

Written evidence submitted by the Premier League

Premier League response to DCMS Select Committee inquiry on Concussion in Sport

The Premier League welcomes this opportunity to respond to the DCMS Select Committee's inquiry into Concussion in Sport. The Premier League submission is on behalf of all 20 Premier League stakeholders.

The Premier League and our Clubs are committed to learning more about the short-term and long-term impact of head injuries in sport, providing world-leading head injury care for players and using our influence to help tackle the impact of neurodegenerative diseases in communities across England and Wales.

About the Premier League:

The Premier League is the organising body of the Premier League with responsibility for the competition, its Rule Book and the centralised broadcast and other commercial rights.

The Premier League is a private company wholly owned by its 20 member Clubs who make up the League at any one time.

Each individual club is independent, working within the rules of football, as defined by the Premier League, The FA, UEFA and FIFA, as well as being subject to English and European law.

Each of the 20 clubs are a Shareholder in the Premier League. Consultation is at the heart of the Premier League and Shareholder meetings are the ultimate decision-making forum for Premier League policy and are held at regular intervals during the course of the season.

The Premier League Rule Book, contained within the Handbook (Download: [Premier League Handbook](#) - PDF 41.8MB), serves as a contract between the League, the member Clubs and one another, defining the structure and running of the competition.

1. Executive Summary

- In recent years research into the long-term impact of head injuries in sport has increased significantly. The Premier League, alongside domestic football partners, has engaged with this research in order to understand the issue and mitigate risks for today's players and future generations.
- Working with medical experts we have developed a Head Injuries Action Plan. This plan contains a series of workstreams that include the implementation of evidence-based mitigation strategies to protect not just those players playing now, but also future generations. Some work from the Action Plan has already been delivered. For example, the Premier League was the first competition in the world to introduce permanent concussion substitutes on an 18-month trial basis. Over the course of the trial we will be complementing FIFA's data requirements with our own expanded data

collection, including the use of biomarker testing. Our Head Injury Advisory Group - which consists of independent medical experts, club medical staff and a former player - will monitor the results and support us in making recommendations to IFAB, as well as helping us develop our own head injury protocols.

- The Premier League is committed to working with football partners and experts in the field to ensure our head injury protocols are world-leading and evidence led. In collaboration with The FA and EFL we are establishing a new cross-football working group to co-ordinate activity related to head injuries, including further research and support for former players. This work includes two initial short-term studies to identify the forces involved in heading in order to develop evidence-based heading in training guidelines for professional football in time for the 2021/22 season.

2. Concussion in Football

In recent years research into the long-term impact of head injuries in sport has increased significantly. The Premier League and our Clubs are committed to providing world-leading head injury care for players. A series of evidence-based mitigation measures are in the process of being implemented by the Premier League in consultation with football partners to protect player welfare.

There is a significant amount of ongoing work across the football partners. As such the need for collaboration and co-ordination is essential. A new cross-football Head Injury Policy Oversight Group has been established to ensure resources are used effectively. This group will have the task of steering the multiple working groups and ensuring that the partners are aligned strategically. This level of cross-football collaboration will provide us with as large an information base as possible to make the important decisions relating to player welfare. The Premier League provides significant annual funds to the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) which is used for research and support for former players. We will continue to play a supportive role to our football partners in areas in which they lead. This includes longer-term causal research led by The FA's Research Taskforce and the support of former players suffering from neurodegenerative diseases where the PFA is the primary organisation.

3. The Premier League's Role

It is incumbent on the Premier League to lead Clubs by developing frameworks that they can administer, and by offering on-going support that incorporates best practice. The Premier League and our Clubs are committed to providing world-leading head injury care for players and using our influence to help tackle the impact of neurodegenerative diseases in communities across England and Wales.

As we set out above, the Premier League is committed to providing world-leading head-injury care for players, and our priority is to mitigate the risk for current and future players. As part of our Head Injuries Action Plan – of which more detail can be found in Section 4: 'Looking Forward' – activity led by the Premier League will seek to contribute to at least one of the following objectives:

1. To continually develop a world-leading system and protocols related to head injuries within the Premier League and academies.
2. To use the influence and reach of the Premier League and Clubs to increase awareness of neurodegenerative diseases.

