



Under strict embargo until 11:00 on Friday 17 May 2024

HEADING IN U7-U11 YOUTH GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL MATCHES TO BE PHASED OUT OVER THE NEXT THREE SEASONS FOLLOWING IFAB TRIAL

In 2022, we became the first national association to successfully adopt the International Football Association Board [IFAB] trial to remove deliberate heading in grassroots football matches at U12 level and below.

We first introduced the IFAB trial in England following our steps to bring in heading guidance in youth football in 2020, and then the implementation of heading guidance in training across every level of the professional and amateur game in 2021.

After two seasons of the IFAB trial in English football, we will now introduce a new rule to phase out deliberate heading in matches in all affiliated grassroots youth football between U7-U11 level over the next three seasons. This includes all leagues, clubs and any affiliated school football matches – starting with U7-U9 level from the 2024-25 season, then increasing to include U10 level from 2025-26, and U11 level from 2026-27.

The introduction of the new rule follows a consultation and discussion process with representatives across the grassroots game, including the National Game Board, the FA Development Committee and the wider County FA network. It has also been approved by the FA Board and the FA shareholders, who comprise a wide range of key stakeholders from across English football, with representation from the professional and grassroots game.

WHY THE NEW RULE IS BEING INTRODUCED IN GRASSROOTS YOUTH FOOTBALL NEXT SEASON

We first introduced the IFAB trial with the aim to help positively shape grassroots youth football – and to ensure that matches at this level are aligned to our current [heading guidance for training](#). This was established in 2020 following consultation with the grassroots game, coaches and other experts across football, and recommends that heading is removed or restricted at this level.

We also adopted the IFAB trial to help reduce any potential risk factors that may be linked to heading the ball, including injuries from head to head, elbow to head, or head to ground contact.

We continue to play a leading role in reviewing and improving the safety of our game. This includes investing in and supporting multiple research projects in adult football to gain a greater insight and understanding of this complex area. During this time, we have worked with stakeholders across English football to review and proactively address potential risk factors which may be associated with football whilst research continues in this area, including ongoing dialogue with the international governing bodies.

The gradual introduction of the new rule over the next three seasons will support the players' journey as they adapt from deliberately heading the ball in grassroots youth football matches. It has been decided that as grassroots players move from primary to secondary school, heading the ball will be introduced at this natural transition point in their U12 season.

Throughout this period, we will research, review and analyse the way that it is being implemented to help identify ways of improving the experience for players and referees.

We will also continue to review and evolve the current heading guidance for training to ensure it meets the requirements of the game. This includes providing coaches and players with innovative technical support and guidance so that they can prepare for the transition into heading the ball in youth matches.

APPROACH TO THE IFAB HEADING TRIAL

Before the start of the 2022-23 season, we invited all County FAs, leagues, clubs and schools across the country to take part in the new IFAB trial to remove deliberate heading in grassroots football matches at U12 level and below. Over the last two seasons, around 16,000 teams and 107,000 players have participated in the trial, and we have remained in consultation with all of our key stakeholders across the grassroots game to provide guidance and support to implement the trial successfully.

Throughout this two-year period, we have carried out robust and thorough research into the application of the trial, working closely with the County FAs to understand how the game has adapted to the new format. This included observing and monitoring matches involved in the trial, conducting surveys with coaches, parents, guardians, referees and club officials, as well as gathering feedback from youth players.

ADAPTING THE HEADING TRIAL FOR THE 2024-25 SEASON

We have researched and collected feedback from leagues and clubs taking part in the IFAB trial to remove deliberate heading in grassroots football matches at U12 level and below to see how the experience of the players taking part could be further improved. Our aim is to also create more technical opportunities for players with the ball at their feet, allow for more effective playing time, and to reduce the amount of time the ball is in the air during a match.

As a result, from the start of the 2024-25 season for U7-U9 teams, we will also be rolling out the following:

Deliberate Header Restart:

- Deliberately heading the ball is an offence punishable by an indirect free kick
- The indirect free kick is taken at the point where the ball was deliberately headed, except:
 - Where a player deliberately heads the ball within their own penalty area, the referee will stop the game and restart with an indirect free kick to the opposition from the nearest side line of the penalty area where the offence took place

Touchline Restart:

- When the whole of the ball passes over the whole of the touchline, on the ground or in the air, instead of a throw-in, a pass-in/dribble-in is awarded
- The kicker that takes the pass-in/dribble-in may touch the ball again before it is touched by another player
- At the moment of delivering the ball:
 - The ball must be stationary on the touchline at the point where it left the pitch; only the kicker may be off the pitch
 - All opponents must stand at least five yards from the point on the touchline where the pass-in or /dribble-in is to be taken from
- A goal cannot be scored directly from a pass-in
- The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves

Sanctions in the event of a deliberate header in a match:

- From the start of the 2024-25 season, there will be no disciplinary sanctions applied for a deliberate header in a match, unless the action is considered a persistent deliberate offence, which could then result in a caution

WORKING WITH THE GRASSROOTS GAME TO HELP IMPLEMENT THE NEW RULE

The County FA network, leagues, clubs, coaches, referees and schools across the country will play a key part in helping to implement the new rule. In conjunction with this announcement, we will be providing the relevant guidance and will work closely with them over the coming weeks to ensure that they have the support they need to successfully implement the new rule from the start of next season.

We will also support any league, club and school who is taking part in the current IFAB trial across the U10-U12 ages groups if they wish to continue with the trial on a voluntary basis next season, ahead of the transitional phasing of the new rule from the start of the 2025-26 season.

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