GUIDANCE ON DEALING WITH DISCRIMINATION

FOR MATCH OFFICIALS

The FA

FOR ALL

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INTRODUCTION & FRAMEWORK

We all want football to be as welcoming as possible. Everyone at every level of the game should have an enjoyable experience participating in our national sport.

Referees play a vital role in this work, partly by sanctioning any discriminatory words and/or actions.

But what exactly is discrimination, what actions should you take and where does your responsibility begin and end?

This guide aims to answer these questions – and more. It also provides advice on how to manage situations when discrimination sadly occurs.

1. WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

Here's the definition given by the Equality Act 2010:

"A person (A) discriminates against another (B) if, because of a protected characteristic, A treats B less favourably than A treats or would treat others."

There are nine protected characteristics, i.e. grounds on which you cannot discriminate by law. These characteristics are shown in the image on the right.

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and wider society. It protects people from direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, regardless of whether the victim has multiple characteristics, is perceived to have them – or is associated with someone who has a protected characteristic. For example, if you're discriminated against because your son/daughter is gay.

2. YOUR ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY AS A REFEREE

Your role is to ensure the Laws of the Game are adhered to. Your responsibility to challenge any discriminatory words and/ or actions you see or hear.

The Laws of the Game clearly state in Law 12 – Fouls and misconduct:

"A player, substitute or substituted player who commits any of the following offences is sent off: using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or action(s).

"A player or team official who commits a cautionable or sending-off offence, either on or off the field of play is disciplined according to the offence."

Of course, such language or actions might be reported to you when you have not personally seen or heard them. In this case, you should still follow the discriminatory reporting protocol. This is covered **on page 7 and 8**.

For clarity, your role is not to judge whether the allegation is discriminatory. But as the next section says, you must report it.

3. YOUR REPORT IS VITAL

The match referee must report any discriminatory behaviour they have seen or witnessed or any alleged discrimination as part of their misconduct report following the game. Any offence which has been heard, seen or any allegation made (irrespective of its origins) must be reported as an 'Extraordinary Incident' in your post-match report.

4. YOUR OWN LANGUAGE AND ACTIONS

Any match official found to have used discriminatory word and/actions is subject to the same disciplinary procedures as any other football participant.

With this in mind, it's important to self-check your own language and/or actions.

Of course, language changes. What was acceptable five years ago, might not be today. Similarly, what's acceptable today may not be tomorrow. We all need to keep up to date with what's acceptable and what's not. Above all, if you're not sure, don't be afraid to ask. Don't just press on regardless.

Language is not only important in relation to protected characteristics (e.g. race, sexual orientation etc.), and when dealing with players. It also applies when dealing with refereeing colleagues and in our everyday lives.

Even in jest or 'banter', the wrong choice of language can offend and cause unnecessary hurt and harm. People may laugh along, join in, or not actively object to the words used – but this doesn't mean they're happy with what's being said.

Here are some tips to guide your words and actions:

- Before you make a decision, comment or joke ask yourself: is this appropriate?
- Think about how you'd feel if you were on the receiving end of a comment/action you're about to make. Impact always outweighs intention.
- When referring to a player, use their name, shirt number and kit colour. Don't define them by what you assume is their protected characteristic.

- Don't use the 'defence' that 'we've always said it that way'. Find out the right way.
- Inclusivity is everything. Don't use 'banter' to try and make a questionable or harmful comment acceptable.
- Take the time to make a difference by keeping up to date with acceptable terminology **See here** for some guidance.

Overall, the aim is to ensure the way we behave as match officials fosters positive relationships with every part of the football family, whether in person or online.

5. WHAT ACTION WILL THE FA TAKE?

When a report is received, The FA investigates **all** allegations of discrimination. If there is sufficient evidence, a participant is likely to face disciplinary action by a charge for a breach of FA Rule E3.2 or E4*.

An aggravated breach of FA Rule E3 occurs when a participant is charged with:

Insulting, abusive or improper behaviour, or brings the game into disrepute, while also including a reference, whether express or implied, to any or more of the following: ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion or belief, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation or disability.

To find out about The FA's Equality Policy **click here**.

