

*This statement is a joint letter to the Football Association from clubs in steps three to seven of the non-league, as well as from clubs across the respective women's leagues. The supporting clubs are listed as signatories at the end of the statement on behalf of their respective chairpersons or official club representatives.*

To the Football Association,

30<sup>th</sup> March 2020

We are writing to express our profound concern and displeasure regarding the decision to null and void entirely the 2019/20 playing season from steps three to six of the non-league, as well as tiers three to seven of the women's non-league.

Our concern is grounded primarily in the needless and inexplicable haste exercised in reaching the decision, coupled with a total lack of substantive dialogue or consultation with affected clubs. The decision also disregards the millions of pounds invested and countless hours expended collectively by clubs, and so has critical financial implications.

In writing this joint letter, we recognise that the decision to expunge results for the 2019/20 season still pends official ratification from the FA Council. However, we believe it is unacceptable that such a decision has been handed down to us in this manner. We urgently seek constructive dialogue with the FA with the aim to have the decision re-considered.

Before continuing, it is crucial that we extend our appreciation to all governing bodies, leagues and respective chairpersons for their continued hard work at a time of such adversity. We are markedly conscious of the seriousness of the public health situation, which undoubtedly takes precedence over football. Consequently, all clubs agree with the decision that the current playing season should be indefinitely discontinued until it is safe to resume; it would be both irresponsible and reckless to consider resuming playing football at this time. We would like to take the opportunity to echo government advice for everyone to stay home to protect the NHS, and thus save lives.

Over the last few days, we the clubs have reached consensus in our views regarding the manner in which the decision to both terminate, then expunge the current playing season has been delivered, seeking to clearly express them below:

- Why was the FA decision reached so hastily when there is plenty of time ahead in the coming weeks and months that can be utilised to sensibly consult with leagues and clubs?
- The official FA statement online states that: "The FA and National League System (NLS) steps three to six have reached a consensus that their 2019-20 season will now be brought to an end, and all results will be expunged". No such consensus was ever reached amongst the NLS steps three to six, some leagues were barely consulted.
- Affected clubs were eager to open an official consultation process with their respective leagues and the FA, to work on an agreed and constructive outcome. Many leagues across the country assert that no vote had been put to them by the FA, and that leagues at steps five to six in particular felt the decision had already been made by the time they had been consulted, rendering the 'consultation' process insignificant. Many clubs were never given an opportunity to vote, only to suggest possible conclusions to league officials. There appears to have been little-to-no attempt to consult deeply and widely and so formulate a clearer idea of what any 'consensus' amongst clubs might be.

- On a similar note, leagues and clubs at step seven of the non-league pyramid were not consulted whatsoever in the decision, in spite of the fact that the ruling affects clubs in step 7 as well.
- NLS steps one to two are not in the same “null and void” decision – it is understood they were removed from the ruling at the 11th hour. How can the FA possibly justify treating different steps under the non-league banner differently? Particularly given there now is the possibility of relegation from step two but no promotion from step three? It is incomprehensible to treat leagues differently; you cannot undermine the integrity of the footballing pyramid by applying a different set of rules to one group and not to the others.
- Voiding the season has immense financial implications on clubs, their sponsors and local communities. Why did the FA, in reaching its decision, not discuss the huge financial impact during their ‘consultation’ process? Are clubs expected to foot the bill for playing a season of ‘friendlies’?

Whilst we are deeply dissatisfied with the manner in which the decision has been reached and delivered, it is imperative to consider the ramifications of the decision itself on clubs, from a footballing, financial and community perspective.

Most clubs in steps three to six have now completed 70-80% of their league fixtures, and it is incomprehensible that these results should be delegitimised and expunged on the basis that the final quarter of the season cannot be fulfilled in the future. Simply put, there is no valid basis to expunge an entire season, especially at this stage.

We are led to believe that the option of the “extension of the playing season” was discounted because of the issue of player contracts and wages becoming a problem for clubs; we ask only that the same logic be applied to our leagues that is being applied in the rest of the NLS and the EFL. Where necessary (many of the clubs in question do not have such player salary concerns) we can work with the FA to develop a solution that helps the clubs, whether that’s leveraging the government subsidies on offer or liaising with players to be flexible with the clubs they represent. This is far from unfeasible.

Clubs including Jersey Bulls FC and Vauxhall Motors FC have also already mathematically secured promotion this season - what are the grounds for them not to get promoted this season? Especially when they have clearly outgrown their respective competition? Other clubs also stand on the verge of promotion. It is patently unjust to have a season’s tireless work annulled in such a manner.

The issue, however, goes far beyond those clubs expecting promotion. Many clubs backing this letter do not currently stand to get promoted yet still offer their support because of their belief in upholding the integrity of the footballing leagues. Our demand for the FA to reconsider its decision is also about sending a message to the fans of our clubs, who have spent hard-earned money to follow their teams up and down the country, letting them know their support was not in vain. We know it is well within the powers of the FA to ensure that this is the case.

Despite the declaration to have our seasons expunged from record, the FA remains open to completing many other competitions under its jurisdiction, including the FA Trophy and FA Vase. The FA Trophy presents a particularly interesting case where one semi-final pits step three Halesowen Town FC against step two Concord Rangers FC. How can one club have their season expunged yet compete in the same season against a club who may fulfil their season entirely? The issue of unequal treatment across tiers also pertains to the women’s

footballing system, whereby clubs in tiers one and two have not had their seasons expunged, unlike clubs from tiers three to seven.

