THE FA'S POLICY ON THE REGULATION OF DISCRIMINATION IN FOOTBALL


TheFA

INTRODUCTION

The FA together with various stakeholders has reviewed how discrimination is regulated within football. This guidance replaces any previous guidance issued and is effective from the 1 August 2026.

Discriminatory behaviour must be dealt with appropriately, effectively and efficiently in order to protect the integrity and image of the game; and to ensure that football really is for all.

Acts of discrimination are offensive, abusive and harm the dignity of the individuals that are subjected to them. Discrimination can affect an individual's mental health and sense of well-being, and also harm others around them. Discrimination does not just affect the recipient of the abuse and ultimately it has a significant negative impact on the integrity of football, and the public's perception of the game as a whole.

This document sets out the basis for The FA's policy on the regulation of discrimination in football; how it will be applied in relation to FA Rules and Regulations; and when disciplinary action is likely to arise. To the extent there is any discrepancy between this policy document and FA Rules and Regulations, FA Rules and Regulations shall apply.

The FA's policy on discriminatory conduct by spectators can be found **here**.

1. WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?

FA Rule E3.1 sets out various obligations regarding a Participant's behaviour. A breach of Rule E3.1 is considered "Misconduct". Acts of discrimination are considered to be amongst the most serious type of Misconduct which a Participant can commit. For this reason, any act of discrimination is considered to be an "Aggravated Breach" of E3.1. An "Aggravated Breach" is defined as a breach of Rule E3.1, where it includes a reference, whether express or implied, to any one or more of the following: ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion or belief, sex, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation or disability

In addition to the above, Rule E4 also prohibits any Participant from carrying out any act of victimisation as defined in the Equality Act 2010, or any act of discrimination by reason of ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion or belief, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, disability, age, pregnancy, maternity, marital status, or civil partnership, unless otherwise permitted by law and FA Rules or Regulations.

2. WHEN WILL THE FA TAKE ACTION?

The FA reserves the right to take disciplinary action against any Participant who engages in discriminatory behaviour of any kind whilst they are or were, a Participant.

The FA reserves the right to charge a Participant engaging in discriminatory behaviour whether or not the Participant seeks to claim either that the discriminatory act/behaviour did not take place in a football setting and/or that the Participant engaging in discriminatory behaviour claims that they had an expectation of privacy when the offence was committed. In the event the Participant claims he or she had a legitimate expectation of privacy, The FA will take into account whether or not such an expectation exists and whether it is legitimate before charging. Where The FA considers that a legitimate expectation does or might exist, it will then take into account the circumstances of the particular case to determine whether such expectation is outweighed by the severity of the offence.

2. WHEN WILL THE FA TAKE ACTION? (CONTINUED)

Where The FA believes the offence is particularly serious, including by reference to the language used, The FA reserves the right to charge a Participant notwithstanding the fact that the Participant has or may have a legitimate expectation of privacy. Where The FA does charge in such circumstances, and a Regulatory Commission and/or Appeal Board finds the charge to be proven, any legitimate expectation of privacy may be relevant when assessing the appropriate sanction for the case.

For clarification, this means that the following non-exhaustive list of matters would be subject to FA action:

- Any comment made orally irrespective of who it is said to, or any gesture representing a discriminatory act or theme;
- Text messages, WhatsApp, snapchat, Facebook messenger, email or any other form of electronic communication irrespective of who they are sent to;
- Any form of social media post, whether only visible to a closed group or not;
- Any interview involving any form of media;
- An advertisement on any form of media;
- Anything said or done outside of a club or football context, for example in an individual's spare time away from everyday employment.

The above shall include reposting (including re-tweeting), "liking", or forwarding a social media post, message or any other type of communication in any forum whether private or not.

It should be noted that the fact that a Participant is liable to face or has pending any other criminal, civil, disciplinary or regulatory proceedings (whether public or private in nature) in relation to the same matter shall not prevent or fetter The FA commencing, conducting and/or concluding proceedings under FA Rules.

3. WHAT ACTION WILL THE FA TAKE?

The FA investigates all allegations of discrimination. If there is sufficient evidence to charge, a Participant is likely to face disciplinary action by way of a charge for a breach of FA Rule E3.2 or E4, or in a limited amount of circumstances receive a warning.

From the start of the 2026/2027 season, The FA has introduced new standard sanctions and guidelines for Aggravated Breaches. These are set out at Appendix 1, Part A of the Disciplinary Regulations. A link to The FA Handbook is provided **here**.

