



GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL: BEHAVIOUR & DISCIPLINE REVIEW 2025 – 26 SEASON

FOR ALL

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GLOSSARY

To support understanding of key terms used throughout this report, the following glossary provides definitions of important concepts, initiatives, and disciplinary terms relevant to grassroots football behaviour and discipline.

- 1. Aggravated/Discriminatory Conduct**
Behaviour or language that is aggravated as it includes a reference to protected characteristics such as race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, or religion.
- 2. General Misconduct**
Breaches of FA Rules and Regulations that are not Serious Misconduct/Cases but excluding red and yellow cards.
- 3. Grassroots Football**
Football played at community level, including youth and adult amateur leagues, below the professional and semi-professional tiers.
- 4. Penalty Points**
Points assigned to teams for behavioural offences, which can lead to further sanctions if thresholds are exceeded.
- 5. Reporting Gap**
The known gap between the number of Serious Case incidents that occur versus the number that are reported
- 6. Respect Marks**
Scores submitted by Clubs reflecting the standard of behaviour shown by players, coaches, and spectators during matches.
- 7. Serious Misconduct/Cases**
Cases involving Discriminatory Conduct, Serious Offences Against a Match Official or assault participant on participant.
- 8. Serious Offence Against a Match Official**
Includes threats, physical contact, or assaults directed at referees or other match officials.

INTRODUCTION



Alan Darfi
Senior Behaviours & Discipline Manager
The Football Association

As we enter the third year of The FA's 2024-28 Grassroots Football Strategy, tackling poor behaviour remains a core strategic priority. Working in partnership with our network of 50 County Football Associations and key stakeholders, we continue to strengthen our approach to behaviour and discipline, reinforce shared responsibility and support positive cultures across the grassroots game*.

Football remains the nation's game, with more than 1.6 million affiliated players, supported by more than 170,000 dedicated volunteers**.

The vast majority of matches take place in a positive environment, with Good Respect Marks consistently exceeding 90%. However, we know that ahead of the current strategic cycle, seven in ten people involved in grassroots football believed poor behaviour was negatively affecting their experience of the game***.

While serious disciplinary offences, including incidents involving discrimination, threats or physical abuse towards match officials, and player-on-player assaults, occur in fewer than 0.09% of the 1.2 million grassroots fixtures played each year, even isolated incidents can have a significant impact on individuals, clubs and communities. Tackling poor behaviour therefore requires a broad approach encompassing prevention, education, engagement, targeted intervention and proportionate disciplinary action.

This report provides an overview of the activity delivered under The FA's tackling poor behaviour strategic goal during the 2025-26 season. It brings together evidence from across the grassroots game, including disciplinary activity, behaviour interventions, campaigns and measures designed to support positive cultural change.

For the first time, the report provides a more comprehensive overview of this activity, alongside transparency on serious cases managed by The FA's Grassroots Discipline Team across both the adult and youth game. As in previous years, it includes an incidents per 1,000 fixtures measure, providing a clearer assessment of incident prevalence as participation in grassroots football continues to grow.

Through continued collaboration across the football community, we will keep working to ensure grassroots football is a safe, inclusive, respectful and welcoming game for everyone – For All.



Daniel May
County FA Support Services Manager
– Behaviours
The Football Association

*Steps 5 and below of the men's football pyramid (including youth) and Tiers 5 and below of the women's pyramid (including youth).

**The FA Grassroots Mid-Strategy Review – September 2026

***Grassroots Survey – A Conversation About Our Game – 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2025-26 season has seen continued progress in tackling poor behaviour across grassroots football, supported by a combination of prevention, education, engagement, targeted intervention and proportionate disciplinary action.

The vast majority of grassroots football continues to be played in a positive environment, with an average Good Respect Mark of 90.5% across more than 1.3 million scores. Serious cases remain relatively rare, representing fewer than 0.09% of all grassroots fixtures, while general misconduct accounts for just 1.14%. However, we recognise that even relatively rare incidents can have a significant impact on individuals, clubs and communities.

There is encouraging evidence that targeted interventions are contributing to positive change. More than one million players participated in the Silent Support Weekend in March 2026, with 97% reporting that behaviour either improved or remained the same. The Behaviour Improvement Programme supported more than 1,000 teams during the season, with Good Respect Marks for these teams increasing by 7% and penalty points reducing by 6.6 against the expected trend. Alongside this, the Enough is Enough campaign reached more than 16,000 physical locations, with 76% of respondents believing the campaign is having a positive impact.

Confidence that The FA is doing enough to tackle poor behaviour has also continued to improve. Having stood at 20% at the start of the strategy period, this has now increased to 41%, representing a 105% proportional increase and providing a stronger foundation from which to continue building confidence across the grassroots game. The reporting gap has also reduced from 2.35 in 2022 to 1.89, indicating increased confidence in reporting misconduct, while recognising that further progress is required.

The 2025-26 season has also seen reductions in serious offences against match officials and participant-on-participant assaults. Serious offence allegations against match officials fell to 1.09 per 1,000 fixtures, while participant-on-participant assault allegations fell to 0.06 per 1,000 fixtures. Protecting match officials remains a particular priority, with The FA continuing to combine strong sanctions with education, welfare support and preventative measures.