3. Develop dementia-friendly football clubs, increasing services for supporters and other members of the community with dementia.

To deliver these objectives the Premier League has taken the lead on projects that inform mitigation measures for both sub-concussive events i.e. heading, and concussive events i.e. collisions. Additional activities primarily focused on the Premier League, our Clubs, players or community beneficiaries, have been identified and will also be led by the Premier League.

Outside of football, we also work with partners from cricket and rugby union on the 'Sport United Against Dementia' campaign to increase understanding of dementia and the tailored support for those diagnosed with dementia, including former players. We take our role in this group very seriously and look forward to continuing our engagement with other sports to increase understanding of dementia and use our reach to educate and support families across the country that are impacted by neurodegenerative diseases.

This is currently, and will remain, an issue of upmost importance to the Premier League and as such progress in this area will be monitored by the Premier League's Board at regular intervals.

4. Looking Forward

The Premier League's Head Injuries Action Plan incorporates various workstreams and is backed by funding from the Premier League itself. This investment will add to the existing funding arrangements in place with the PFA to support research and support for former players.

Within the action plan, we will be implementing a range of work streams to best protect player welfare. They include:

Head injury protocols

- Implement evidence-based mitigation measures for concussion injuries (impact injuries such as head clashes). This has begun with the introduction of permanent concussion substitutes on an 18-month trial basis. This is under the control of The International Football Association Board (IFAB), but we will be working with an academic institution to collect qualitative and quantitative data during the pilot to help IFAB's decision-making, and to evolve our own concussion and return to play protocols. As a pilot, the protocol will be reviewed in 2022 to establish if it is appropriate to be used longer-term. As part of this work, we are exploring how biomarker technology may be utilised to understand head injuries.

Heading guidelines

- We have recently announced two short-term studies to understand the forces involved in heading to enable evidence-based heading in training guidelines to be produced for adult professional football. The first study delivered with SWA will use bespoke mouth guards with built-in accelerometers to measure forces in training. The second study is using tracking data provided by Second Spectrum to analyse the forces for every header performed in Premier League matches during the 2019/20 season. Together these data sets will be analysed by medical experts and the football partners to devise guidelines that will be used across the professional game from the start

of the 2020/21 season. We have already implemented The FA's heading guidelines for youth football in our community programmes and academies.

Education and wider support

- It is the intention to develop head injury resources and training to educate academy and community staff who work with hundreds of thousands of young people each year.
- We will be supporting the Sport United Against Dementia campaign by using our channels and clubs to disseminate information on dementia to the general public and to signpost people to the support available via the Alzheimer's Society's Dementia Connect service.
- Working with the Alzheimer's Society we will support our clubs to become dementia friendly. This will involve developing resources, training and support networks to ensure that supporters diagnosed with dementia can continue to engage with their club.
- The Premier League & PFA Community Fund regularly provides grants to professional football clubs' community organisations to deliver programmes for those with dementia. The Premier League will support the PFA to raise awareness of these programmes amongst former players. Examples of current projects include the Aston Villa Foundation's dementia café and Watford Community, Sport and Education Trust's Golden Memories programme.

The activities outlined above are the starting point for the action plan. This plan is expected to evolve as further research increases our understanding of the subject. As part of the action plan, we seek to make meaningful change across the next three years throughout football. By using the workstreams included in our action plan that are set out above, we hope take steps to put in place appropriate best practice across the game of football, and ensure football partners understand the long-term effects of head injuries and the impact of mitigation measures put in place to protect players. We also intend to play our part in supporting the wider society with the growing issue of dementia.

5. Conclusion

The Premier League supports the ongoing work to understand both the short-term and long-term impact of head injuries in football, and sport. The science of concussion is evolving at pace and this will enable sporting bodies to be able to implement measures based on evidence in the coming years. Our priority is, and will remain, to mitigate the risk for current and future players. We will continue to do this by engaging with other domestic football partners, sports and experts in the field in order to understand the issue, and to ensure that our protocols, now and going forward, are world-leading and evidence-led.