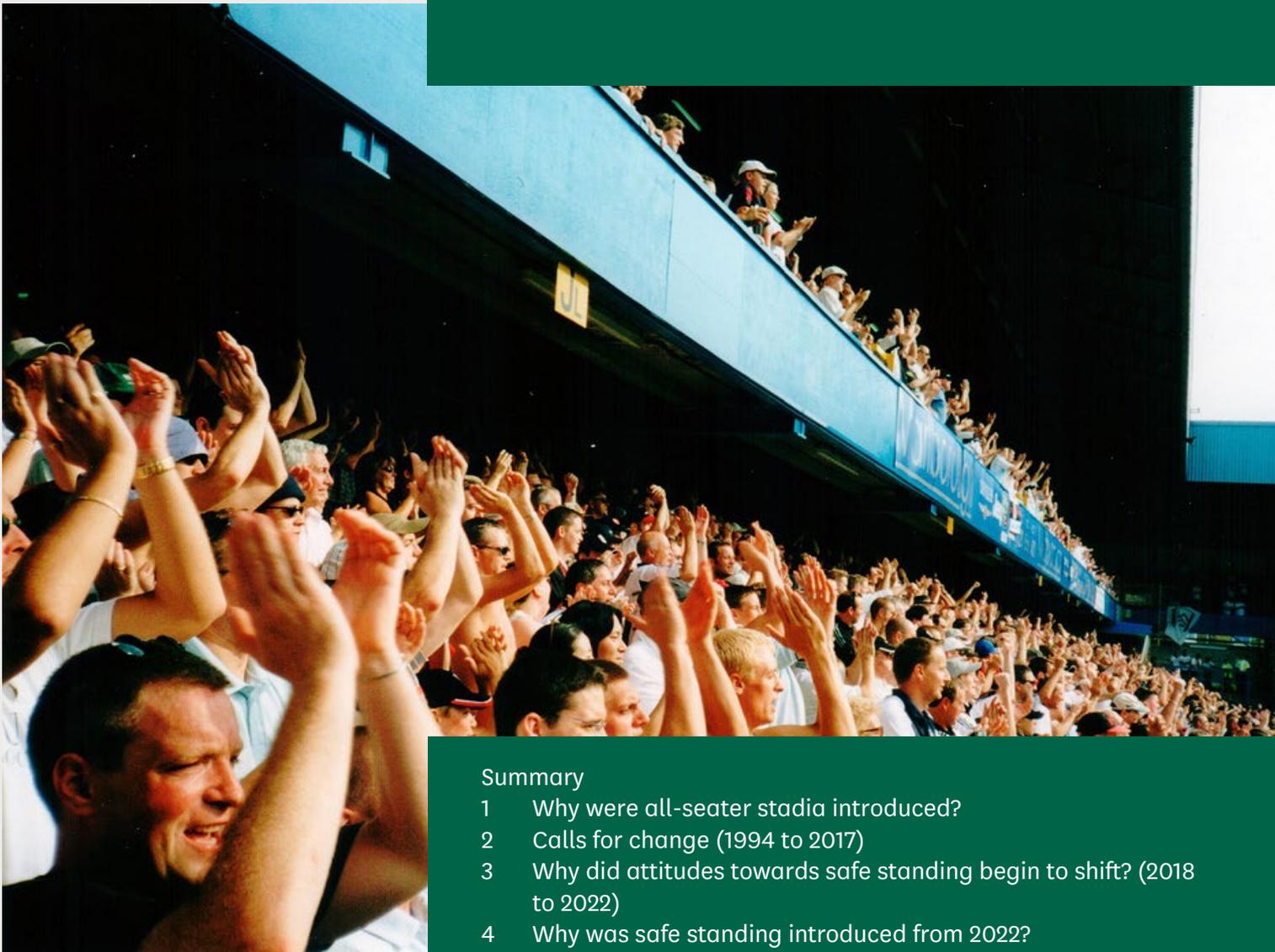


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# Standing at football in England and Wales



## Summary

- 1 Why were all-seater stadia introduced?
- 2 Calls for change (1994 to 2017)
- 3 Why did attitudes towards safe standing begin to shift? (2018 to 2022)
- 4 Why was safe standing introduced from 2022?

