could reasonably risk the postponement or abandonment of such Official Match;
- k. the number of teams from the same Division already playing at that ground;
- l. whether the landlord is an SPFL Club;
- m. whether there are adequate arrangements for visiting supporters;
- n. whether there are adequate arrangements and appropriate segregation for visiting Club Officials;
- o. proximity to the Club's original non-compliant ground;
- p. any conditions and compliance with such conditions and/or any guidance given in respect of or in relation to a previous like application by the same Club and/or in respect of the same ground; and
- q. any extenuating circumstances.

The above is not intended to be an exhaustive list. Other factors may also be relevant.

The SPFL Board is unlikely to be satisfied that a legally binding agreement referred to in paragraphs (a) and (b) above, will be sufficient to secure an assurance of occupation for the whole of the relevant Season if the agreement permits the "landlord" to terminate the Club's right of occupation during the Season in the event that the Club in question breaches its obligations in terms of the agreement. This would include, for example, a right for the landlord to terminate the Club's right of occupation during the course of a Season if the Club concerned failed to meet its financial (including rent) and/or other obligations under a lease with the landlord.

All Clubs and clubs in membership of the SHFL and SLFL should consider the basis on which they occupy their Home Ground and consider whether they require to make an application for approval by the SPFL Board for Season 2026/27, on or prior to **31 March 2026**, in terms of **Rule D4.3.2**.

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Landlord Clubs

Rule H19: If a Club owns its Registered Ground, itself or through a Group Undertaking, and wishes to grant a right of occupation or tenure in its Registered Ground to any other party, it must obtain prior written approval from the Board by making a written application to the Secretary by **31 March 2026**.

Synthetic and Artificial Pitches

Rule H4 contains a prohibition on Official Matches being played on a synthetic or artificial playing surface unless certain conditions are met. In the William Hill Premiership, Clubs are not permitted to use a synthetic or artificial playing surface, unless they have received a waiver, approval or period of grace from the SPFL Board.

For Clubs in the William Hill Championship, League 1 or League 2 and for the Candidate Club, in order to be used in an Official Match a synthetic or artificial playing surface must be designed and constructed to the relevant FIFA standard (currently 'FIFA Quality Programme for Football Turf'¹) and it must be demonstrated to the SPFL Board that the pitch in question meets and continues to meet the relevant FIFA quality and performance criteria.

Per **Rule H4.2** it is the highest FIFA standard which is applied to synthetic or artificial playing surfaces used in SPFL Matches. Accordingly absent any waiver, approval or period of grace all artificial and synthetic surfaces used in SPFL Matches must have a current FIFA Quality Pro certification.

In addition to meeting the relevant FIFA criteria, the Board must approve the use of any synthetic or artificial playing surface proposed to be used in an Official Match. Any such application for approval for Season 2026/27 must be submitted to the Company Secretary by not later than **31 March 2026**. Such Board approval, when given, has continuing effect and does not require to be renewed annually unless and until the Board becomes concerned that a particular synthetic or artificial playing surface proposed to be used in SPFL Matches may no longer be compliant with the relevant FIFA standard, in which case further procedures may be applied and/or approval may be withdrawn.

¹ https://football-technology.fifa.com/media/1026/fifa_quality_programme_for_football_turf.pdf

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D. Summary of Other Key Matters

Financial Fair Play

Rule E28 requires that Clubs and the Candidate Club are under an obligation to certify that they have no Overdue Payables as regards other football clubs, football authorities (primarily SPFL and Scottish FA), overdue payments to players and coaching staff (primarily remuneration and pension obligations) and no overdue sums in relation to their tax liabilities as at 31 January 2026 and provide certification to the Company Secretary by no later than **31 March 2026**.

Additionally, by the same date, Clubs and the Candidate Club must declare and certify that throughout the calendar year ending 31 December 2025 they were in compliance with applicable law in relation to PAYE, tax, expenses and benefits and the National Minimum Wage requirements and that, as at 31 January 2026, the Club had no sums due to or in respect of any employees or former employees arising out of or connected with the applicable law in relation to PAYE, tax, expenses and benefits and the National Minimum Wage Regulations 2015 and/or any supplementary, variation or replacement regulations or other provisions in force from time to time, except where payment of such sums was not obliged to be paid on or before 31 January 2026. As noted above, this declaration and certification is part of the SPFL Membership Criteria.

Please ensure that the Certificates of No Overdue Payables and the Undertaking of Compliance with Employee Remuneration Requirements **are not** submitted prior to the 31 January 2026.