Discrimination remains a key area of focus under the FA Group strategic priority of A Game Free from Discrimination. Allegations relating to race, ethnicity and colour continue to account for the largest proportion of discriminatory cases, while allegations relating to sexual orientation and disability have increased. These trends reinforce the importance of continuing to improve awareness, confidence in reporting and support for those affected, alongside robust disciplinary action.

The FA has also continued to strengthen its disciplinary framework. From the 2026-27 season, the minimum suspension for a first proven act of discrimination will increase from six to ten matches, alongside mandatory fines and education. Existing measures include strengthened club sanctions, team points deductions, ground closure powers and targeted improvement action where persistent poor behaviour is identified.

Looking ahead to 2026-27, The FA will build on this progress through further investment in prevention, education, behaviour insight and targeted support. The new Behaviour Hub and refreshed respect marks will provide participants, leagues and County FAs with improved access to information and more detailed insight into behaviour. Expanded cooling-off periods will also provide match officials with an additional tool to manage situations where emotions escalate and help restore a safe and positive playing environment.

While the evidence demonstrates meaningful progress, tackling poor behaviour requires sustained commitment across the whole game. The FA, County Football Associations, leagues, clubs, players, coaches, match officials, volunteers and spectators all have a role to play in setting and maintaining the standards that we all want to see across grassroots football.



Silent Support Weekend

- 1 million+ players took part in the Silent Support Weekend in March 2026.
- 97% of participants felt that behaviour improved or stayed the same during Silent Support Weekends in the season.
- Average good respect marks increased from 91.1% to 92.1% for leagues that took part in both Silent Support Weekends.



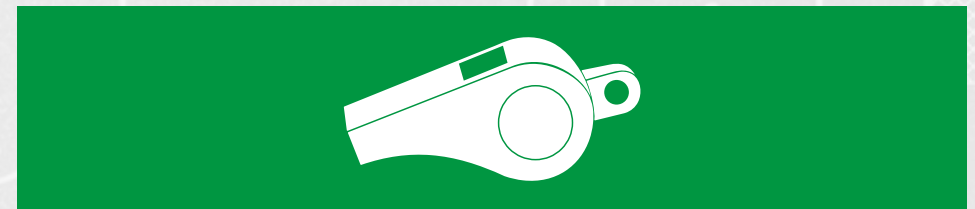
Enough is Enough Campaign

- Nationwide campaign with 16,000 on-site marketing materials, demonstrating a range of sanctions issued within grassroots football.
- Increase of 21% of people who feel The FA do enough to tackle poor behaviour.
- Winner of the Transformational Impact Category at the Football Business Awards.



Discipline Cases

- Serious cases occur in less than 0.09% of all grassroots football and general misconduct in just 1.14%.
- Fast-Track process launched for non-serious grassroots discipline cases.
- Anti-Discrimination pillar launched as part of 'A Game For All Standard.'
- Reporting gap reduced to 1.89 from 2.35 in 2022.



General Behaviour Statistics

- Average score of 90.5% of good respect marks from over 1.3 million scores.
- 64% of participants surveyed felt that behaviour is good or very good.
- Behaviour Improvement Programme – Targeted intervention with over 1,000 teams taking part during the 25/26 season.
- Good respect marks increased by 7% for teams on the Behaviour Improvement Programme and penalty points reduced by 6.6.

DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE



DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE

Silent Support Weekend

Silent Support Weekend is a national initiative for Under-18 grassroots football designed to help young players find their voice on the pitch, make their own decisions and enjoy the game without unnecessary distraction from spectators on the sidelines.

In March 2026, more than one million players took part in Silent Support Weekends across the country. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with 97% of participants reporting that behaviour either improved or remained the same during the weekend.

The initiative will continue during the 2026-27 season on the following dates:

- 14–15 November 2026
- 13–14 March 2027

In addition, a number of leagues have volunteered to take part in a pilot during the 2026-27 season, introducing more frequent Silent Support Weekends.

The pilot will inform future national rollout and frequency recommendations.

For more details on Silent Support Weekends see here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8P08PyCAG8>



DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE

Behaviour Improvement Programme

The Behaviour Improvement Programme (BIP) was delivered by County FAs throughout the 2025-26 season.

The programme provides targeted support to teams that need it most to improve behaviour and promote a more positive playing environment.

Teams are identified using a range of indicators, including Respect Marks and Penalty Points, before receiving tailored support from their County FA.

This includes access to relevant guidance, resources and practical interventions to help drive sustained improvements in behaviour.

More than 1,000 teams participated in the 2025-26 season, and the results showed clear, measurable improvements across all indicators.

The programme will now operate as a rolling initiative each season, ensuring continuous support for teams who need it most.

BEHAVIOUR MEASURE	BEFORE BIP	AFTER BIP	NET CHANGE
'Good' Respect Marks	75%	82%	+7%
'Poor' Respect Marks	6%	4%	-2%
Penalty Points	31.1	38.3	-6.6 (against expected trend of 44.9)

DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE

Enough is Enough

The Enough is Enough campaign was launched to demonstrate The FA's commitment to taking robust action against individuals who commit serious misconduct. At the beginning of the current strategy, only one in five people felt that The FA was doing enough to tackle poor behaviour, making this a key area of focus.