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## Summary

From August 1994 to January 2022, clubs in the English Premier League (PL) and Championship had been required to provide all-seated accommodation. This followed Lord Justice Taylor's report into the Hillsborough disaster of April 1989.

Throughout this period improvements in stadium design, the wishes of some fans to stand, and the success of "safe standing" in other European countries, led to calls for the introduction of standing areas at PL and Championship grounds. The 2019 [Conservative Party Manifesto](#) (PDF) included a commitment to "work with fans and clubs towards introducing safe standing".

In November 2021, the then Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) announced that, from 1 January 2022, standing would be allowed in licensed areas at the grounds of five clubs - Cardiff City, Chelsea, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur. Other parts of the grounds would have to remain all-seated. The change was introduced through the [Football Spectators \(Seating\) Order 2021](#) (SI 2021/1239).

On 4 July 2022, the DCMS announced that standing would be allowed at all football clubs subject to the all-seated policy. This would be subject to fulfilling the Sports Ground Safety Authority's (SGSA) licensing criteria. In addition to the five clubs that were granted licenses in January 2022, the following teams were granted licensed standing areas for the 2022/23 season: Brentford, Queens Park Rangers and Wolverhampton Wanderers. Wembley also has a safe standing section for domestic matches. The change was introduced through the [Football Spectators \(Seating\) Order 2022](#) (SI 2022/728).

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# 1 Why were all-seater stadia introduced?

The Football Spectators (Seating) Order 2022 ended 28 years of mandated all-seater stadia in the PL and Championship. The instrument came into force on 25 July 2022 and, for the 2022/23 season, eight clubs opened licensed safe standing sections. Wembley also now has a safe standing section for domestic fixtures. Any club in the PL and Championship can apply to the SGSA and, subject to fulfilling licensing criteria, create a safe standing section in their stadium.

Prior to 1994 ‘terraces’, large standing sections with no formal seats, were a common feature of stadia in the PL and Championship. Following the Hillsborough Stadium disaster of 15 April 1989, the then Government asked Lord Justice Taylor to examine the events that led to the tragedy and to make recommendations on crowd control and safety at sports events.

Lord Justice Taylor’s final report was published in January 1990 and recommended, among other things, that grounds in the top two divisions of English football should be all-seated to help spectator safety:

There is no panacea which will achieve total safety and cure all problems of behaviour and crowd control. But I am satisfied that seating does more to achieve those objectives than any other single measure.<sup>1</sup>

(...)

Apart from comfort and safety, seating has distinct advantages in achieving crowd control. It is possible to have disturbances in a seated area and they have occurred, but with the assistance of CCTV the police can immediately zoom in with a camera and pinpoint the seats occupied by the trouble-makers as well as the trouble-makers themselves...<sup>2</sup>

Lord Justice Taylor recommended that the all-seated requirement should be in place by August 1994.

## How was this enforced?

From 1 August 1994, under the Football Spectators Act 1989, all clubs in the PL and Championship were required to provide all-seated accommodation. Clubs promoted to the Championship for the first time have up to three years

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office, *The Hillsborough Stadium Disaster: Inquiry by the Rt Hon Justice Taylor*, Cm 962, January 1990, para 61

<sup>2</sup> As above, para 64

to convert any standing areas to seats. Once converted, grounds had to remain all-seated, even when a club was relegated from the Championship.

