



ANNUAL GRASSROOTS DISCIPLINARY REVIEW

FOR ALL

PUBLISHED: NOVEMBER 2023



FOR ALL

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INTRODUCTION



This Annual Disciplinary Review is drafted to provide an insight to all misconduct types which are overseen by the Grassroots Discipline Team, including assaults/attempted assault on a match official, physical contact/attempted physical contact against a match official, threatening behaviour against a match official, participant on participant assault, aggravated misconduct, and acts of discrimination, whether that be direct, indirect, victimisation or harassment.

These matters are referred to as “serious cases” and, when charged, are considered by the National Serious Case Panel, a highly skilled and diverse disciplinary panel that specialises in such cases. The National Serious Case Panel membership is comprised of individuals from varying backgrounds, from circuit judges, King’s Counsel, junior barristers and solicitors, to social care experts, current or former members of the police force and individuals from County Football Associations with strong footballing experience.

The National Serious Case Panel is recognised as a diverse disciplinary panel, with 46% of its total membership, deriving from ethnicities which are underrepresented within the game, along with 37% of its total membership, being female (vs 13% and 9% in 2020 respectively) This in turn inspires greater confidence in the process from those who report discrimination as they experience disciplinary panels that are diverse and reflective of the modern game.

In a bid to promote transparency in this space, the Grassroots Discipline Team will commit to publishing our data annually.

A handwritten signature in white ink, appearing to read 'Fraser'.

Fraser Williamson
Senior Discipline Manager
The Football Association

Note: County Football Associations deal with discipline matters at Steps 5 and below of the men’s football pyramid and at Steps 3 and below of the women’s pyramid. In terms of this report, ‘Grassroots’ refers to football taking place at and below these tiers of the game.

OVERVIEW

ALLEGATIONS

Note:

At the time of writing, there are a number of cases unresolved, therefore affecting the total proven/not proven outcomes.

Number of collective **serious case allegations** in 2022/2023: **3,636**

Number of **discriminatory allegations** in 2022/2023: **2,078**

Number of collective **serious case allegations** in 2021/2022: **3,324**

Number of **discriminatory allegations** in 2021/2022: **1,894**

Percentage change: **+9%**

Percentage change: **+10%**

Commentary:

As we continue to prioritise greater awareness of the disciplinary process and how to report misconduct, it is expected that the rate of allegations will increase year-on-year. It remains unclear as to whether misconduct is increasing within the game, or whether participants or bystanders are becoming more confident in reporting incidents. The Football Association remains committed to ensuring that where allegations are made, a thorough investigation will take place and charges brought against perpetrators where necessary. We want to see an increase in reporting so we can then hold offenders to account for their behaviour.

Commentary:

Discriminatory allegations are predominantly reported following comments made during a fixture or matters posted on social media platforms. Participants will often deny social media charges as they feel The Football Association does not have any right to challenge personal social media posts. However, FA Rule E3.1 clearly highlights that a participant must act in the best interests of the game at all times.

OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

SERIOUS OFFENCES/CHARGES

Number of **serious offences against a match official** in 2022/2023:

1,451

Number of **serious offences against a match official** in 2021/2022:

1,430

Percentage change:

+1%

Commentary:

While the overall increase is minimal, we expect to see the tougher sanctions available for the 2023/2024 season reduce the overall level of misconduct against match officials.

Number of **collective serious case charges** in 2022/2023:

2,263

Number of **collective serious case charges** in 2021/2022:

2,202

Percentage change:

+3%

Commentary:

It is incredibly important that when requested, witnesses come forward to support the County Football Association case, and where they are called upon, attend a hearing to give oral evidence. We believe that the number of charges made could have increased significantly if individuals came forward and provided supporting statements. Without supporting evidence, it makes it more difficult for a County Football Association to raise charges. We understand that the hearing process may be daunting, so we have created in depth hearing guidelines to manage the expectations of anyone attending. This can be found [here](#).

OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

PROVEN SERIOUS CASE/CASE CLOSURE TIMES

Number of **proven serious cases** in 2022/2023:

1,858

Number of **proven serious cases** in 2021/2022:

1,803

Percentage change:

+3%

Percentage of charges resulting in a proven outcome:

82%

Commentary:

The Football Association's regional discipline managers conduct thorough reviews of all evidence County Football Associations put forward for review, clearly setting out the standards required for a case to be brought. It is evident that the regional discipline managers have raised investigative standards across the network but there remains the drive to improve this much more.

Average days from case notification to closure in 2022/2023:

44 days

Average days from case notification to closure in 2021/2022:

53 days

Percentage change:

-17%

Commentary:

There has been a decrease in the overall time taken to resolve serious cases. This is important as victims wish to see swift resolution. As a result, The Football Association has reduced the maximum amount of time available within regulation to conclude a case from notification to closure, halving it to 90 days from a previous allowed maximum of 180 days. We must however ensure a speedy and efficient process does not impact the integrity of the investigations and case management.



DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2022/2023

RELATED TO ETHNICITY/RACE COLOUR

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to ethnicity/race/colour:

845

Number of **proven charges** relating to ethnicity/race/colour:

248

Number of **charges** relating to ethnicity/race/colour:

363

Number of **not proven charges** relating to ethnicity/race/colour:

98

Average sanction: **7 matches**

Commentary:

In terms of discriminatory conduct, referencing ethnicity/race/colour is the most prominent category and has been for the previous five seasons. It is expected that as confidence in reporting from under-represented communities increases, more will come forward to report allegations of discrimination, which will be investigated thoroughly with complainants being updated wherever possible throughout the process. In addition to the suspension, it is mandatory for all offenders of discriminatory abuse to go through education. The Football Association is running various campaigns throughout the season to highlight discrimination in any form will not be tolerated.

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2022/2023 (CONTINUED)

RELATED TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to sexual orientation:

567

Number of **proven charges** relating to sexual orientation:

298

Number of **charges** relating to sexual orientation:

367

Number of **not proven charges** relating to sexual orientation:

50

Average sanction: **7 matches**

Commentary:

Sexual orientation references are becoming more dominant in the discriminatory space. Each County Football Association has an Inclusion Advisory Group which supports the County Football Association Board in implementing local initiatives to reduce such references, alongside the national FA anti-discrimination campaign, Enough is Enough.

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2022/2023 (CONTINUED)

RELATED TO DISABILITY

Number of **serious case** allegations relating to disability: **290**

Number of **proven charges** relating to disability: **141**

Number of **charges relating to disability**: **192**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to disability: **29**

Average sanction: **7 matches**

Commentary:

While references to ethnicity and sexual orientation are most frequent, disability references are also significant in number. Many of these offences take place in open age men's football, with no references resulting from disability football itself.

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2022/2023 (CONTINUED)

RELATED TO NATIONALITY

Number of **serious case allegations relating to nationality:**

167

Number of **proven charges relating to nationality:**

70

Number of **charges relating to nationality:**

97

Number of **not proven charges relating to nationality:**

23

Average sanction: **7 matches**

Commentary:

There are instances where nationality and race references interlink and may be categorised in either. Most of these improper references relate to individuals of Polish or Pakistani nationality. 58% of these allegations result in a charge. Outside of that 58%, allegations are often not supported with sufficient evidence to take matters forward. This may be because witnesses withdraw their statements or do not want to be called upon if a hearing takes place, reducing the value of their evidence. We continue to educate participants in the disciplinary process and in particular we strongly encourage the need to produce statements and attend hearings where required so we can hold perpetrators to account. 21 members of The Football Association's National Serious Case Panel are from the South Asian community.

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2022/2023 (CONTINUED)

RELATED TO GENDER

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to gender:

182

Number of **proven charges** relating to gender:

91

Number of **charges** relating to gender:

121

Number of **not proven charges** relating to gender:

17

Average sanction: **7 matches**

Commentary:

With the growth of women's football and the incredible European success in 2022, we have seen more discrimination claims pertaining to gender, specifically posts made on social media. Where possible, charges have been brought, but we are regrettably continuing to experience online discriminatory trolling aimed at female participants. The Football Association fully supports the Online Safety Bill in a bid to protect individuals from online hate.

