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To: Stephen Pearson Esq.

*Chair of the Future Competitions Structure Working Group
competitions-development@rfu.com*

Preston Grasshoppers RFC response to recommendation paper on the adult male competitions structure (English Club Championship Level 3 and below) for implementation in the 2021/22 season

Firstly, can we thank you again for the time you spent with us discussing our club submission on our 24 July zoom call. We recognised that we had raised a number of issues, some of which were outside the scope of the new competition structure working group but like you, we thought it was a good discussion and were grateful for the opportunity to share our thoughts and concerns with you at that time. Now that the consultation exercise has been completed, we have studied your future competition plan and would like to share further thoughts and responses for your consideration.

- We are pleased to see our cup competition suggestions taken on board, albeit only at level 5 and below. We believe our combined league and Cup proposal offers a much more attractive package for local regional and national sponsors than the somewhat piecemeal RFU proposal which has serious implications for club sustainability.
- We are disappointed that you have felt unable to consider adoption of our alternative flatter structure with less geographical sub-division and leagues of 14 teams and fully incorporating Levels 3&4. We still believe our proposal would offer a more sustainable fit within the overall league structure and believe it sits comfortably with the recently published Championship/Heartland proposals. We do however appreciate that our proposal came late in your discussions with the NCA and some members of that organisation would prefer to be more aligned with professional rugby aspirations than the community game.
- We note the absence of transition proposals towards the new structure. We have not been party to recent exchanges on this topic between the NCA/National league teams and are concerned to see that a limited circulation questionnaire has been circulated by the NCA seeking thoughts on the use of last year's results or delaying the introduction of the new competition structure by a year to allow more data to support promotion/relegation to the new structure. From our perspective, we would expect next seasons on field performance to be an underpinning feature for all movement between leagues and we believe that it is inherent in any league structure that transition proposals need to be fair to all parties involved in both old and new structures. We are not aware that you might be considering delaying introduction of the new structure and as you would expect, as a club which has played at both level 4 and level 5 in recent years, we are very keen to be involved in any future discussions which may be held on transition plans. We believe that such discussions should include all clubs involved in the new structure.

- Moving now to wider issues; despite the topics not being included in the scope of the new competition plans, we repeat our sustainability concerns related to the issues of salary cap and wage inflation. We would be very grateful if you could advise us on how best we might pursue these topics. Whilst it would be against the spirit of the game for us to point the finger at individual clubs, and despite assertions to the contrary, we are well aware of, and believe, allegations that a number of clubs in our region pay players outside the appropriate PAYE system and do not acknowledge such payments exist. This is one of the fundamental reasons that we advocate the need for a strict, well policed salary cap with no facility for opt-out. At our zoom session you said that there is another working group reviewing salary cap issues. We wonder if it would be possible for you to facilitate our contact with that group so that we can share our concerns with them.
- Finally, we recognise that our suggestions related to additional infrastructure qualification requirements for promotion into National leagues is not a short-term issue. However, from our discussion, we believe that there was support for our suggestions to build on the community hub concept which justifies the investment of clubs like ours into young players and in trying to make attendance at our club a safe and enjoyable one for players and spectators alike. We would like to express our real interest in being involved in any future discussions on this topic whenever they may be held.

Individuals within the club may of course complete your questionnaire in addition to this “official” club response. We would welcome continuing direct dialogue on the questions and issues we have identified in this note. If it would be helpful to you, we would be happy to be involved in further conference calls. In the meantime, we continue to target getting back into regular rugby and pursuing our aim of being a long term, sustainable rugby club at the centre of our community which successfully delivers the values promoted by the RFU.

Yours sincerely,

Gareth Dyer

Head of Rugby Operations; On Behalf of Preston Grasshoppers RFC

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