

Calendar 2024 - 2025 (accompany Calendar for Board approval)

1. Objective of this paper

The purpose of this paper is to seek Hockey Ireland Board approval to the Calendar for the season 2024 - 2025. The paper provides the explanatory notes for the agreed operation of the Calendar plus background information on the engagement and consultation process to build the 24/25 Calendar.

2. Approach taken to building the Calendar

The Competition Review Group (CRG) has been tasked with leading the development of the 2024 /25 Calendar and in parallel to deliver an engagement process template for use in subsequent seasons to ensure engagement and consultation with all stakeholders of the domestic calendar.

The CRG drafted an engagement timeline for building the Calendar over a number of months, iterating a number of drafts taking input from all stakeholders including: HP Director, current HI Competition Committee Working Groups (IHL, Cups, Indoor, Interpros, Schools & Colleges, Technical Officials), Umpires Association and the Provinces. See the timetable for the Calendar and the stakeholders involved in Section 5.

The Calendar has been built based on Guiding Principles detailed below in Section 3. It is recognised that in building the Calendar compromises are required, given that player cohorts cross over between HP, JAG, clubs, schools and colleges. This final Calendar sent for Board approval is the best compromise that can be achieved following engagement and consultation with all Stakeholders.

The certainty of HP plans at this early stage cannot be secured as timing does not align with a) the Sport Ireland multi-annual funding cycle, b) ProLeague (PL) qualification is unknown until June, and c) other NA's commitment to test matches /warm weather training camps is unachievable until later in the year. 2024/25 PL participation will require two availability blocks for Ireland participating teams - February and June 2025 - and the Calendar has been built to be adaptable with minimal impact and changes required should one or both teams be playing in the PL.

The approved Calendar and these Guiding Principles and explanatory notes for the operation of the Calendar will be published on the website.

The annual Calendar must be agreed by mid-May, so that competition planning and scheduling can take place across HI, provinces, schools and colleges.

The Provinces are required to build their own competition calendar aligned with the HI Calendar and to adhere to the Calendar operational decisions as covered in Section 4.

Once issued, IT SHOULD BE NOTED HOWEVER, THAT THE CALENDAR REMAIN SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

The website should always be used to reference the latest Calendar and any change will be announced.

3. Guiding Principles for Developing the Calendar

1. **Where possible**, the HI Calendar should be the same for men and women club competitions and particularly to keep key events together, e.g. EYHL Champions Trophy, ISC Finals.
2. In building the calendar, the competitions are prioritised as follows:

Tier	Competitions	Comment
1	FIH, EuroHockey Nations - Outdoor & Indoor. HP Senior training camps. EuroHockey Clubs – Outdoor and Indoor.	No Tier 2 competitions scheduled to clash. Clubs representing Ireland, will be able to re-schedule domestic competitions (and the schedule will have ensured local opposition).
2	IHL (Div1 & Div2). ISC. Interpro's – U16 & U18.	No full competition schedule or playoffs scheduled to clash with Tier 1 or another Tier 2 competition (except where mutually exclusive). One off match re-schedule allowable where workable.
3	Provincial Leagues.	May schedule to clash with Tier 1 (except when in Ireland). No HP players available. May only schedule on EYHL/Cup weekend, where workable & not penal to a club based on Sat fixture venue (re-fix request to Provincial Committee).
4	Provincial Cups.	May schedule to clash with Tier 1 (except when in Ireland). No HP players available. May only schedule on EYHL/Cup weekend, where workable & not penal to a club based on Sat fixture venue (re-fix request to Provincial Committee). May not schedule any provincial cups on same weekend as EYHL Champions Trophy weekend.

3. HI Outdoor club competition will have a mid-season break to manage player load and the period for bad weather and unsafe travel conditions to minimise number of postponements.
4. HP players will be available for all rounds of the IHL (Div 1), playoffs and Champions Trophy as well as the ISC semi-finals and final. The HP players MAY be made available for ISC KO16 and KO8 and this will be announced in December 24.
5. HP players must be made available to represent their club in EuroHockey competition up to 15th May. Any requirement beyond that date, will be subject to agreement with the HP Director.
6. Clubs representing Ireland in EuroHockey competitions will be able to reschedule any clashing domestic competition match. The re-scheduled date will be determined by the Clubs Outdoor sub-group, having consulted the HP Director, if appropriate.
7. HI Indoor Competition to be aligned to EuroHockey Nations and Club tournaments to ensure Indoor players can play domestically and in international competitions.
8. JAG Sunday training dates have been provided to avoid inadvertent scheduling / re-scheduling of club competitions on these dates and thus helping to prevent clashes. No other dates, other than those in the Calendar have priority over club competitive hockey.
9. St. Patrick's Day is specifically reserved for provincial club hockey.
10. It is recognised that IHUA does not have sufficient umpires to cover all HI competitions and priority will be applied. Cup regulations include when umpire appointment is club responsibility.

4. 'Rules' and guidelines for the operation of the Calendar

The following rules and guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Calendar. There is also a 'Notes' column to the right on the Calendar Spreadsheet.

Any issue, query or challenge should be addressed to the Competitions Committee Chairperson in the first instance.