The campaign combined a nationwide awareness campaign with targeted communications. Digital channels were used to publicise sanctions and reinforce key messages, alongside advertising on billboards, bus stops and other outdoor media. Campaign materials were displayed at more than 16,000 locations nationwide. Targeted advertising was also placed within 10 miles of the 100 clubs with the poorest disciplinary records to maximise local impact.

The campaign has delivered encouraging results. 76% of respondents believe that Enough is Enough is having a positive impact, while The FA and County FAs continue to reinforce the campaign by regularly promoting disciplinary outcomes through digital channels.

Public confidence has also increased significantly. 41% of respondents now believe that The FA is doing enough to tackle poor behaviour - more than double the figure recorded at the start of the strategy in 2024.

The campaign's impact has been recognised externally, winning the Transformational Impact Award at the Football Business Awards on 15 May 2026.

Respect Shop

The FA and Team Grassroots have worked in partnership to launch The Respect Shop, providing clubs and leagues with easy access to a range of FA-approved resources designed to support positive matchday environments.

The online shop includes a variety of materials, including A-Frame boards, posters and hi-vis bibs, enabling clubs and leagues to promote consistent Respect messaging and reinforce positive behaviours across grassroots football.

Clubs and leagues can also purchase vouchers at a 10% discount, helping to reduce the cost of approved Respect equipment and making it easier to access impactful resources that can be used on matchdays. This ensures consistent messaging across matchdays and reduces cost barriers for clubs.

<https://www.teamgrassroots.co.uk/respect/>

<https://www.teamgrassroots.co.uk/product/voucher/>



DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE

Grassroots Code

The Grassroots Code provides a clear, unified standard for behaviour across all levels of grassroots football.

The Code has been created to unite everyone involved in grassroots football around a shared commitment to positive standards of behaviour.

Co-created with grassroots clubs, the Code sets out the behaviours and expectations that will help create the positive football environment that players, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators all want to experience - both within their own club and across the wider game.

At the heart of the Grassroots Code are five clear Standards of Behaviour, designed to be simple, memorable and applicable to everyone involved in football:

- Enjoy the game
- Give respect
- Be inclusive
- Work together
- Play safe

Supporting resources, including codes of conduct and presentations, are available via the link below. These can be used by clubs and leagues to help embed positive behaviours.

<https://www.englandfootball.com/participate/behaviour/The-Grassroots-Code>

Body Cam Trial

The referee body camera trial continued throughout the 2025-26 season, representing a world-leading pilot exploring the role technology can play in improving behaviour across grassroots football.

The pilot involved 10 County FAs and delivered encouraging results, with strong support from those involved. 85% of participants viewed the use of body cameras positively, while 74% felt they had a positive influence on player behaviour.

The FA will continue to evaluate the findings from the pilot.

Captains Only Protocol

The Captains Only Protocol will remain in place across all levels of English football, reinforcing the role of the captain as the sole point of contact between players and match officials when discussing decisions.

Under the protocol, only the team captain is permitted to approach the referee to discuss a decision after it has been made. A designated 'captain-only zone' has also been introduced, extending four metres around the referee, with only the captain allowed to enter this area. Any other player who enters the zone may be cautioned for dissent.

The protocol is designed to reduce incidents of mass confrontation, dissent and intimidation of match officials, while encouraging respectful communication and improving the matchday environment for everyone involved.



DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE

U18 Referee Armbands

Under-18 referees will once again have the option to wear a yellow armband to identify that they are under the age of 18.

This provides an additional safeguard for young referees by giving players, coaches and spectators a clear visual reminder to show increased respect, understanding and patience.

The armbands will be distributed to all eligible U18 referees through their respective County FAs. While wearing the armband remains optional, we strongly encourage all eligible referees to use this initiative as part of wider efforts to create a more supportive environment for young officials.

Positivity Champions Project

The Positivity Champions project celebrates and recognises the positive behaviours that exist across grassroots football, supporting a key pillar of The FA's strategy to tackle poor behaviour and promote a positive culture across the grassroots game.

With the vast majority of matches taking place without misconduct, the initiative provides an opportunity to shine a spotlight on the clubs, volunteers and communities who consistently demonstrate respect, inclusion and positive behaviours week in, week out.

From September to May, one grassroots club will be selected each month for demonstrating an outstanding commitment to creating a positive environment and embedding good behaviour within their club.

Each monthly winner will receive:

- A visit from The FA Community Shield, with their County FA and local media invited to celebrate the achievement
- National recognition across England Football channels, sharing the club's story and approach to promoting positive behaviour
- A free Respect Matchday Bundle from the Respect Shop

The project provides an opportunity to celebrate the very best of grassroots football, while recognising those who play a leading role in creating welcoming and positive environments for everyone involved. The project also reinforces the message that positive behaviour is the norm across grassroots football.

Behaviour Hub

The FA will shortly launch a brand-new Behaviour Hub, providing a high-quality, accessible platform where participants can access a wide range of resources and guidance to help tackle poor behaviour and promote positive standards across the game.