The 1989 Act set up the Football Licensing Authority (FLA) to operate a licensing system for grounds used for designated football matches and to monitor local authorities' oversight of spectator safety.<sup>3</sup> In November 2011, the FLA's responsibilities passed to the [Sports Grounds Safety Authority \(SGSA\)](#).<sup>4</sup>

It is an offence to admit spectators to a designated football match without a license - issued by the SGSA - being in force.<sup>5</sup> Specific license conditions are prescribed in secondary legislation, subject to the negative procedure, made under section 11 of the 1989 Act.<sup>6</sup> The Football Spectators (Seating) Order 2022 introduced the relative amendments to this Act to permit licensed safe standing sections.

SGSA has additional specific criteria that must be met to receive a license for a safe standing section. In cases where these criteria are not met, or a license not applied for, the all-seated order still applies.

The 1989 Act only applies in England and Wales.

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<sup>3</sup> A designated match is defined under the Football Spectators (Designation of Football Matches in England and Wales) Order 2000 (S.I. 2000/3331), as "any association football match which is played at Wembley Stadium, at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff or at a sports ground in England and Wales which is registered with the Football League or the Football Association Premier League as the home ground of a club which is a member of the Football League or the Football Association Premier League at the time the match is played".

<sup>4</sup> [Section 1 of the Sports Grounds Safety Authority Act 2011](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Section 10 of the 1989 Act](#); [Section 9 of the 1989 Act](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Section 11 of the 1989 Act](#)

## 2

## Calls for change (1994 to 2017)

By the early 2000s some fan groups had begun to campaign against the all-seater requirements.

A November 2003 Early Day Motion (EDM) called on the Government to “re-examine the case for introducing small, limited sections of safe standing areas at football grounds”.<sup>7</sup> The EDM received 22 signatures.

The following year, the Football Supporters Federation began its “safe standing” campaign. By 2007, the Federation had presented its findings to the then Government. This led to a Westminster Hall debate on 24 October 2007. Gerry Sutcliffe, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the DCMS, laid out the Labour Government’s position:

Nobody has come to me from the football safety authorities, the police, football authorities or local authorities to say that they want a change.

(...)

The available evidence supports that analysis. As has been said, in the 2006-07 season there were record average attendances. The average attendance was 34,379 for premier league matches and 9,938 for football league matches. It is interesting to note that, in the past 15 years, attendances in the premier league have increased by 65 per cent., and that on average stadiums are 92 per cent. full. In the 2006-07 season, there was also the lowest ever number of reported injuries. Figures show that injuries to spectators are rare, but spectators attending grounds with terraces were almost twice as likely to be injured as those attending all-seater stadiums. There was one injury per 39,000 people in all-seater stadiums, compared with one injury per 22,000 people in stadiums with terracing.<sup>8</sup>

This position was broadly re-stated in December 2010 by Hugh Robertson, then Minister for Sport and the Olympics: “I think that it is generally accepted across football that standing still presents a greater risk of injury”.<sup>9</sup>

In 2011, Don Foster MP introduced a Private Members Bill, the Safe Standing (Football Stadia) Bill. When introducing the Bill, he described the developments in technology that could enable standing to be safer:

Countries such as the United States, Canada and Germany are certainly not negligent towards their citizens' safety. They have harnessed technological developments to create standing areas that truly are safe, and such areas

<sup>7</sup> EDM 121 2003/04, [Standing areas at football grounds](#), 26 November 2003

<sup>8</sup> [HC Deb 24 October 2007 cc90-91WH](#)

<sup>9</sup> [HC Deb 8 December 2010 c99WH](#)

are a popular choice with supporters. In such areas, as with seated areas, there are designated spaces for each fan, and there are barriers between rows, preventing surging, pushing or jostling. Individual fans can be easily identified if they are causing trouble, because they are limited to their own individual spaces.<sup>10</sup>

The Bill did not have a second reading.

From 2013 to 2016 the Government's position remained the same: all-seater stadia remained the best means of keeping fans safe at football matches.<sup>11</sup>

In 2016, four e-petitions calling for the all-seater requirement to be re-examined gained a cumulative 11,906 signatures.<sup>12</sup> The Government indicated that its position remained unchanged.<sup>13</sup>

By 2017, however, Tracey Crouch, then Sports Minister, said the Government was "monitoring the developments at Celtic and Shrewsbury Town FC".<sup>14</sup> These clubs had introduced "rail seating" at their grounds.

