

1 December 2025

**TO: SWPL CLUBS  
SWF CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS**

**Circulated by email only**

Dear Colleagues

**The Scottish Women's Premier League Limited ("the Company")  
The Scottish Women's Premier League ("the SWPL")  
Membership of the SWPL for Season 2026/27**

**A. Introduction**

On 25 May 2022, SWPL Clubs signed a Participation Agreement, enabling them to participate in the newly formed SWPL. On that day, the Articles of Association, and the Rules were also agreed and adopted. As part of the adopted Competition Rules, Clubs must adhere to the Membership Criteria of the SWPL.

Following the commencement of each Season, the SWPL will issue a letter in the same general form as this letter, which will be adjusted in appropriate terms from Season to Season, setting out to member "**Clubs**" and clubs which might potentially become a member of the SWPL through promotion ("**Candidate Clubs**"), the Membership Criteria of the SWPL and other related considerations for the next following Season.

The relevant Season to which this letter primarily relates is Season **2026/27** although there may be some information updates which may require attention during Season **2025/26**.

Copies of the Articles of the Company and the Competition Rules which have previously been circulated to Clubs, are attached for ease of reference, and are also available via the SWPL website (<https://swpl.uk/>). 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 Competition 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 2025/26 four amendments to the Membership Criteria were made. The Board approved the amendments following the SWPL's Annual General Meeting on Tuesday 10 June 2025.

**TO: SWPL CLUBS / SWF CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS**

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The first three amendments relate to wording regarding the requirement for Clubs to hold a Scottish FA Licence. The amendments were made in part, due to the Scottish FA's implementation of their new Women's Club Licensing programme which will be implemented from Season 2025/26.

The amended wording has the effect that at the beginning of each Season the Board may determine the Scottish FA Club Licensing standards required by Clubs/Candidate Clubs in respect of respect of their Home Ground, overall Licence Award, and floodlights which Clubs/Candidate Clubs will be required to have as at 31 March of that Season, to meet the Membership Criteria for the following Season.

The first of the three amendments (D4.5.1) relates to the Ground Criteria required by Clubs/Candidate Clubs, the second (D4.9) relates to the overall Licence Award and the third relates to floodlights (Rule H18). Clubs must meet that standard as at the 31 March of the relevant Season.

The SWPL Board confirmed at the Board meeting on 1 September 2025 that the standard set by the Board in respect of Home Ground, Floodlight, and overall Licence Award, which Clubs/Candidate Clubs will be required to have at 31 March 2026, is **Bronze**. This was confirmed to Clubs and Candidate Clubs on 16 September 2025.

In addition, the fourth and final amendment made prior to the start of Season 2025/26 clarified that Clubs and Candidate Clubs must register their Home Ground with the SWPL by no later than 31 March (D4.2).

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

**SWPL Membership Criteria**

Below is a summary of the principal provisions of the Competition Rules as they relate to, Membership of the SWPL, Ground Registration, stadia requirements, Artificial Pitch requirements and Financial Fair Play. Reference is also made to the Rules of the League Play-Off Match.

The Membership Criteria of the SWPL and related Rules are to be found in **Sections D and H** of the SWPL Competition Rules. Your attention is drawn, in particular, to **Rules D1 to D8** (inclusive) and **Rules H1 to H21** (inclusive). In addition, there are requirements in **Section B** which must be complied with as a condition of being permitted to play in the SWPL and in **Section G** in relation to fixtures. **Section C** of the Rules describes the structure and operation of the SWPL and **Rule E31** contains the SWPL financial Rules regarding No Overdue Payables and Compliance with Employee Remuneration Requirements.

**"Candidate Club" and League Play-Off Competition**

The term **Candidate Club** refers to any club which, on sporting merit, may be eligible to participate in the SWPL either directly by winning SWF's Championship, or as a consequence of winning a Play-Off Competition, subject to compliance with SWPL Membership Criteria. For present purposes this is a reference to the League Play-Off Match at the end of Season 2025/26 and potential promotion to SWPL2 for Season 2026/27.