Clubs – Outdoor

- The HI season has two phases with a mid-season break in all island competition from 8th December through to 8th Feb for EYHL1 teams and 25th Jan for EYHL2 and IJC.
- Mid-season break opportunity:
 - Provinces encouraged to use the break for local competitions, particularly Cups, to support clubs in player and squad development.
 - The indoor HI and provincial competitions schedule provide further player competitive and development opportunity.
 - Rest and recovery option is available / suitable for some players
- One double weekend has been scheduled for EYHL1 pre-Christmas, with a date for a possible March double weekend flagged, should HP have matches (PL, tournament or training matches) in February.
- HP carded players will be available on 20 weekends for HI club outdoor competitions (17 x EYHL1 weekends, 2 x ISC Saturdays, 2 x Champions Trophy playoffs and finals weekend). The HP carded players may be made available for the ISC KO16 and KO8, and if so, this will be communicated in December. Note: request / restriction may apply to an individual player at any time due to specific circumstances, such as injury, load, etc.).
- The EYHL Champions Trophy will take place on the May Bank Holiday weekend. As this is the premier domestic competition, no other competitions on the island can take place, to enable all the hockey community attend, particularly club members and supporters from participating clubs.
- EYHL2 will follow the same format as 2023/24. Each province to confirm their entries by 31st December 2024 and the first league matches will start on 25th January. *Note: Any review of the format changes introduced in 2023/24 can only be conducted once the current season finishes.*
- EYHL2 has 1 x double weekend (Round 3 & 4). For Round 4, if both clubs fail to progress through to ISC KO8, then the EYHL2 Round 4 match will be moved forward 1 week.
- Provinces local league and Cup scheduling to be built aligned with the Calendar and the underlying Principles and Calendar operations rules included in this document. If a provincial Sunday scheduling throws up an unfair situation due to extensive travel for HI competition on Saturday, a re-fix request to be agreed by the provincial committee.
- Contingency dates have been provided for in the Calendar one each side of Christmas to manage player load and minimise backup at the end of the season if postponements happen.
- Re-scheduling of any HI competition matches will be done in consultation with the Clubs Outdoor sub-group and HP, where applicable.

Hockey Ireland 1st XI Cup Competitions – new guidelines

- Open to every club in Ireland to enter the 'Irish Cup' and by virtue of provincial ranking position at end of the previous season, the club is assigned to the appropriate Cup (Senior, Trophy, Challenge I, Challenge II), with each Cup limited to 16 clubs.
- This provides:
 - More balanced number of matches and attractive competition with realistic chance of winning to encourage entry and helps with over /under playing issues for players and clubs
 - Improves the situation for Fixtures Secretaries /Administrators regarding re-scheduling and helps improve planning and management of facilities
 - Finals can be held earlier in the Calendar than previously with less 'waiting weeks' at the end of the season for suitable cup final dates
- Choice of venues for Finals will seek to ensure participating clubs can maximise attendance from their supporters.

Clubs - Indoor

- The HI Indoor tournament format is being changed from this season. There will be a Final 6's Sunday and a Final 4's Sunday to determine the Irish Champions, thus ensuring full regional representation for finals.
- Provinces will need to plan for their Indoor qualifying competitions within their own Calendars and to complete no later than **26th January 2025**.

Schoolboys & Schoolgirls competitions

- The dates for Kate Russell, Schoolboys, John Waring and June Smith are included on the calendar.
- A competition extending number of senior schoolgirls teams is being piloted this year (Daphne Hall), subject to sanctioning of the event by Hockey Ireland

Intersities

- The Intersities will return and run as a pre-season tournament in September.

U16 & U18's Interpros

- The JAG competition and training dates follow the approach for the last few seasons.
- Note: A review of the JAG pathway and Interpros is planned to commence this year and complete before end 2024.

Master Interpros

- Note, the Masters program is **NOT** run by the HI Competitions WG and dates are not known. Dates for the Masters must not clash with HI competitions.
- This requirement will also minimise difficulty in securing Umpires and Officials for Masters events.

5. Consultation Process and Approach

The Calendar was built over a period, taking drafts through iterations and consultation as below.

No.	Consultation Engagement Step	Stakeholders	By When
1	Draft the process for developing the Calendar and circulate to all stakeholders (as below). <i>Ensure everyone is aware of what is happening, when and what they need to do.</i>	I Cooper	22-Mar
2	Gather the HP international commitments (including JAG) and agree specific considerations for 2024/25 and produce Version 1.	I Cooper, HP Director (and Pathway Manager, if applicable)	22-Mar
3	Circulate Calendar Version 1 including considerations to the Competitions Review WG	I Cooper	24-Mar 5-April
4	HP confirmation that Calendar Version 1 reflects position agreed	HP Director	28-Mar
5	Competitions Review WG meeting to discuss and build out to reflect domestic competitions – guiding principles and dates, creating Version 2.	Competition Review WG	9-April 8-April
6	Circulate Version 2 to the existing Competitions Committee / WG chairs for any additional comments.	I Kelly	10-April 21-April
7	Discuss comments with existing Competitions Committee lead persons (individually)	I Kelly	17-April
8	Finalise draft and create Version 3 of the Calendar and guiding principles and notes.	Competition Review WG	22-April 1-May
9	Issue Version 3 to wider Stakeholder Group, along with request to all stakeholders to attend meeting to take feedback, make decisions and finalise Calendar. <i>Assumes attendees will come with any specific issues/change requests from respective organisations and are in a position to work to compromise with all stakeholders</i>	I Cooper Issue to: Branch Competition Secretaries, HI Competition WG Chairs (Cups, IHL, Indoor, Interpros, Schools & Colleges), HP team, Umpires, Officials, HI Office	23-April
10	Hold meeting with all stakeholders to review Calendar and agree as a group to any changes. <i>Online.</i>	As above	5-May 13-May
11	Issue Final draft to all Stakeholders and seek acknowledgement for Calendar going to Board for approval. <i>(Expectation is that meeting attendees represent the discussions and conclusions back to their respective organisation. Any stakeholder can note their dissent to final agreed position. This will be submitted with the paper to the Board).</i>	I Cooper	7 May 14-May
12	Stakeholder acknowledgement to Calendar	All stakeholders	10-May
13	Provide Calendar to Management Board for approval at the May Board	I Cooper	11-May 17-May