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<sup>10</sup> [HC Deb 7 December 2010 c109](#)

<sup>11</sup> PQ 180467 [on [Football](#)], 19 December 2013; PQ 204214 [on [Football: Sportsgrounds](#)], 10 July 2014; PQ 12142 [on [Football: Sportsgrounds](#)], 15 December 2015

<sup>12</sup> E-petition 164625: [I would like to see the introduction of safe standing at football matches.](#), 11 February 2017; E-petition 169323: [Debate if "Safe Standing" could be introduced to all seater stadia in England](#), 18 April 2017; E-petition 119094: [Allow safe standing areas in football in grounds.](#), 21 July 2016; E-petition 194239: [Legalise flares and safe standing in certain sections at football matches](#), 3 May 2017

<sup>13</sup> PQ 54333 [on [Football: Sportsgrounds](#)], 25 November 2016

<sup>14</sup> PQ 115105 [on [Football: Sportsgrounds](#)], 29 November 2017

## 3

## Why did attitudes towards safe standing begin to shift? (2018 to 2022)

Improvements in stadium design and technology and the success of ‘safe standing’ in European countries, led to increased calls for the introduction of standing areas at PL and Championship grounds.

In April 2018, West Bromwich Albion’s request for a safe-standing section was rejected.<sup>15</sup> Later that year, safe-standing was the subject of another Commons debate. This led to an initial evidence review, conducted by DCMS, from November 2018.

The following year, the Conservative Party Manifesto included a commitment to work towards safe standing.

In June 2021, the SGSA conducted its own independent review into standing at football. By September 2021, DCMS instructed SGSA to take the first steps towards granting safe standing licenses to football stadia.

From January 2022, standing was allowed in licensed areas at five ‘early adopter’ clubs: Cardiff City, Chelsea, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur. The change was introduced through the [Football Spectators \(Seating\) Order 2021](#) (SI 2021/1239).

The following section gives background to these developments, and the evidence base that led to safe standing’s initial introduction.

### What is rail seating?

Rail seating is one method of implementing safe standing. Several German football clubs use it, including Borussia Dortmund and Wolfsburg. Each ticket holder is designated a seat in the stadium. The design allows for the seat to be locked upright, allowing supporters to stand. Each row has a safety barrier to improve crowd control. For games with all-seater requirements (such as UEFA or FIFA tournaments), the seats can be unlocked and the rail seating becomes a seated section.

<sup>15</sup> [Sports minister rejects West Brom request for safe-standing area](#), Guardian [online], 9 April 2018 (accessed 21 February 2023)

### 3.1 Evidence review for the DCMS (November 2018-January 2019)

A petition [calling for safe standing at Premier League and Championship grounds](#) closed on 8 June 2018 with over 112,000 signatures. In its response, the DCMS [said it would need “strong evidence and rationale” to change the current position](#).

The petition was debated in the House of Commons on 25 June 2018. Tracey Crouch, then Sports Minister, acknowledged the increasing support for a change of policy but said this would need to be evidence based. She announced that the DCMS was commissioning a review to examine “how risks associated with standing would be addressed and what systems might be needed to achieve this”.<sup>16</sup>

The evidence review was undertaken by CFE Research between November 2018 and January 2019. An October 2019 report set out the findings and [concluded that there was a lack of “robust evidence” on whether a change to current policy would ensure “equivalent or improved spectator safety”](#).<sup>17</sup> There was therefore “significant scope” for further research to build the evidence base.<sup>18</sup>

### 3.2 Conservative Party Manifesto (November 2019)

The 2019 [Conservative Party Manifesto](#) (PDF) included a commitment to “work with fans and clubs towards introducing safe standing”.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.3 SGSA research report (June 2021)