The refreshed platform will feature dedicated sections for key audiences, including players, coaches, spectators, referees and volunteers, ensuring users can quickly and easily find the most relevant information and support.

A feedback mechanism will also be built into the platform, allowing users to share suggestions and help shape future improvements. The new Behaviour Hub will be available from late 2026 and will become a central resource for behaviour support, evolving continuously as new insights and trends emerge.



DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE

Cooling-Off Periods

Cooling-Off periods will become available across all grassroots football from the 2026-27 season.

A cooling-off period allows the referee to temporarily pause a match when they believe emotions have escalated and a short break is required to help restore a safe and positive playing environment. When a cooling-off period is called, all players must move to their respective penalty areas and remain there until the referee restarts play.

Any player who fails to follow this instruction may receive a temporary dismissal under existing sin bin regulations. A maximum of two cooling-off periods can be implemented during a match. If a third period is required, the match must be abandoned.

Respect Marks

Full-Time respect marks have been refreshed for the new season, introducing a range of improvements to provide more detailed insight into behaviour and enable more targeted support for teams.

The key changes include:

- Separate behaviour questions for players, coaches and spectators, allowing for clearer accountability and more targeted support
- A 1-5 scoring scale for each question, with 5 representing the highest standard of behaviour
- The option to add free-text comments to provide additional context behind scores
- New behaviour dashboards for leagues, enabling them to identify trends and work proactively with clubs and their County FA (launching late 2026)

- Bi-monthly Respect Reports sent directly to teams, providing team averages and comparisons against national benchmarks (launching late 2026)
- The ability for users to flag reports to League Administrators where they believe further review or action may be required

These enhancements will enable County FAs and leagues to better understand behaviour across players, coaches and spectators, helping to identify where additional support is needed. The insights gained will support targeted interventions, including identifying teams for the Behaviour Improvement Programme, as well as providing wider behavioural support across grassroots football.

Ground Closure Powers

To further strengthen accountability at club level, The FA has introduced powers to impose full or partial ground closures on clubs competing at Steps 5 and 6 of the National League System where repeated serious misconduct occurs. These powers provide an additional sanction for the most persistent cases, reinforcing the responsibility of clubs to create a safe and respectful environment for participants and spectators alike

Behavioural Penalty Point System

The behavioural penalty point system was redesigned for the 2024-25 season to place greater emphasis on tackling persistent poor conduct. Penalty points are now issued only for behavioural offences, including dissent and threatening behaviour.

Where teams reach specified accumulation thresholds, they must demonstrate the actions being taken to improve standards, with tailored support provided by their County Football Association. If behaviour fails to improve, further consequences may follow, including in the most serious cases, exclusion from competitions.

During the 2025-26 season, 15 teams had their affiliation for the following season made conditional on agreeing and implementing an improvement action plan with their County Football Association.

DRIVING POSITIVE CHANGE

Stronger Sanctions for Discrimination

The FA continues to place particular emphasis on tackling discrimination. Although offences involving a protected characteristic only account for approximately 0.05% of all grassroots football matches each season, their impact on those affected can be profound, and they have no place in the game.

To reinforce this message, disciplinary sanctions have been strengthened from the 2026-27 season. The minimum suspension for a proven act of discrimination has increased from six to ten matches, reflecting the seriousness of these offences. Financial penalties have also previously been enhanced, with a minimum £75 fine for individuals and recommended entry-point fines of between £140 and £300 for clubs found guilty of aggravated misconduct involving a protected characteristic.

These changes form part of The FA's wider commitment to ensuring that sanctions remain proportionate, act as a meaningful deterrent and support the long-term ambition of creating a game that is safe, respectful and inclusive for everyone.

Team Points Deductions

Introduced at the start of the 2023-24 season, the points deduction framework applies where players or coaches from the same team commit repeated serious misconduct. Developed in response to consistent feedback from across the grassroots game, the regulations place greater accountability on teams and clubs for persistent poor behaviour by their participants.

Teams can receive deductions ranging from three to twelve points, depending on the number and severity of offences committed within a 12-month period. Encouragingly, the regulations have been required rarely since their introduction, suggesting that the prospect of sporting sanctions is acting as an effective deterrent before repeated offending occurs.

DISCIPLINE STATISTICS



OVERVIEW

ALLEGATIONS – SEASON COMPARISON

Number of collective **serious case allegations** in 2025/26:

4,716

(3.78/1000 fixtures)

Number of collective **serious case allegations** in 2024/25:

4,649

(3.73/1000 fixtures)

Change:

**+0.05/1000
fixtures**

Commentary:

Independent research indicates that for every 100 serious incidents brought to The FA's attention, a further 89 are estimated to go unreported. This represents a positive shift from 2022, when it was indicated that for every 100 cases reported a further 135 incidents went unreported. We refer to this difference as the “Reporting gap” and for simplicity record it as a factor of 2.35 in 2022 and 1.89 in 2026. This reflects the impact of ongoing work to improve understanding of reporting processes, build confidence among participants and make it easier for concerns to be raised.