**TO: SWPL CLUBS / SWF CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS**

Provision is made in **Rule C26** for a League Play-Off Competition to take place at the end of Season 2025/26 between the Club in position 19 in the SWPL and the second placed team of SWF's top league in a single League Play-Off Match.

In order to be entitled to participate in League Play-Off Competition Matches the SWF club must first have either complied with the SWPL Membership Criteria not later than **31 March 2026** or have secured from the Board of the SWPL any necessary approval, waiver and/or period of grace. If the SWF club fails to so comply and/or secure, then it/they are prohibited from participating in the League Play-Off Match.

All clubs in membership of SWF's Championship competition are potentially the Candidate Club and each should now carefully consider what measures/steps each would require to take to meet the SWPL 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 the League Play-Off Match at the end of Season 2025/26; and (ii) to be promoted to SWPL 2 of the SWPL, if successful as the winner of that League 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 Candidate Clubs to apply to the SWPL Board for a waiver, relaxation, period of grace and/or approval in relation to certain aspects of the SWPL 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 SWPL Board in the event that such an application is received.

Please note that 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 Candidate Clubs 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 SWPL Board on or prior to **31 March 2026**.

**B. Summary of SWPL Membership Criteria and Related Matters**

For full details of the SWPL Membership Criteria, arrangements and requirements, reference should be made to the Competition Rules.

1. **Rule C1 and C2:** the 20 Clubs eligible to participate in the SWPL in Season 2026/27 shall be the 20 leading women's football clubs in Scotland. The same 20 Clubs will be the Clubs of the SWPL during Season 2026/27, except that:
  - a. the Club finishing in position 20 in the League in the immediately preceding Season shall be automatically relegated from the League and replaced with the club finishing in position 1 in the SWF Championship; and
  - b. the Club finishing in position 19 in the League in the immediately preceding Season, if it shall lose the League Play-Off Match, shall be relegated from the League and replaced with the winner of the League Play-Off Match, subject to such Candidate Club(s) being eligible and having satisfied the provisions of the Rules summarised below.

**TO: SWPL CLUBS / SWF CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS**

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2. At the end of Season 2025/26 there is provision for a League Play-Off Competition in terms of **Rule C26**, in which the Club occupying position 19 in the SWPL will, subject to the SWF club in position 2 of their top league meeting the SWPL Membership Criteria and having regard to SWPL Board decisions on approvals, waivers and/or period(s) of grace, be required to take part. The current Rules for the operation of the League Play-Off Match are included in the SWPL Competition Rules.
  
3. **Rule D3**: if a Club, in the opinion of the SWPL Board, fails or would fail to fully comply with the SWPL Membership Criteria if it participates or were to participate in the SWPL in any Season and no relevant approval, waiver and/or period of grace is granted by the SWPL Board, then that Club is liable to such sanction or action as may be decided on by the SWPL Board.
  
4. **Rule D4**: the Membership Criteria of the SWPL are:-
  - membership of the Scottish FA, which includes both full members and registered members. A club shall be admitted as a registered member automatically by reason of it participating in the SWPL;
  - registration of a Club's and Candidate Club's Home Ground with the SWPL by 31 March 2026, in accordance with Rule H13;
  - a Club participating in the SWPL must have entered into and be entitled to participate, in terms of a Participation Agreement with the Company which is to be signed by a Candidate Club on promotion to the SWPL;
  - a Club and Candidate Club when participating in the SWPL must either own its Registered Ground, whether by itself or through a holding or subsidiary company, or have such rights of occupation or tenure in its Registered Ground as may be approved by the SWPL Board;
  - Clubs' and Candidate Clubs' Registered Grounds for a Season must, by not later than 31 March immediately preceding the relevant Season, comply with a minimum of the Bronze stadia criteria as set out in the Scottish FA's Women's Club Licensing Manual at a minimum;
  - **Rules H18** (floodlighting) and **H19-H20** (pitch dimensions) must be complied with;
  - a Club and Candidate Club must comply with **Rule H23** and provide a copy of its safety certificate as referred to in **Rule H22**, unless it has previously been provided or it is not required by law, to the Secretary not less than one month prior to the start of each season;
  - all Clubs are required to take such steps as the SWPL Board considers necessary to implement the development of youth football in Scotland in accordance with the requirements, philosophy and recommendations of the Company;