In August 2019, the SGSA commissioned independent research on the nature and scale of standing at football, the associated safety risks and how to mitigate them.<sup>20</sup>

A final report was published in June 2021.<sup>21</sup> This found, among other things, that creating standing areas did not appear to encourage or increase the

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<sup>16</sup> [HC Deb 25 June 2018 cc273-4WH](#)

<sup>17</sup> Welford J et al, [Standing at football: a rapid evidence assessment](#) (PDF)[online], CFE Research, October 2019, pp5-6 (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>18</sup> As above

<sup>19</sup> [Get Brexit Done Unleash Britain's Potential](#) (PDF)[online], 2019, p26 (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>20</sup> SGSA website, [Research](#) (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>21</sup> [Standing in seated areas at football stadia, final report for the SGSA by CFE Research](#) (PDF), June 2021, p4 (accessed 21 February 2023)

likelihood that spectators would behave in ways posing a safety risk. The report also said that the installation of barriers or rails could have a positive impact on spectator safety:

...barriers almost completely eliminate the possibility of forwards or backwards movement during goal celebrations and the risk of a surge that could cause injury to those in front. Standing on unlocked seats, seat backs and barriers is, however, possible and could cause injuries, but these would likely be a result of a deliberate act and other spectators remain better protected against this where barriers have been installed. Spectators and staff are satisfied that barriers have improved safety.

The installation of barriers or rails is perceived to have wider, positive effects on spectator behaviour. Police have not been deployed to areas with barriers operated by the case study clubs this season. Barriers also help to enhance spectators' feelings of safety which increases their enjoyment of the game.

Areas where standing is tolerated are popular with spectators because of the atmosphere that is created. Wheelchair platforms have been successfully integrated into tolerated standing areas to provide a more inclusive experience.

Creating areas where standing is tolerated (with or without barriers) does not appear to encourage or increase the likelihood that spectators will engage in the risk behaviours that pose a threat to safety. It does not appear to increase standing elsewhere in a stadium, but neither does it eradicate it. Strict enforcement of the seating policy in other areas can be effective, but can take time to embed...<sup>22</sup>

Persistent standing amongst away spectators was identified as the biggest remaining challenge.<sup>23</sup>

The report said that, in the event of any change in legislation, it would be important to monitor implementation and evaluate the success of strategies to manage spectator safety.<sup>24</sup>

## 3.4 SGSA announces “early adopter” programme (September 2021)

On 22 September 2021, the SGSA announced that it had been instructed by the DCMS to take the first steps in licensing standing areas.<sup>25</sup> Clubs in the PL and

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<sup>22</sup> [Standing in seated areas at football stadia, final report for the SGSA by CFF Research](#) (PDF), June 2021, p4 (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>23</sup> As above

<sup>24</sup> As above

<sup>25</sup> [Licensed standing areas at top flight football grounds to be allowed from January](#), SGSA news [online], 22 September 2021 (accessed 21 February 2023)

Championship were invited to apply to offer licensed standing areas, as part of an “early adopter” programme.<sup>26</sup>

The licensed standing areas would be independently evaluated for the remainder of the 2021/22 season. Other parts of grounds with licensed standing areas would have to remain all-seated. Fans would be expected to sit in those areas.

## 3.5 DCMS announces five early adopter clubs (November 2021)

In a Written Ministerial Statement of 8 November 2021, Nigel Huddleston, then Sports Minister, announced the clubs chosen as “early adopters”: Cardiff City, Chelsea, Manchester City, Manchester United and Tottenham Hotspur.<sup>27</sup>

The Minister said this represented a “significant step” towards fulfilling the Government’s manifesto commitment to introduce standing. The “early adopter” clubs would enable the Government to evaluate the success of standing areas before any wider implementation was considered.