The increase in serious case allegations being reported, together with the narrowing of the reporting gap, provides encouraging evidence that more participants feel able to speak up when misconduct occurs and have greater confidence that reports will be taken seriously and addressed appropriately. However, we recognise there is still more to do to ensure all serious incidents are reported and that everyone involved feels supported throughout the process.

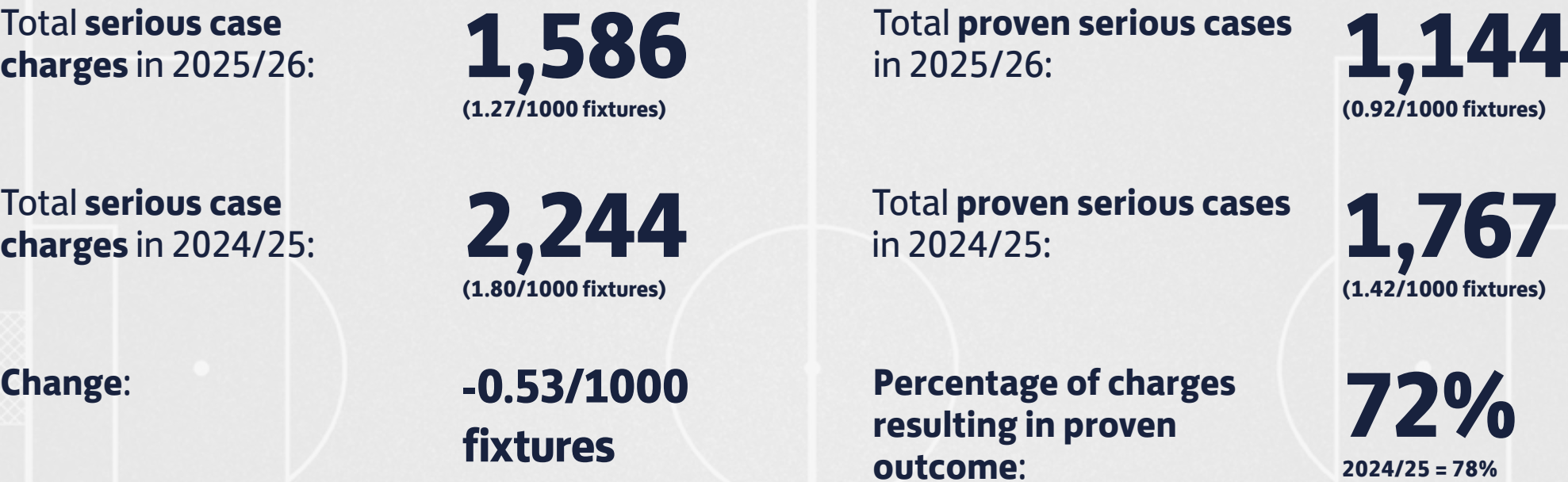
*2CV Independent Research – 2026

OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

CHARGES – SEASON COMPARISON

Note:

Our data cut this year was earlier than the year before, which has impacted some of the yearly comparisons.



Commentary:

While the number of allegations received has increased, the number of charges issued has decreased. To ensure this report is released earlier, our data cut this year was earlier than the year before, which has impacted some of the yearly comparisons. This figure also reflects the ongoing refinement of our investigative processes, ensuring that only cases meeting the required burden of proof proceed to charge.

The overall proven rate of 72% in the 2025-26 season demonstrates that participants are right to have confidence in the misconduct process. It also shows that allegations are investigated thoroughly, and that when charges are issued, participants can be assured of a fair and balanced hearing.

OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

CASE CLOSURE TIMES – SEASON COMPARISON

Average days from **case notification to closure** in 2025/26:

46.4

Average days from **case notification to closure** in 2024/25:

48.5

Change:

-2.1 days

Commentary:

Following targeted efforts to ensure the prompt resolution of cases, there has been a decrease in the average time taken from case notification to closure. This remains well within the regulatory timeframe of 90 days for a charge to be heard following receipt of an allegation.

The FA remains committed to ensuring that all cases are resolved promptly and efficiently, recognising the importance of timely outcomes for both those reporting allegations and those responding to charges.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a pen and writing on a clipboard. The clipboard has a white sheet of paper with handwritten notes in black ink. The notes include names and initials in parentheses, such as "Mara (R10)", "George (CS)", "John (K)", "Jay", "Ibrahim (M)", "Kane (M)", "Robert (CS)", and "Shaw (CS)". There are also arrows pointing from some names to others. The background is a blurred green field.

Creating a game where everyone feels welcome, respected and included remains a central ambition of The FA's 2024-28 Strategy through our strategic priority of A Game Free from Discrimination. We continue to invest in initiatives that challenge discriminatory behaviour, support those affected and promote positive cultural change across grassroots football. This includes our national anti-discrimination campaign, Enough is Enough, alongside a broad programme of education, engagement and disciplinary action.

Good governance also plays a vital role in driving inclusion. Every County Football Association is now required to operate an Inclusion Advisory Board (IAB) in accordance with The FA's Code of Governance, ensuring diverse perspectives help shape local decision-making and strengthen inclusive practices across the grassroots game.

Although representing a smaller proportion of overall cases, allegations involving gender have continued to rise alongside the sustained growth of the women's and girls' game, highlighting the importance of maintaining a safe and respectful environment as participation expands.