**E4 charge relates to acts of discrimination such as Pregnancy & Maternity/Marriage & Civil partnership.*

THE REPORTING PROCESS

1. AT THE MATCH

If you, as the referee, hear or witnesses a discriminatory incident on the field of play or in technical area, you should:

- Stop play immediately and send off the offending player or technical area occupant from the field in accordance with Law 12.
- Make a full and comprehensive report of what has happened before you restart play (player name, offence, minute, what was said/done, where you were, any other necessary information).
- Separately, advise both teams, necessary players and management, that you have made a comprehensive report and will be reporting this post-match.

If an incident is reported to you with no match officials witness to it, you should:

- Stop play immediately.
- Make a full and comprehensive report of what has happened before you restart play (the alleged offending player name, offence, minute, what was said/done, where you were, any other necessary information).
- Separately, advise both teams, necessary players and management, that you have made a comprehensive report of what has been reported to you and will be reporting this post-match.

If you - or one of the match officials - hears or witnesses an incident from a spectator, you should:

- Stop play immediately.
- Advise the host club about what's been witnessed and ask them to deal with the offender, if they can be identified.
- Make a full and comprehensive report about what's happened before you restart play (offence, minute, what was said/done, where you were, any other necessary information).
- Separately, advise both teams, necessary players and management, that you have made a comprehensive report and will be reporting this post-match.

2. IF A MATCH OFFICIAL IS ADVISED OF AN ALLEGATION *AFTER* A MATCH

If a match official is advised of a discriminatory allegation after a match, they should ensure full notes of the allegation are made before leaving the changing room.

- The notes should include timings and as be as accurate as possible, including reported speech.
- The notes should document all participants in attendance at the meeting or meetings.
- The notes should be retained by the match officials.
- As well as submitting an extraordinary match report, the referee should immediately inform their referee appointments' officer.
- Match officials are strongly advised not to make any comments to the media regarding any aspect of an allegation of this nature.

3. AWAY FROM THE MATCH

At the earliest possible opportunity after a match, you should:

- Report all your information as an extraordinary incident through The FA Whole Game System (or MOAS if used for the appointment). If you sent the player off, you should still report an extraordinary incident with all your information.
- Write every detail possible in this report, including where you were at the time, i.e. your position on the pitch or in your changing room etc. Be as specific as you can with elements such as:
  - The time the incident was reported to you.
  - Who reported what to you.
  - The full statements from all necessary participants.
- Ring the County FA or the appointments officer. Dealing with discriminatory incidents can be really tough. We often need some reassurance and a listening ear, so feel free to pick up the phone or send a text/email.
- You may then be required to give a further witness statement and/or attend a personal hearing. Remember, you are only ever a witness at such hearings. You are there to give your view to help the disciplinary procedure reach a fair outcome.

Important notes:

- As the referee, do not defer responsibility for taking notes regarding the incident until the end of the game; it must be recorded there and then.
- Always submit an Extraordinary Incident report following the game, irrespective of whether the discriminatory language/behaviour was heard by/reported to the referee.
- When a match official has been made aware of an allegation of discriminatory behaviour that they have not heard themselves, they should also observe and include in their report the behaviours of all involved.

RESPECT

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS

To achieve genuine inclusivity, it's important to call out discrimination in society – and the same applies to match officials. We have a duty to report discriminatory words and/or actions on or around the field of play. Here are nine example scenarios and how you might listen, action and report.

1. You hear a discriminatory comment made by a player on the field of play.

LISTEN

Stop the game immediately and take accurate notes detailing the comments.

ACTION

Send off the player for using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or action(s).

Explain to a suitable representative of the club the reason for the sending off.

REPORT

Complete your post-match misconduct report, including the sending-off of the player.

As the sending-off was due to a discriminatory comment, you must also report the specific incident in an Extraordinary Incident report.

2. A player is subject to discriminatory abuse at a game by a spectator, but you do not directly hear the comment; the player is visibly distressed and advises you during a break in play.

LISTEN

At the break in play listen to the player and take accurate notes detailing the alleged comments.

ACTION

As the game has stopped immediately, notify a suitable representative from the home club (manager, secretary) to advise them of the allegation. As it is a spectator, ask for a club representative to speak to the individual(s) concerned and deal with the incident as necessary (including alerting the police).

REPORT

Post-match, speak to the player concerned to verify the action/ comments made. Explain to the clubs the nature of the allegation and advise that this will be included in your match report as an Extraordinary Incident. Complete the separate Extraordinary Incident report.