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2022/2023 (CONTINUED)

RELATED TO RELIGION

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to religion:

27

Number of **proven charges** relating to religion:

6

Number of **charges relating to religion**:

8

Number of **not proven charges** relating to religion:

2

Average sanction: **7 matches**

Commentary:

Most of these references are in relation to antisemitic remarks. Several clubs have reached out to their County Football Association resulting in training sessions being delivered that focus on how to report discrimination. This training helps ensure the clubs members understand the disciplinary and reporting processes and they are also helpful in identifying ways to positively engage the Jewish community further.

SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL

ASSAULT/ATTEMPTED ASSAULT

Number of **serious case allegations relating to assault/attempted assault on a match official:**

72

Number of **proven charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a match official:**

42

Number of **charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a match official:**

53

Number of **not proven charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a match official:**

11

Average sanction: **2,035 days**

Commentary:

11 charges have been found not proven. This means that there was insufficient evidence presented at the disciplinary hearing and the panel could not therefore be satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the offence took place. The Football Association plans to expand the body cam trial to ensure that wherever possible we can capture video evidence to strengthen the County Football Association case against the perpetrator. The average also includes an exception to the standard minimum sanction of five years which is two years for perpetrators between the ages of 12-14 inclusive. This reduces the number of days of the reported average sanction.

The Football Association provides support through a National Refereeing Manager to every official who comes forward to report an assault/attempted assault.

SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL (CONTINUED)

PHYSICAL CONTACT/ATTEMPTED PHYSICAL CONTACT

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a match official:

391

Number of **proven charges** relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a match official:

252

Number of **charges** relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a match official:

300

Number of **not proven charges** relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a match official:

48

Average sanction: **183 days**

Commentary:

The minimum sanction for physical contact/attempted physical contact is 112 days. Often in these cases, the participants fail to take accountability for their actions which results in the disciplinary commission imposing a greater sanction. Offenders of serious offences against a match official must also complete mandatory education alongside their suspension.

SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL (CONTINUED)

THREATENING BEHAVIOUR

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to threatening a match official: **988**

Number of **charges** relating to threatening a match official: **762**

Number of **proven charges** relating to threatening a match official: **673**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to threatening a match official: **89**

Average sanction: **117 days**

Commentary:

The number of threatening behaviour cases is disappointing to see, as disciplinary panels have been imposing firmer sanctions since the 2021/22 season. The Football Association will continue to review its sanctions applicable to these offences to ensure participants who commit these offences receive a sanction proportionate to the offence alongside ensuring a safe environment for all participants.



ASSAULTS COMMITTED BY A PARTICIPANT ON A PARTICIPANT

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to participant-on-participant assault:

107

Number of **proven charges** relating to participant-on-participant assault:

37

Number of **charges** relating to participant-on-participant assault:

43

Number of **not proven charges** relating to participant-on-participant assault:

6

Average sanction: **1,062 days**

Commentary:

These are charges for matters which are more serious than violent conduct. There is a greater requirement of stronger evidence in these cases. Notwithstanding that, 86% of the cases result in proven outcomes, with an average sanction of nearly three years.

GENERAL MISCONDUCT

Cautionable misconduct

CAUTION CODE	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2021/2022)	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2022/2023)	PERCENTAGE CHANGE
C1 – Unsporting Behaviour	248,360	267,648	+7.8%
C2 – Dissent	6,412	7,319	+14.1%
C2 – Dissent (sin bin)	33,933	33,034	-2.7%
C3 – Persistent Offending	18,485	19,037	+3.0%
C4 – Delaying Restart	21,213	24,899	+17.4%
C5 – Failed to respect required distance	1,267	1,281	+1.1%
C6 – Entering/re-enters without match official permission	926	1,027	+10.9%
C7 – Exiting without match official permission	176	139	-21.0%

Commentary:

Sinbins were introduced as a tool for match officials to use to prevent dissent on the field of play escalating; and place the onus on the offending team to correct the behaviour, while temporarily removing the offending player from the field of play. Between August 2019 and March 2020, these provided a significant impact, reducing offences of improper conduct including abusive language/behaviour against a match official. Since the pandemic restrictions were lifted, the use of sinbins has reduced (by 3%) with cautions for dissent by word or action increasing by 14%. To address this, we are relaunching sinbins in the 2023/24 season to drive consistency and application.

GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

Standard misconduct

DISMISSAL CODE	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2021/2022)	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2022/2023)	PERCENTAGE CHANGE
S1 – Serious Foul Play	4,454	4,700	+5.0%
S2 – Violent Conduct	10,757	10,649	-1.0%
S3 - Spitting	130	137	+5.0%
S4 – DOGSO ¹ by handball offence save for goalkeeper	1,317	1,358	+3.0%
S5 – DOGSO to an opponent whose overall movement is towards the offender's goal by an offence punishable by a free kick	2,568	2,725	+6.0%
S6 – Offensive Language	8,306	8,317	+0.1%
S7 – Second Cautionable Offence	8,208	8,819	+7.0%

¹ Denying an Obvious Goal-Scoring Opportunity.

GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

Misconduct charges

OFFENCE TYPE	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2021/2022)	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2022/2023)	PERCENTAGE CHANGE
E3 Improper Conduct Against a Match Official – Including Abusive Language	3,204	3,078	-4.0%
E3 Improper Conduct Against a Match Official – Not Including Abusive Language	595	579	-3.0%
E20 Failure to control club officials/ E21 Failure to control spectators	5,559	5,671	+2.0%

Commentary:

It is pleasing to see that there is a reduction of FA Rule E3 offences, which may be partly due to The Football Association's recent campaigns to improve the overall positive football environment. It is however alarming to see a rise in FA Rule E20 and E21 offences. The Football Association is taking steps to address this at steps 5-6, specifically ground closures where spectator discrimination occurs. Outside of this, larger fines are being levied against the club to place greater responsibility upon them to ensure their spectators do not act in a manner which is improper.



SUMMARY:

We are being proactive in dealing with matters of serious misconduct and hope to see our measures reduce general misconduct levels.

However, we acknowledge we must continue our efforts if we are to ensure a safer environment for match officials and deliver a game free from discrimination.

The Football Association, following consultation with many stakeholders, internally and externally, is introducing pioneering sanctions to address misconduct. We believe these will have the desired effect in improving the culture of addressing misconduct in grassroots clubs, but collectively we all share the same responsibility.

If you would like to feedback on addressing misconduct, please contact **your County Football Association** who will be happy to discuss further.

POINTS DEDUCTIONS, GROUND CLOSURES AND BODY CAM TRIAL

Points deductions

The Football Association will introduce point deductions for teams across the grassroots game from the start of the 2023/24 season if their players or coaches commit repeated offences of serious misconduct.

This landmark development has been approved by the Football Regulatory Authority and ratified by The Football Association Council, and it is part of our commitment to tackle and address incidents of unacceptable behaviour in the game. The tougher sanctions follow consistent feedback from across grassroots football that player behaviour is a significant issue and will specifically target offending teams where its participants commit serious misconduct, making clear to clubs that this kind of behaviour will not be tolerated.

Point deductions will apply to clubs at Step 7 and below of the men's game, and clubs across Tier 3 and below in the women's pyramid, which commit cumulative incidents of serious misconduct, such as acts of discrimination and assault or attempted assault, physical contact or attempted physical contact against a match official.

Deductions will range from 3 to 12 points depending on the number of breaches within 12 months of the team's first offence and severity of the case(s).

More information on the sanctioning guidelines across the grassroots game can be found [here](#).

Ground closures

A disciplinary commission shall have the power, for teams at step 5 and step 6 of the National League System, to make a full or partial stadium closure for a period it deems fit. There is a criterion to be met in this regard and further details can be found [here](#).

Body Cam trial

Since the trial began, there have been no allegations of misconduct against a match official, by the match officials who wear the cameras. On that basis, we are looking to expand the pilot even further to create a greater sample size to prove the concept that match officials wearing body worn cameras, does indeed reduce misconduct and where it doesn't prevent misconduct, it gives greater evidence to the County Football Association when bringing disciplinary proceedings.





FOR ALL

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