Allegations involving religion have increased slightly compared with the previous season. The FA has continued to work closely with partners, including a dedicated antisemitism task force, to tackle religious discrimination and ensure football is a game where everyone feels they belong.

OVERVIEW

DISCRIMINATORY ALLEGATIONS – SEASON COMPARISON

Number of **discriminatory allegations** in 2025/26:

3,358

(2.69/1000 fixtures)

Number of **discriminatory allegations** in 2024/25:

2,849

(2.28/1000 fixtures)

Change:

**+0.41/1000
fixtures**

Commentary:

The FA remains focused on ensuring that participants feel confident reporting misconduct and understand how to do so. Continuing to close the reporting gap that we know exists is a key priority, and The FA will repeat research in this area during the 2027-28 season to assess progress and identify further opportunities for improvement. We know this gap has reduced to 1.89 (from 2.35 in 2022) but we will continue to focus on reducing this gap further.

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT

RELATED TO ETHNICITY/RACE COLOUR

Note:

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

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to **ethnicity/race/colour** in 2025/26:

1,147
(0.92/1000 fixtures)

Number of **charges** relating to **ethnicity/race/colour** in 2025/26:

235

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to **ethnicity/race/colour** in 2024/25:

1,021
(0.82/1000 fixtures)

Number of **proven charges** relating to **ethnicity/race/colour** in 2025/26:

157

Change:

+0.10/1000 fixtures

Number of **not proven charges** relating to **ethnicity/race/colour** in 2025/26:

57

Average sanction: **7 matches**

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT

RELATED TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Note:

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

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to **sexual orientation** in 2025/26:

999
(0.80/1000 fixtures)

Number of **charges relating to sexual orientation** in 2025/26:

329

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to **sexual orientation** in 2024/25:

738
(0.59/1000 fixtures)

Number of **proven charges relating to sexual orientation** in 2025/26:

243

Change:

+0.21/1000 fixtures

Number of **not proven charges relating to sexual orientation** in 2025/26:

47

Average sanction: **7 matches**

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT

RELATED TO DISABILITY

Note:

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

Number of **serious case allegations relating to disability** in 2025/26:

450

(0.36/1000 fixtures)

Number of **charges relating to disability** in 2025/26:

177

Number of **serious case allegations relating to disability** in 2024/25:

418

(0.34/1000 fixtures)

Number of **proven charges relating to disability** in 2025/26:

135

Change:

**+0.02/1000
fixtures**

Number of **not proven charges relating to disability** in 2025/26:

29

Average sanction: **7 matches**

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT

RELATED TO GENDER

Note:

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

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to **gender** in 2025/26:

356
(0.29/1000 fixtures)

Number of **charges** relating to **gender** in 2025/26:

121

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to **gender** in 2024/25:

346
(0.28/1000 fixtures)

Number of **proven charges** relating to **gender** in 2025/26:

97

Change:

**+0.01/1000
fixtures**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to **gender** in 2025/26:

13

Average sanction: **7 matches**

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT

RELATED TO NATIONALITY

Note:

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

Number of **serious case allegations relating to nationality** in 2025/26:

350
(0.28/1000 fixtures)

Number of **charges relating to nationality** in 2025/26:

94

Number of **serious case allegations relating to nationality** in 2024/25:

287
(0.23/1000 fixtures)

Number of **proven charges relating to nationality** in 2025/26:

63

Change:

+0.05/1000 fixtures

Number of **not proven charges relating to nationality** in 2025/26:

20

Average sanction: **7 matches**

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT

RELATED TO RELIGION

Note:

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

Number of **serious case allegations relating to religion** in 2025/26:

56
(0.04 per 1000 fixtures)

Number of **charges relating to religion** in 2025/26:

14

Number of **serious case allegations relating to religion** in 2024/25:

39
(0.03/1000 fixtures)

Number of **proven charges relating to religion** in 2025/26:

10

Change:

+0.01/1000 fixtures

Number of **not proven charges relating to religion** in 2025/26:

4

Average sanction: **7 matches**



SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL

Commentary:

Serious offences against match officials include threats, physical contact and assaults. While these incidents represent only a very small proportion of the 1.2 million of grassroots fixtures played each season and we saw a decrease in the 2025-26 season, their impact on individual referees and the wider officiating community can be significant.

Encouragingly, the refereeing workforce continues to grow and refereeing numbers are at their strongest levels to date. In the 2025-26 season there were almost 42,000 registered match officials, with an increase of 9.7% in the retention rate, both representing year-on-year increases. Maintaining this positive trend depends on ensuring referees can officiate in a safe, respectful and supportive environment, free from abuse and intimidation.

The FA takes a zero-tolerance approach to serious misconduct towards match officials. Participants found guilty of these offences face significant suspensions and financial penalties, and all proven offenders must complete a mandatory education programme before returning to the game. These measures are designed not only to hold individuals accountable, but also to reinforce the standards of behaviour expected across grassroots football.

Supporting those affected is equally important. Through the National Refereeing Manager, The FA works alongside County Football Associations to provide direct support to every referee who reports an assault or attempted assault, helping to ensure appropriate welfare, guidance and communication throughout the disciplinary process.