4. REPORTING DISCRIMINATION

Pursuant to Rule E14 all Participants have a duty to report any Misconduct and/or potential breach of FA Rules or Regulations. All Participants are duty bound to report any or any suspected discriminatory behaviour to The FA. This can be done by emailing **integrity@thefa.com**.

For the avoidance of doubt, Participants have a duty to report, pursuant to FA Rule E14, any allegations or reported discrimination within a Club, whether it is being dealt with by way of internal process, employment tribunal etc. or not. Where an allegation is being dealt with by way of internal disciplinary process or is subject to any other tribunal (including Employment Tribunals), The FA would ordinarily await the outcome of such a process; however, The FA expects all Participants (which, for the avoidance of doubt, includes Clubs and Leagues) to keep it fully informed of the process/proceedings and provide The FA with all relevant documentation. All Participants should take note of paragraph 24 of Part A to The FA's Disciplinary Regulations which allows The FA to rely on the proceedings and findings of other such tribunals which shall be presumed to be correct unless it is shown, by clear and convincing evidence, that this is not the case.



STANDARD SANCTIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR AGGRAVATED BREACHES

The FA's standard sanctions and guidelines for Aggravated Breaches come into force on 1 August 2026. These are set of standard sanctions and guidelines for when disciplinary action is taken against individuals and set out the punishments an individual is likely to receive if they commit an offence. These sanctions and guidelines form part of **The FA's Disciplinary Regulations at Appendix 1, Part A, General Provisions** and are applicable to all levels of football. All capitalised terms refer to definitions in The FA Handbook unless otherwise specified.

PLAYERS, MANAGERS, TECHNICAL AREA OCCUPANTS

Standard Sanction

A finding of an Aggravated Breach against a Player, Manager or Technical Area Occupant will attract an immediate suspension of no less than 10 Matches ("Standard Sanction") subject to the circumstances outlined below.

A Regulatory Commission shall take all aggravating and mitigating factors into account, including but not limited to those listed in these guidelines when determining the level of sanction.

A Regulatory Commission may impose a sanction lower than the Standard Sanction if it is satisfied that a mitigating factor or mitigating factors of significant number or weight is/are present and provided that an immediate suspension of no less than 6 Matches is imposed. This discretion will only be exercised in circumstances where an Aggravated Breach has been admitted at the earliest reasonable available opportunity, unless, notwithstanding the absence of an admission, the specific circumstances of the case are exceptional so that a sanction lower than the Standard Sanction is justified. For the avoidance of doubt, in all cases, any such departure from the Standard Sanction must not result in a sanction lower than an immediate 6-match suspension.

Where a Player is aged 12-15 (inclusive) a Regulatory Commission may suspend any number of Matches on terms and for such period as it considers appropriate provided that a suspension of no less than one Match is served.

A Regulatory Commission may impose an immediate suspension in excess of 12 Matches in circumstances where aggravating factors of significant number or weight are present.

Exceptions

A Regulatory Commission may only consider imposing a suspension below 6 Matches where the following specific (and exhaustive) circumstances arise such that the Regulatory Commission determines that a suspension of 6 Matches would be excessive:

Where the offence was committed in writing only or via the use of any communication device and:

- Where the Regulatory Commission is satisfied that there was no genuine intent on the part of the Participant Charged to be discriminatory or offensive in any way and could not reasonably have known that any such offence would be caused; or
- The age of the Participant at time of the offence (e.g. where the Participant was a minor at the time the offence was committed); or
- The age of the offence (e.g. a social media post made a considerable time ago).

For the avoidance of doubt, the existence of the circumstances above will not necessarily result in a suspension of less than 6 Matches. A Regulatory Commission must be satisfied that the unique circumstances and facts of a particular case are of such significance that a suspension of less than 6 Matches is justified to avoid an unjust outcome for the Participant Charged. In reaching a decision, the Regulatory Commission must also consider whether or not it is in the best interests of the game in tackling all forms of discrimination to impose a sanction of less than 6 Matches. In any event, a Regulatory Commission shall impose a suspension of no less than 3 Matches.

Where a Player is aged 12-15 (inclusive) a Regulatory Commission may suspend any number of Matches on terms and for such period as it considers appropriate provided that a suspension of no less than one Match is served.

TIME BASED SUSPENSIONS

A Regulatory Commission may assess that a Match-based suspension is not appropriate due to the specific circumstances of a case; the nature of the role of a Participant, and/or whether they are currently engaged by a Club.