Nigel Huddleston also announced that the [Football Spectators \(Seating\) Order 2021 \(SI 2021/1239\)](#) had been laid before Parliament. This directed the SGSA to amend the “all-seater condition”, which requires stadia to provide all-seated accommodation, in any license to admit spectators issued to the five specified clubs under the Football Spectators Act 1989. The amendment allowed these clubs to admit fans to their grounds to watch designated matches from a standing position, provided certain conditions were satisfied – ie doing so in areas where the seating accommodation has been adapted so there are seats incorporating a barrier or seats with an independent barrier. The Order came into force on 7 December 2021.

On 2 January 2022, Chelsea vs Liverpool became the first game to trial safe standing in England and Wales.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [Licensed standing areas at top flight football grounds to be allowed from January](#), SGSA news [online], 22 September 2021 (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>27</sup> DCMS, [Written Ministerial Statement on Early Adopters Programme for Licensed Standing in Seated Areas](#) [HCWS376], 8 November 2021

<sup>28</sup> [Chelsea v Liverpool to be first football match to trial safe standing in England and Wales on 2 January](#), DCMS press release [online], 1 January 2022 (accessed 21 February 2023)

## 4 Why was safe standing introduced from 2022?

CFE Research produced a final report for the SGSA which evaluated the impact of licensed standing areas amongst the early adopter clubs. This was delivered in July 2022.<sup>29</sup> The report recommended that:

Given the positive impact on the safety of fans and the lack of any evidence that it increases disorder or anti-social behaviour, we recommend that all clubs, in consultation with the SGSA and SAGs, be given the opportunity to implement licensed standing areas.<sup>30</sup>

On 4 July 2022 Nigel Huddleston, then Secretary of State for Sport, announced that licensed safe standing would be formally introduced for the 2022/23 season.<sup>31</sup>

[The Football Spectators \(Seating\) Order 2022](#) (SI 2022/728) was introduced on the same day. The instrument is broadly similar to the Football Spectators (Seating) Order 2021. However, this Order allows all football clubs which are currently subject to an all-seater policy (PL and Championship teams) to admit spectators to their home grounds to watch football matches whilst standing, if certain conditions are met and in areas of the ground where the seating has been adapted. Standing is only permitted at domestic games. The order came into force on 25 July 2022.

It was announced that alongside the early adopters, the following clubs would be permitted a safe standing section: Brentford, Queens Park Rangers and Wolverhampton Wanderers.<sup>32</sup>

Wembley will also have a small safe standing section for domestic matches.<sup>33</sup> The Carabao Cup Final, scheduled for 26 February 2023, according to the English Football League (EFL), “will be the first major domestic English men’s final in almost 35 years at which some supporters will be permitted to stand”.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> [Early adopters of licensed standing areas, report for the SGSA on the findings from the independent evaluation by CFE Research](#) (PDF)[online], July 2022 (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>30</sup> As above, p43

<sup>31</sup> [Safe standing at football stadiums to be rolled out next season](#), DCMS press release [online], 4 July 2022 (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>32</sup> As above

<sup>33</sup> As above

<sup>34</sup> [All you need to know ahead of the Carabao Cup Final 2023](#), EFL news [online], 20 February 2023 (accessed 21 February 2023)

## 4.1

# Criteria for licenses

SGSA is responsible for providing safe standing licenses to clubs. In order to be granted permission to create a safe standing section, clubs must meet various criteria.<sup>35</sup> These criteria fall into four broad categories: compliance with guidance, infrastructure, safety management procedures and Safety Advisory Group (SAG) engagement.<sup>36</sup> SGSA has also published [supplementary guidance for safe standing in seated areas](#).<sup>37</sup>

During a 19 January 2023 oral evidence session for the DCMS Committee's inquiry into safety at major sporting events, Bob Eastwood, Head of Security and Safety Operations at the EFL, providing the following summary of the factors that are considered before a licensed standing section is approved:

**Jane Stevenson:** Thank you. For the numbers and ratios of safe standing, it seems like a really popular way to watch football. Most football fans, I think, really relish the atmosphere of safe standing. As far as the economics go, clubs are going to want to get— At the moment it's one seat out, one standing place in, whereas I think in Europe it's slightly more. Do you think we will look at that? Are there stewarding implications? Are there access implications in safe standing for people with disabilities or different needs in the stadium? Where do you think safe standing will go in terms of ratio and ensuring access for everybody?