To promote consistency and transparency, allegations are assessed against clearly defined criteria. Assault or attempted assault cases require evidence that an individual's actions, or attempted actions, caused or intended to cause injury. Physical contact offences relate to confrontational behaviour that is not considered likely to cause injury, while threatening behaviour covers words or actions intended to intimidate or threaten a match official, irrespective of whether the official believed the threat would be carried out.

The FA reviews its disciplinary framework each season to ensure sanctions remain proportionate and effective. Alongside robust enforcement, continued investment in education, referee support and behaviour change initiatives will remain central to reducing offences against match officials and creating a safer environment for everyone involved in the game.

OVERVIEW

OFFENCES AGAINST MATCH OFFICIALS – SEASON COMPARISON

Total serious offence allegations
against Match Officials in 2025/26:

1,358
(1.09 per 1000 fixtures)

Total serious offence allegations
against Match Officials in 2024/25:

1,702
(1.37/1000 fixtures)

Change:

**-0.28/1000
fixtures**

Commentary:

The number of serious case allegations involving match officials has again fallen during the 2025-26 season, representing encouraging progress. Match officials continue to be the participant group most likely to report misconduct, meaning trends in these cases are less influenced by under-reporting than in other areas of the game.

To ensure sanctions remain effective and reflect the seriousness of these offences, The FA has strengthened its disciplinary framework. Updated sanction guidelines continue to impose significant consequences, with recommended suspensions of five to ten years for assault on a match official and three to five years for attempted assault.

The FA has also refined its disciplinary regulations to improve consistency and clarity. The evidential threshold for proving a charge of threatening a match official has been simplified, making it easier to apply consistently. In addition, the definition of assault has been expanded to explicitly include attempted assaults, ensuring the most serious behaviour is dealt with under the strongest available sanctions.

Protecting match officials remains a key priority. Building on the progress made this season, The FA has introduced a range of additional measures designed to prevent serious misconduct, strengthen support for referees and reinforce the message that abuse towards match officials has no place in grassroots football. These initiatives are outlined elsewhere in this report.

SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL

(CONTINUED)

ASSAULT/ATTEMPTED ASSAULT

Note:

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

Total serious case allegations relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2025/26:

151
(0.12/1000 fixtures)

Number of charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2025/26:

67

Total serious case allegations relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2024/25:

194
(0.16/1000 fixtures)

Number of proven charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2025/26:

46

Change:

**-0.04/1000
fixtures**

Number of not proven charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2025/26:

14

Commentary:

The definition of an assault now clearly includes attempts to assault, resulting in an increase in assault charges, which bring lengthy bans.

SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL

(CONTINUED)

PHYSICAL CONTACT/ATTEMPTED PHYSICAL CONTACT

Note:

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

Total serious case allegations relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a Match Official in 2025/26:

429
(0.34/1000 fixtures)

Number of charges relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a Match Official in 2025/26:

202

Total serious case allegations relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a Match Official in 2024/25:

480
(0.38/1000 fixtures)

Number of proven charges relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a Match Official in 2025/26:

151

Change:

**-0.04/1000
fixtures**

Number of not proven charges relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a Match Official in 2025/26:

40

SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL

(CONTINUED)

THREATENING BEHAVIOUR

Note:

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

Total **serious case allegations** relating to threatening a Match Official in 2025/26:

698
(0.56/1000 fixtures)

Number of **charges** relating to threatening a Match Official in 2025/26:

323

Total **serious case allegations** relating to threatening a Match Official in 2024/25:

1,028
(0.82/1000 fixtures)

Number of **proven charges** relating to threatening a Match Official in 2025/26:

240

Change:

**-0.26/1000
fixtures**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to threatening a Match Official in 2025/26:

40

ASSAULTS COMMITTED BY A PARTICIPANT ON A PARTICIPANT



ASSAULTS COMMITTED BY A PARTICIPANT ON A PARTICIPANT

Note:

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

Total serious case allegations relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2025/26:

80
(0.06/1000 fixtures)

Number of charges relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2025/26:

24

Total serious case allegations relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2024/25:

98
(0.08/1000 fixtures)

Number of proven charges relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2025/26:

15

Change:

-0.02/1000 fixtures

Number of not proven charges relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2025/26:

7

Commentary:

Serious injury must be inflicted for an assault (participant on participant) to be proven. The FA will continue to deal with incidents of this nature seriously, with lengthy recommended sanctions. The FA also works with the Police as appropriate, where criminal charges are also brought against offenders.

GENERAL MISCONDUCT



GENERAL MISCONDUCT

Commentary:

We continue to monitor the increase in SOW (Stage One Warning) offences for dissent, which are cautions issued to non-players such as coaches, managers and officials. This incentive has provided Match Officials with the ability to take immediate action against offenders during a match, which has had a positive impact in terms of ensuring misconduct does not escalate further. We are also monitoring an increase in dissent cautions together with a reduction in dissent sin bin cautions.