A Regulatory Commission should have regard to the Standard Sanction and the guidelines set out in this Appendix as well as the mitigating and aggravating factors when determining sanction. However, a Regulatory Commission shall be entitled to impose an appropriate, immediate time-based suspension that is commensurate with the breach, having regard to the specific roles and responsibilities of the Participant.[1]

[1] Where a sporting sanction would cover all or part of a period in which the Participant's Club/team is not playing competitive matches (e.g. the Close Season/summer months), a Regulatory Commission should account for this when considering the length and/or commencement date of the sporting sanction. The start date and period of any sporting sanction shall be determined so that the sporting sanction is effective.

EDUCATION

Any Participant who is found to have committed an Aggravated Breach shall be made subject to an education programme, the details of which will be provided to the Participant by The Association.

OTHER PENALTIES

A Regulatory Commission may impose any one or more of the other penalties as provided by paragraph 41 of Part A to the Disciplinary Regulations.

FACTORS TO BE CONSIDERED WHEN DETERMINING SANCTION

A Regulatory Commission will have due regard to the circumstances and seriousness of the incident when determining the appropriate sanction and whether (and to what extent) to depart from the Standard Sanction or when setting an appropriate time-based suspension. For the avoidance of doubt, a suspension of less than 6 Matches may only be considered by a Regulatory Commission where the specific (and exhaustive) circumstances listed above arise.

In so doing, the Regulatory Commission shall give consideration to any aggravating and mitigating factors, to include but not limited to:

Aggravating Factors

- Repeated use of discriminatory language or conduct during commission of the offence or offences.
- Multiple offences over a period of time.
- The public nature of the offence(s) (e.g. the commission of the offence(s) in a public place, via broadcast media or a social media platform (particularly via an account on a social media platform with a high number of followers in relative terms)).
- The profile of the Participant, including where they hold a position of responsibility within their Club or organisation (e.g Club captain, Manager, Chairman, member of senior management).
- The relative ages of the Participant and the victim(s) at the time of the offence, particularly where the victim was a minor and the Participant was not.
- Failure to co-operate with The Association.
- Previous disciplinary record of the Participant.
- Any attempt to conceal the breach.
- The extent of any premeditation.
- Lack of remorse or insight and/or failure to understand and/or appreciate the severity of the conduct and/or its impact.

Mitigating Factors

- Admission at the earliest reasonable available opportunity in particular where the factual conduct forming the basis for thecharge would be capable of being disputed.
- Demonstration of genuine remorse.
- Co-operation with The Association.
- Where it is accepted that the Participant had a legitimate expectation of privacy.
- Inexperience of the Participant by reference to their age or background at the time of the offence.
- In respect of social media posts, the age of the post and the Participant's age at the time of the post. For example, depending on the other circumstances and characteristics of the offence, it may be considered a mitigating factor where the post was made a considerable time ago and/or where it was made at a time when the Participant was a minor.

SECOND OR FURTHER OFFENCES

Second or further offences will be treated with the utmost seriousness. There will be a presumption that the sanction for a second or further offence will be higher than 12 Matches. In any event, the sanction for a second or further offence must always be greater than for a first offence. Where a Regulatory Commission deems it appropriate to issue a time-based suspension it should consider all relevant factors including but not limited to the number and severity of any previous offences when determining sanction. A Regulatory Commission should have regard to the Standard Sanction and the guidance set out in this Appendix as well as the mitigating and aggravating factors when determining sanction.

Where a Player is aged 12-15 (inclusive) and commits a second or further Aggravated Breach, in determining the suspension to be imposed, a Regulatory Commission shall use as an entry point, an immediate suspension of 11 matches. The Regulatory Commission may depart from the entry point where aggravating or mitigating factors are present but, in any case, must impose an immediate suspension of no fewer than 7 matches.

Regulatory Commissions shall still be entitled to take all aggravating and mitigating factors into account when determining sanction.

MULTIPLE AGGRAVATED BREACHES

Where a Regulatory Commission finds a Participant to have committed two or more Aggravated Breaches on separate occasions which have been considered by a Regulatory Commission during the same proceedings, the Regulatory Commission may impose a Match or time-based suspension depending on what it deems appropriate in the circumstances. A Regulatory Commission should have regard to the Standard Sanction and the guidance set out in this Appendix as well as the mitigating and aggravating factors when determining sanction. However, a Regulatory Commission shall have the power to impose any sanction which is appropriate and proportionate to the nature of the Aggravated Breaches committed. This includes being able to impose a suspension in excess of 12 Matches, particularly in very serious cases to impose a time-based suspension of any duration.

PLAYERS AGED UNDER 12

Where an Aggravated Breach is committed by a Player aged under 12, no disciplinary charge will be brought. In such cases, the Player will be subject to an education programme, the details of which will be provided to the Player by The Association.



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