## **TO: SWPL CLUBS / SWF CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS**

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- Clubs and Candidate Clubs intending to make use of a synthetic or artificial playing surface for SWPL Matches must comply with the procedures and obtain the appropriate approvals, including from the SWPL Board, as set out in **Rule H4**; and
- all Clubs and Candidate Clubs must have sent to and had received by the Secretary, a fully completed and signed declaration and certificate confirming compliance with No Overdue Payables and Compliance with Employee Remuneration Requirements Rules as at 31 January 2026 in a form specified by the Board and in accordance with **Rule E31.7**. The date by which the required declaration and certificate must be provided is 31 March 2026.

### **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 SWPL Membership Criteria or for an extension of the period, within which a ground may be registered with the SWPL 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 SWPL Board may, in its absolute discretion, waive, relax or grant a period of grace in respect of any Club or the Candidate Clubs requirement to comply with any part of the SWPL Membership Criteria 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 SWPL.

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

## **C. Summary of Key Home Ground Related Matters**

### **Registration of Grounds**

**Rule H13:** all Clubs and Candidate Clubs must, subject to rule D6, register or be deemed to have registered its Home Ground with the Secretary by not later than **31 March** immediately preceding each Season. If a Club's Home Ground is already registered with the SWPL, that registration will be deemed, providing there has been no relevant change in circumstances, continued for Season 2026/27 (**Rule H16**), subject to that ground meeting the newly implemented Licensing Standard. Where the ground does not meet the required standard, the Club/ Candidate Club will be required to apply to the SWPL Board for a Period of Grace and or Waiver, or register a compliant Home Ground.

### **Other Stadia Requirements**

Clubs and Candidate Clubs 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 SWPL Board to play its Home Matches from time to time 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;

**TO: SWPL CLUBS / SWF CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS**

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- **Rule H12:** The SWPL Board is entitled to direct a Club to take such steps as the SWPL Board considers necessary in order that the pitch at its Registered Ground or other ground where it is authorised to play its Home Matches from time to time is put into and maintained in good condition and repair;
- **Rule H18:** Registered Grounds or other grounds authorised for the playing of Home Matches are required to have floodlights which give minimum lux and other values as outlined in the Scottish FA Women's Club Licensing Manual, based on the standards set by the SWPL Board, which, as noted above will be the Bronze standard for both SWPL1 and SWPL2;
- **Rule H19:** there are minimum and maximum pitch dimensions; and
- **Rule H22 and H23:** a Club and Candidate Club must comply with **Rule H23** and provide a copy of its safety certificate as referred to in **Rule H22**, unless it has previously been provided or it is not required by law, to the Secretary not less than one month prior to the start of each season.

A failure to comply with these requirements is a breach of the Rules and would result in the relevant Club being liable to a range of possible sanctions.

**Stadium Tenure and Occupation Arrangements**

**Rule D4.4.2:** if a Club or Candidate Club wishes, in relation to Season 2026/27, to have, as its Registered Ground, one which it does not own or which is not owned by a subsidiary or holding company of the Club or Candidate Club concerned, then 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 SWPL 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 SWPL Board is likely to regard the following as relevant:-

- a. such an agreement must contain provisions, satisfactory to the SWPL Board, that the Club in question will be able to fulfil each and all of its Home fixtures in the SWPL, Scottish Cup and League Cup 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;
- b. 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 with regards to facilities, including for the recording, transmission and broadcasting of Home matches, as set out in the Rules and such other football organisations in whose competitions the Club in question will take part during the Season;
- c. whether the Board is satisfied that there will be compliance with **Rule H11** (Pitch Condition);

**TO: SWPL CLUBS / SWF CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS**

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- d. 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;
- e. whether a like application has been made by the same Club for a previous Season; and
- f. 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.

