Summary of poll results

"You all had 6 or 7 matches in the year, plus any Cuppers matches you qualified for. Did you feel this was..."
About right: 37
Too many: 3
Too few: 14
Don't mind: 1

Perhaps 7 or 8 league matches would be an optimal number, then. Interestingly, there was essentially no difference between division 1 players and division 2 players in this section.

"Do you prefer the new structure to the old structure?"
Yes: 7
No: 17
No preference: 31

So among the firm opinions, there is over twice the support for the old structure than for the new, but over half have no preference. 14 of the "No" votes came from Div 1 players.

"Which of these league structures would you prefer?"
Old: 17
New: 14
Termly: 10
Don't mind: 14

A rather even split, although the termly structure has not gained enough support to be considered.

Three key features of the comments were

1) a will to allow the best teams to play each other in the college leagues:

"...we found that even in 'division 1' last year we ended up playing a couple of teams of substantially lower standard than others..."

"Have the best teams playing each other and the up and coming teams playing ability appropriate opposition."

2) a feeling that the idea of a league final was unjust:

"An all or nothing match should only be for tournaments really."

"Whilst I like the idea of a longer than usual final match I feel this should be kept to cuppers..."

"...I do think that it is a bit tough having the whole season come down to one playoff..."

3) a desire to force better organisation amongst captains:

"...there seem to be too few matches in Michaelmas and then an almighty pile up at the end of Lent when people realise they actually have to play their fixtures."

"One issue with the structure last year was a lot of matches kept being pushed later and later in term before a few eventually were forfeited."

"More frequent matches would be great, but it relies on captains being able to organise matches appropriately"

Old or new?

So which would be preferred - the old structure or the new? The answer has to be the old structure. The new structure is at odds with the first two points, and garnered less support in both of the last two questions on the poll. However, we must remember the reasons why we moved to the new structure in the first place:

4) to reduce the number of Div 1 matches below 10;
5) to remove the third tier, in which many teams felt uncompelled to play, and make the leagues more exciting for more teams by bringing them closer to the top of the structure; and
6) to promote greater mobility between the first and second tiers.

In moving back to the old structure, we have a chance to solve problem 4 by reforming a single Division 1 with 10 teams. The other two problems, on the other hand, will return. We have considered having divisions 1/2a/2b/2c to solve problem 5 but this exacerbates problem 6.

What to do in 2014-5?

It is also out of the question that we move back to the old structure this year, simply because it would involve telling 6 teams who believe they have a chance to be league winners this year that they are mistaken. But it would be possible to run the old structure in 2015-6 if we tell teams where they need to place this year in order to qualify for div 1 in 2015-6.

This is why we would like to give captains the chance to opt for a third kind of structure - what I will dub the "KJ structure" (after a certain committee member). This is a little hard to explain in words, but a picture helps.

The KJ structure - http://imgur.com/zmro5dK

Division 1 will contain 18 teams, initially split into three sub-divisions of roughly equal talent. Call these 1Red, 1Green and 1Blue.

These sub-divisions (of 6 teams) complete a round-robin league (i.e. each team plays each other team once - 5 matches).

The top two teams of each sub-division at the end of this round-robin qualify for division 1a. The middle two progress to 1b, and the bottom two, to 1c.

These new sub-divisions complete another round-robin league. To save time, fixtures appearing in round-robin 2 which already happened in round-robin 1 will not be repeated; this shaves one match off of each team's fixture list (so, another 4 games - a total of 9 in the season).

The winner of 1a is the league winner, and the bottom 4 teams in 1c get relegated.

Lower tiers will follow a similar system, but will need to change in form year-on-year to make allowances for the number of signups. They may use either 2 or 3 sub-divisions. Tiers will always contain between 10 and 19 teams.

This system conveniently produces a seeding of all teams for next year's league, too.

Why we're offering this option

This structure solves problems 2, 4, 5 and 6 and also somewhat solves problems 1 and 3 - the latter, because captains will be forced to complete their Red/Green/Blue matches by an intermediary deadline, forcing them to spread out their matches.

We don't, however, want to force any changes on teams without a vote first.

Your choices

We are asking each team to vote for one of the following to be used in 2014-5:

- the new structure
- the KJ structure

Note that the "new" structure here is the one used in 2013-4, with two div 1s.

If the new structure wins, it will run for one more year, and then revert to the old structure. I will tell teams that next year's Div 1 will be comprised of the four top teams in each of 1a and 1b, and the winners of 2a and 2b.

If the KJ structure wins, I will continue to ask captains for their opinion on it, and, if it proves popular enough, it will remain in future years. But the alternative is a return to the old structure, so I will still tell teams to aim to be one of the top 10 within the KJ structure.