Cautionable misconduct

CAUTION CODE	PER 1000 FIXTURES (2024/25)	PER 1000 FIXTURES (2025/26)	CHANGE (PER 1000 FIXTURES)
C1 – Unsporting Behaviour	194.06	195.22	+1.16
C2 – Dissent	4.20	5.96	+1.76
C2 – Dissent (sin bin)	25.03	24.11	-0.92
C3 – Persistent Offending	12.15	13.50	+1.35
C4 – Delaying Restart	24.89	24	-0.89
C5 – Failed to respect required distance	0.74	0.70	-0.04
C6 – Entering/re-enters without Match Official permission	0.79	0.83	+0.04
C7 – Exiting without Match Official permission	0.10	0.11	+0.01

GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

Standard misconduct

DISMISSAL CODE	PER 1000 FIXTURES (2024/25)	PER 1000 FIXTURES (2025/26)	CHANGE (PER 1000 FIXTURES)
S1 – Serious Foul Play	3.10	3.21	+0.11
S2 – Violent Conduct	7.82	8.03	+0.21
S3 – Spitting	0.09	0.06	-0.03
S4 – DOGSO ¹ by handball offence save for goalkeeper	0.94	1.00	+0.06
S5 – DOGSO to an opponent whose overall movement is towards the offender's goal by an of- fence punishable by a free kick	2.04	2.37	+0.33
S6 – Offensive Language	5.64	5.54	-0.10
S7 – Second Cautionable Offence	9.67	8.98	-0.69

¹ Denying an Obvious Goal-Scoring Opportunity.

GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

Misconduct charges

OFFENCE TYPE	PER 1000 FIXTURES (2024/25)	PER 1000 FIXTURES (2025/26)	CHANGE (PER 1000 FIXTURES)
E3 - Improper Conduct (Participant Charge)	5.96	6.08	+0.12
E20/E21 - Failure to control (Club Charge)	4.70	4.39	-0.31

GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

SOW offences

DISMISSAL CODE	PER 1000 FIXTURES (2024/25)	PER 1000 FIXTURES (2025/26)	CHANGE (PER 1000 FIXTURES)
SOW01 – Clearly/persistently not respecting the confines of the technical area	0.27	0.28	+0.01
SOW02 – Delaying the restart of play	0.13	0.13	0.00
SOW03 – Deliberately entering the technical area of the opposing team	0.02	0.02	0.00
SOW04 – Dissent by word or action	5.16	6.12	+0.96
SOW05 – Entering the referee review area	0.01	0.00	-0.01
SOW06 – Excessively showing the TV signal for a 'VAR' review	0.00	0.00	0.00
SOW07 – Excessively/persistently gesturing for a red/ yellow card	0.03	0.04	+0.01

GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

SOW offences (continued)

DISMISSAL CODE	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2024/25)	PER 1000 FIXTURES (2025/26)	CHANGE (PER 1000 FIXTURES)
SOW08 – Gestures which show clear lack of respect for Match Officials (e.g. sarcastic clapping)	0.19	0.14	-0.05
SOW09 – Gesturing or acting in a provocative manner or inflammatory manner	0.28	0.28	0.00
SOW10 – Persistent or unacceptable behaviour (including repeated warnings)	0.42	0.34	-0.08
SOW11 – Showing a lack of respect for the game	0.21	0.19	-0.02
SOW12 – Throwing/kicking drinks bottles or other objects	0.03	0.02	-0.01
SOW13 – Other	0.17	0.20	+0.03

SUMMARY:

Creating a game that is safe, inclusive and respectful for everyone will remain central to The FA's work throughout the remainder of the 2024-28 strategy period. Through our strategic priorities of A Game Free from Discrimination and Tackling Poor Behaviour, we will continue to build on the progress made to date, combining education, prevention, support and proportionate disciplinary action to drive lasting cultural change across grassroots football.

Over the coming seasons, we will continue to strengthen our approach by investing in initiatives that promote positive behaviour, challenge discrimination, improve reporting and ensure that misconduct is dealt with consistently, fairly and robustly. Alongside this, we will continue to review our policies and sanctions to ensure they remain effective in responding to the evolving needs of the game.

While significant progress has been made, we recognise that tackling poor behaviour requires sustained commitment from everyone involved in football. Lasting change can only be achieved through collective responsibility, with players, coaches, clubs, leagues, match officials, volunteers, County Football Associations and The FA all playing their part in setting and maintaining the standards expected across the game.

The FA's work is strengthened by the continued support and collaboration of key partners, including County Football Associations and Kick It Out. The FA remains committed to listening, learning and working in partnership with the grassroots football community to identify opportunities for further improvement. Together, we will continue to create an environment where everyone feels welcome, valued and able to enjoy football free from abuse, discrimination and unacceptable behaviour.

By continuing to work together, we can ensure that football remains a game that is safe, inclusive and welcoming For All.



SERVING THE GRASSROOTS GAME IN PARTNERSHIP WITH OUR CFAs



ALONGSIDE OUR TRUSTED PARTNERS

THANK YOU

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK ALL OUR PARTNERS FOR THEIR CONTINUED
COMMITMENT, COLLABORATION AND SHARED AMBITION.

TOGETHER, WE ARE HELPING TO CREATE A SAFER, MORE POSITIVE
GAME FOR ALL.



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