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS (Cont.)

3. You hear your appointment officer say something you believe to be discriminatory in a face-to-face development session.

LISTEN

Listen to what has been said and take accurate notes.

ACTION

Inform County FA/FA staff if they are present if you feel comfortable to do so. If they are not present and/or you feel uncomfortable, then make a report.

REPORT

Report the discriminatory words and/or action to your County FA discipline officer or by clicking here.

4. A team refuses to continue with the game and walks off/refuses to return to the field of play due to a discriminatory allegation you did not see or hear.

LISTEN

Listen to the participant making the allegation and advise representatives from both teams of what has been alleged.

ACTION

Explain and action the protocols in place for occasions when allegations of discriminatory abuse have been made. These include speaking with representatives from both teams and the stepped approach regarding the match (pause/suspend/abandon). If a team advises they are unwilling to continue, advise that the game will have to be abandoned and reported to the County FA and Competition.

REPORT

Following the game, notify the appointing authority of the incident and the circumstances leading to the abandonment of the fixture. Complete an Extraordinary Incident report outlining the facts surrounding the incident which led to the abandonment.

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS (Cont.)

5. A player in your game alleges they have received abuse of a discriminatory nature and tells you what has been said as you did not hear it yourself.

LISTEN

Stop the game. Speak to the player and take accurate notes of the allegation.

ACTION

Speak to representatives of both teams detailing the allegation and explain that a statement will be taken from the alleged victim following the game.

REPORT

Post-match, take a statement from the alleged victim. Repeat the statement back to them to ensure it is an accurate reflection of the allegation. Include full details of the incident, including the player's statement, in an Extraordinary Incident Report following the game.

6. You (the referee) are accused of using discriminatory language.

LISTEN

Stop the game. Open dialogue with the alleged victim and team manager.

ACTION

Alert the opposition manager of the reason for interruption. Advise all parties that you will report the incident following the game.

REPORT

Post-match, report the incident as an Extraordinary Incident report. Ask the representatives of the two clubs to submit reports regarding the incident.

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS (Cont.)

7. Your assistant referee receives discriminatory abuse from a spectator.

LISTEN

The assistant referee should alert the referee immediately. Speak to the assistant referee and take accurate notes.

ACTION

Alert the relevant representatives from the two teams of the situation and ask for appropriate action to be taken with the spectator (see scenario 2 above). If the issue persists, consider your options, i.e. to suspend or abandon the fixture.

REPORT

Post-match, take a statement from the assistant referee and include the incident as an Extraordinary Incident report. Ensure the assistant referee submits their own report as an Extraordinary Incident.

8. You hear a player or coach use language you deem to be offensive, insulting and abusive towards an opposing player. You do not believe it is discriminatory, but the opposition team believes it is.

LISTEN

Stop the game.

ACTION

Send off the manager for using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or action(s). Advise the opposition that you will include the nature of action in your post-match Extraordinary Incident report.

REPORT

Complete the sending-off report, detailing the nature of the offence. Include within the report the opposition's view that the comments were discriminatory.

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS (Cont.)

9. You hear and see a discriminatory comment and/or action made by a match official on your game.

LISTEN

Inform the match official their words and/or actions are discriminatory and ask them not to use them again.

ACTION

Advise the match official they are being removed from their role in the game.

REPORT

Report the discriminatory words and/or actions to your County FA in an Extraordinary Incident report.

WELLBEING SUPPORT

Dealing with discriminatory incidents can be tough and sometimes distressing for match officials. That's particularly true when the environment in which these incidents occur is hostile. Such a situation can be really challenging for you, mentally and physically.

Ultimately, your wellbeing is a priority, so if you face one of these challenging situations, please get in touch with your County FA or your Appointments Officer. They are there to support you, so don't hesitate to pick up the phone or send a text/email.

In addition, Referee Mental Health Champions are available to support you. They understand the additional pressures refereeing can bring. You can find contact information for these Champions here.

Further support for victims and witnesses of discrimination

The FA facilitates access to mental health and emotional wellbeing services. These services are delivered by Sporting Chance to referees who have been a victim of or a witness to discriminatory abuse.

To access this support, click here, but please note that you'll need to quote the reference number/code provided to you by The FA.

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