**Bob Eastwood:** You've put the context really well, because all those things do need to be considered before safe standing is actually sanctioned through the SGSA licence. The Premier League is in exactly the same position. We have regulations to make sure that access arrangements are adequate and to a good level, and we have partnerships with Level Playing Field to make sure that where improvements are needed, the EFL will work with the club to achieve that. In any application for licensed safe standing, they would have to be able to demonstrate that all those issues were catered for, and that all the risks were mitigated by the application of safe standing as an infrastructure in that particular part of the stand.<sup>38</sup>

## 4.2

# Safe standing infrastructure

SGSA's licensing criteria permit specific types of safe standing infrastructure:

- **Presence of barriers (or rails).** This can either take the form of barriers with seats or independent barriers.

<sup>35</sup> SGSA, [Licensed standing in seated areas criteria](#) (PDF)[online], July 2022 (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>36</sup> SGSA, [Licensed standing in seated areas criteria](#) (PDF), October 2022

<sup>37</sup> SGSA, [Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds Supplementary Guidance: Safe standing in seated areas](#) (PDF)[online], 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, July 2022 (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>38</sup> DCMS Committee, [Oral evidence: Safety at major sporting events](#), HC 596, 2022-23, Q188

- **Seats must be unlocked.** The seats can move from the ‘up’ to ‘down’ position. Therefore, spectators can choose to stand or sit at any point.
- **Each seat/space must be allocated to one spectator.** Spectators must still have allocated, and identifiable, seats to ensure the area cannot become overcrowded.
- **CCTV system must be in place.** This should provide coverage of the entire standing section.

The ground must also ensure that the presence of a standing section has no impact on the viewing standards for spectators in adjoining areas. In addition, there must be no impact on disabled spectators, either in the area itself or the adjoining sections.<sup>39</sup>

## 4.3 Response

The introduction of safe standing was welcomed by the FSA:

Match-going supporters know the benefits of safe standing are enormous, with better atmospheres and more choice for fans, whether they prefer to sit or stand.

We’ve always made the case that football clubs should be able to talk to their fanbase and work together to find the ideal mix of seating and standing at every club.

That’s now possible and it’s no surprise at all that more clubs are already looking to join last season’s early adopters and install their own standing areas.

We’ve been campaigning for safe standing areas for decades now – this is a huge victory for supporters’ groups and all the activists who made it happen.<sup>40</sup>

The SGSA provided the following statement:

The SGSA welcomes the controlled return of standing for the modern era. This is an historic and exciting decision for football and, most importantly, fans. Research, outlined below, has shown that fans will be safer and have an improved experience by having the choice of whether to sit or stand safely.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> As above

<sup>40</sup> [Safe standing areas come to Brentford, QPR, Wolves... and Wembley](#), FSA news [online], 4 July 2022 (accessed 21 February 2023)

<sup>41</sup> SGSA website, [Licensed standing in seated areas](#) (accessed 21 February 2023)

## 4.4

### Next steps

Other clubs have since signalled their intentions to potentially create safe-standing sections: Everton ([part of the plans for its new stadium](#)), [Southampton](#), [Aston Villa](#), [Newcastle](#) and Luton Town ([part of new stadium plans](#)).

[UEFA has begun a programme to observe the use of standing facilities](#) in its men's European competitions for the 2022/23 season. The trial will take place in nations that already have safe-standing infrastructure for domestic fixtures: England, Germany, and France.

No research or insights have yet been generated from the wider introduction of safe-standing in the 2022-23 season.

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