Unacceptable Conduct

The SPFL Rules, along with **Scottish FA Article 28**, contain provisions placing an obligation on Clubs to investigate incidents of Unacceptable Conduct amongst their own supporters at Official Matches and imposing proportionate disciplinary sanctions on such supporters found to have acted in this way.

Rule H40 provides for Guidance for Clubs on Unacceptable Conduct to be issued by the Board. The Guidance, as updated by the SPFL in June 2024, is reproduced at **Annex 4** of the SPFL Rules and Regulations. Additionally, the SPFL issued an updated Unacceptable Conduct Toolkit in August 2025. Compliance with the Guidance is a relevant matter (**Rule H41**) to be considered in any complaint brought against a Club in terms of **Rules H36** and/or **H37**. Clubs are strongly advised to carefully consider the relevant Rules, Guidance and Toolkit and to take steps to implement their terms.

VAR

VAR is required to be used in all William Hill Premiership Matches. The costs of the required equipment at the Home Ground of each relevant Club and the costs of the operation of VAR require to be borne by William Hill Premiership Clubs on an annual basis. Details of the requirements are set out in **Rule G82A** and in the VAR Protocol at **Annex 8** of the SPFL Rules and Regulations.

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E. Appeals

Clubs and clubs in the SHFL and SLFL have a right to appeal to the Scottish FA Judicial Panel against decisions of the Board of the SPFL in relation to compliance with SPFL Membership Criteria and related decisions. Time limits apply to such appeals. For details of appeals procedures, time limits and requirements see the Scottish FA Judicial Panel Protocol.

F. Key Dates Summary

31 March 2026 – the date on which the Candidate Club must have either complied with the SPFL Membership Criteria and related requirements, or have secured from the Board of the SPFL any necessary approval, waiver and/or period of grace.

31 March 2026 – the date on which the ground which a Club or Candidate Club intends to Register as its Home Ground for **Season 2026/27** is required to meet the SPFL Membership Criteria relating to stadia in **Rule D4.4**.

31 March 2026 – the last date for Clubs and the Candidate Club to apply to the SPFL Board for approval of a basis of tenure or occupation, other than ownership, in relation to a Club's and the Candidate Club's prospective Registered Ground for **Season 2026/27**.

31 March 2026 – the last date that Clubs must apply to the Board for approval to be a prospective landlord Club.

31 March 2026 - the last date for making an application to the SPFL for a waiver, relaxation or period of grace by Clubs and the Candidate Club in relation to all or any part of the Membership Criteria and related requirements for **Season 2026/27** (including, in respect of the requirement to hold a Bronze Standard Scottish FA Club Licence).

31 March 2026 – the last date for Clubs and the Candidate Club to apply to the SPFL Board for approval of the use of a specified synthetic or artificial playing surface and pitch in League Matches and Play-Off Matches for **Season 2026/27**.

31 March 2026 – the last date by which Clubs and the Candidate Club are obliged to declare and certify that **as at 31 January 2026** they had no overdue payables etc. and undertake that they were in compliance with Employee Remuneration Requirements.

31 March 2026 – the date at which Clubs and the Candidate Club are required to hold a Bronze Standard Scottish FA Club Licence.

14 July 2026 – the date by which William Hill League 2 Clubs should notify the Company Secretary in writing of either:

- (a) any amendments to which of the SHFL, SLFL East or SLFL West it elects to participate in for **Season 2026/27**; or
- (b) if no such notification has been sent previously, which of the SHFL, SLFL East or SLFL West it elects to participate in for **Season 2026/27**,

in both cases in the event that it is Club 42 at the end **Season 2026/27** and loses the Pyramid Play-Off Tie. Whether the relevant Club is relegated to the SHFL, SLFL East or SLFL West is

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subject to the conditions which will be set out in the revised Pyramid Play-off Competition Rules, currently being reviewed by the SPFL, SHFL and SLFL.

All of the above applications and registrations must be made/notified to the Company Secretary in writing not later than the relevant specified date.

G. Conclusion

Please contact me, Ross Aiken or the Company Secretary if you have any difficulties or queries regarding any aspect of the above.

A copy of this letter will be placed on the SPFL website at <https://spfl.co.uk/pages/rules-and-regulations>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Hall". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sam Hall
Head of Operations on behalf of the Company Secretary
The Scottish Professional Football League Limited

cc SPFL Board Members, Ian Maxwell (Chief Executive, Scottish FA), and Secretaries of SHFL and SLFL