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

All Clubs and Candidate Clubs should consider the basis on which they occupy their Home Ground and consider whether they require to make an application for approval by the SWPL Board for Season 2026/27, on or prior to **31 March 2026**, in terms of **Rule D4.4.2**.

**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 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'<sup>1</sup>) and it must be demonstrated to the SWPL Board that the pitch in question meets and continues to meet the relevant FIFA quality and performance criteria which, from 26 October 2015, is 'FIFA Quality Pro'.

Per **Rule H4.2** it is the highest FIFA standard which is applied to synthetic or artificial playing surfaces used in SWPL Matches; accordingly, all artificial and synthetic surfaces used in SWPL Matches must be played on surfaces which 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 SWPL Matches may no longer be compliant with the relevant FIFA standard, in which case further procedures may be applied and/or the approval may be withdrawn.

**D. Summary of Other Related Matters**

**Financial Fair Play**

**Rule E31** requires that Clubs and Candidate Clubs are under an obligation to certify that they have no Overdue Payables as regards other football clubs, football authorities (primarily SWPL and Scottish FA), overdue payments to players and coaching staff (primarily remuneration and pension obligations) and no overdue sums in relation to employment taxes as at 31 January of that year and provide certification by no later than **31 March of the same year**.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://football-technology.fifa.com/media/1026/fifa\\_quality\\_programme\\_for\\_football\\_turf.pdf](https://football-technology.fifa.com/media/1026/fifa_quality_programme_for_football_turf.pdf)

## **TO: SWPL CLUBS / SWF CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS**

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Additionally, by the same date, Clubs and Candidate Clubs 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. This declaration and certification are part of the Membership Criteria of the SWPL.

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

Please note that in terms of **Rule E17**, any failure by a Club to meet pensions obligations and/or to deliver on employment contract benefits in kind is a Remuneration Default.

### **E. Appeals**

Clubs and Candidate Clubs have a right to appeal to the Scottish FA Judicial Panel against decisions of the Board of the SWPL in relation to compliance with SWPL 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 ground which a Club or Candidate Club intends to Register as its Home Ground **for Season 2026/27** is required to meet the SWPL Membership Criteria relating to stadia in **Rule D4.5**.

**31 March 2026** – the last date for making an application to the SWPL for approval of a basis of tenure or occupation, other than ownership, in relation to a Club's/Candidate Club's prospective Registered Ground **for Season 2026/27**.

**31 March 2026** - the last date for Clubs and Candidate Clubs to make an application to the SWPL for a waiver, relaxation or period of grace in relation to all or any part of the Membership Criteria for **Season 2026/27**.

**31 March 2026** – the last date for Clubs and Candidate Clubs to make an application to the SWPL by for approval of the use of a specified synthetic or artificial playing surface and pitch in League Matches and League Play-Off Matches for **Season 2026/27**.

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

**All of the above applications and registration must be made/notified to Iain Stuart ([iainstuart@SPFL.co.uk](mailto:iainstuart@SPFL.co.uk)) copying in Ross Aiken ([rossaiken@spfl.co.uk](mailto:rossaiken@spfl.co.uk)) in writing not later than the relevant specified date.**

**TO: SWPL CLUBS / SWF CHAMPIONSHIP CLUBS**

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**G. Conclusion**

Please contact Iain Stuart if you have any difficulties or queries regarding any aspect of the above.

A copy of this letter will be placed on the SWPL website at [Scottish Women's Premier League](#).

Yours sincerely



**Molly Hyde**  
**Company Secretary**  
**The Scottish Women's Premier League Limited**

cc SWPL Board Members  
Ian Maxwell, Chief Executive, Scottish FA  
Aileen Campbell, Chief Executive, Scottish Women's Football