The decision to null and void the season is also at odds with the FA's Strategic Plan, which includes a commitment to boosting participation in women's football and to achieve 'trusted regulation and efficient administration'. The move to entirely expunge the 2019/20 playing season undoubtedly risks jeopardising further participation in football across the board as a whole, as many may feel disenfranchised with the sport altogether – a potential direct consequence of the FA's decision.

Furthermore, The FA cannot disregard the potential mental health impact on those involved in the running of non-league teams affected by the decision. Football plays a monumental role in the lives of so many people, young and old, and the footballing authorities have rightly started to acknowledge this on a national scale. So we question whether this aspect has been considered when rushing out a decision as important and drastic as this.

The consensus that we have reached is to take a similar stance to what the Premier League aims to do – wait several weeks to see how the public health situation unfolds before deciding next steps. This is sensible in circumstances where it is by no means certain that we will even be able to start next season in a timely fashion. Among the options for serious consideration should be deciding final positions on a Points Per Game (PPG) basis, which unlike expunging the season, is rooted in the results of fair and meritocratic competition, and bears reflection of the hard work that clubs across the country have poured in this season. The FA has already used a PPG basis to decide final standings before, and many teams under the league re-structuring plans would stand to get promoted on the application of PPG.

A crisis like this is a watershed moment for the FA and the relationship it chooses to have with non-league and grassroots football. It is imperative to solve this issue sensibly and democratically over the coming weeks, with transparent, constructive and fair dialogue with respective leagues and clubs. The alternative which would certainly not reflect well on the FA, is forcing clubs to embark on potential legal recourse, which is wholly unnecessary and financially burdening to clubs. However, we reserve all our rights in this respect and this letter is without prejudice to any legal arguments which may become required to be made in due course.

We urge the FA to reconsider its decision and to slow down the whole process, offering proper consultation with afflicted leagues and clubs as the picture becomes clearer, before deciding a way forward. We stand ready to play our full part to help achieve a fair outcome, allowing the integrity of England's football pyramid to be upheld in such a period of national adversity.

Yours sincerely,

**Geoff Thompson**  
Chairman – South Shields FC

**David Dent**  
Chairman – Shildon AFC

**Sartej Tucker**  
Walton & Hersham FC

**Paul Tudor**  
Chairman - Wolverhampton Casuals FC

**Peter Palmer**  
Beckenham Town FC

**Martin Hillerby**  
Chairman – Stockton Town FC

**Spencer Carmichael-Brown**  
Chairman – Hashtag United FC

**Kev Fryett**  
Redcar Athletic FC

**Ian Horswell**  
Chairman - Jersey Bulls FC

**Guillem Balague**  
Biggleswade United FC

**Barry Hunter**  
Chairman - Worthing FC

**Richard Giles**  
Chairman - Ilkley Town AFC

**Marcus Gree**  
Coventry United FC

**Steve Richardson**  
Chairman - 1874 Northwich FC

**Steve Taylor**  
Chairman - Lancing FC

**Chris Stirrup**  
Chairman - AFC Liverpool

**Dan Birchmore**  
Secretary - Ascot United

**Rajinder Gill**  
Chairman - Sporting Khalsa

**Mick Sloane**  
Chairman - Shepshed Dynamo

**Ku Akeredolu**  
Chairman - Leicester Road FC

**Andy Marshall**  
Chairman - Dinnington Town FC

**Dave Keegan**  
Campion AFC

**Chris Lax**  
Wolviston FC

**Richard Kane**  
Chairman – Gainsborough Trinity FC

**Ash Berry**  
Shelley Community FC

**Ed Garty**  
Maldon & Tiptree FC

**Neil Sharp**  
Chairman - Stowmarket Town FC

**Tony Woodley**  
Vauxhall Motors FC

**Alan Smith**  
Chairman - Studley FC

**Ted Ilderton**  
West Allotment Celtic FC

**Kai Arter**  
Chairman - Otley Town FC

**Mark Wear**  
Stourbridge Ladies

**Bob Andrew**  
Chairman – Tamworth FC

**Vince Kirkup**  
Chairman - Crook Town AFC

**Robert Houghton**  
Gateshead Leam Rangers

**Paul Thompson**  
Chairman - Barnsley WFC

**Mike Tranter**  
Chairman - Shifnal Town

**Andrew Boyd**  
AFC Basildon Women

**Dave Ferrier**  
Chairman - Dudley Town FC

**Martin Marlborough**  
Chairman - Colney Heath FC

**Inanç Elitok**  
Chairman – Ware FC

**Colin Beat**  
Birtley Town FC

**Stuart Fitchie**  
Chairman – Herne Bay FC

**Jack Richards**  
Truro City FC

**Peter Clewer**  
Uttoxeter Town FC

**Joe Doran**  
Bootle FC

**John Wonfor**  
Selby Town FC

**Mark Brough**  
Leek Town FC

**Billy Wood**  
CEO - Hastings United FC

**Andrew Morris**  
Westfields FC

**Andy Pountney**  
Stourbridge FC

**Karen Brookes**  
Halesowen Town FC

**John Lowe**  
Farnham Town

**Stuart Turner**  
Chairman - Quorn FC

**John Manship**  
Chairman - Melton Town

**Jim Davies**  
Lower Breck FC

**Bryan White**  
Workington AFC

**Duane James**  
Mulbarton Wanderers

**Andy Perkins**  
Walthamstow FC

**Stevie Carter**  
Ryton & Crawcrook FC

**Anthony Golden**  
Sunderland West End FC

**Sue Billings**  
Corinthian FC

**Mike Tranter**  
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**Justin Hodgkin**  
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**Graham Read**  
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**Darren Attwood**  
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