



Supporter Engagement
Wednesday 3rd March 2021
14:00 – 16:00

Attendees

Premier League (PL)

Bill Bush, Executive Director (BB)
Kat Allen, Head of Policy and Supporter Relations (KA)
Tommy Guthrie, Supporter Liaison Manager (TGu)
Rachel Solich, Supporter Partnership Manager (RS)

Supporters Representatives

Akhil Vyas, Arsenal Supporters Trust (AV)
Dave Pennington, Manchester United Supporters Trust (DP)
Kat Law, Tottenham Hotspur Supporters Trust (KL)
Steve Moulds, Foxes Trust, Leicester City (SM)
Thomas Concannon, Newcastle United Supporters Trust (TC)
Tom Greatrex, Fulham Supporters Trust (TG)

Football Supporters' Association (FSA)

Kevin Miles, Chief Executive (KM)
Michael Brunskill, Head of Communications (MB)
Jane Hughes, Club Liaison & Membership Support (JH)
Harpreet Robertson (HR)

Summary Note

The Return of Supporters

The PL opened by acknowledging there has not been much movement in this area since the last meeting. As government plans emerge there will be a better sense of whether the return of supporters this season is feasible, and on what terms.

The PL suggested convening a future meeting (in April) to discuss this again in more detail, once the conditions are better understood.

The PL can't yet confirm which sports will be included in the Government's pilot research events in April but intend to stay close to the process, even if football is not actively involved in staging events.

The PL confirmed the possibility of a limited return of home supporters for the final 2 rounds of fixtures in the 2020/21 season in May. If all goes to plan from 17th May 10,000 or 25% capacity allowed in grounds (whichever is smaller).

The PL may try and get dispensation for 15th / 16th May to hold fixtures with supporters which would mean every club gets one home fixture with supporters in the ground. However, that would be reliant upon the clubs deciding that is something they wished to pursue.

All of these plans are reliant upon following guidelines / protocols to be issued by Public Health England and capacity restrictions may be continued by local Safety Advisory Groups (SAGs). The FSA and PL intend to work together to facilitate the longer term return of fans.

BB was invited to attend a PL Network meeting on this subject and it was also agreed that this group would reconvene in April to discuss developments and there is still much to be decided dependent upon the Government's roadmap.

KL asked that all matches are still broadcast while attendance restrictions are in place and that KO times are accessible. The PL acknowledged the request and that it would be anomalous if the penultimate match was the only one not broadcast.

The PL explained the last round of fixtures is always played simultaneously for sporting integrity reasons, and therefore could be broadcast as live or via the red button.

KM made the case for away fan allocations – many clubs have large numbers of “away fans” based in other regions, who may actually live within post code boundaries, even if travel restrictions were in place for longer journeys.

BB acknowledged the importance of away fans to the PL, adding that in the short term the additional social distancing restrictions in seated areas and around segregation points might make it challenging to incorporate visitors without severely impacting on already reduced capacities.

- **Action:** The PL & FSA to hold an additional meeting in April 2021, once the conditions for return of supporters are clearer.

Ticketing Charter

HR thanked the PL for encouraging clubs to engage with their fans, highlighting that some clubs had improvements to make in this area. In preparation for the return of fans, the PL were asked to consider the FSA’s Ticketing Charter when working with clubs on season ticket renewals. The charter includes recommended refund policies, opposition to a force majeure clause and a renewal ‘holiday’ for fans not attending for health / financial situations.

TG said the PL will have a meeting with the heads of ticketing at each club and will share the charter and suggest it be considered by each club. Any individual issues should be flagged with clubs in the normal way, through the regular supporter meetings, or can be escalated to the PL where necessary.

KL pointed out that most clubs are waiting until April before issuing statements on season ticket renewal when a clearer plan for a return of fans is known. However, clubs are making pricing decisions now and urged fan groups to contact their clubs. TC asked for the PL to encourage clubs, particularly those where relations between fan groups and club have been strained, to engage with fans on these discussions. TGu confirmed pricing decisions will be for clubs to make and any discussions should be taken up with the club using established channels.

- **Action:** The FSA to send a copy of the Ticketing Charter to the PL
- **Action:** PL to share Ticketing Charter with clubs

Governance reviews

The PL have completed the “discovery phase” of their strategic review, but progress has slowed partly due to COVID-19. Both the FSA and the PL await announcements from DCMS on their imminent governance review and from UEFA on the proposed reform of European competition.

- **Action:** Progress to be reviewed in the additional April meeting

European competitions

BB says the PL are concerned with the proposed reform of European competition. A “boosted co-efficient” to determine qualification undermines domestic performance, weekend fixture ‘squeeze’ undermines the primacy of domestic game and more fixtures in winter squeezes the domestic fixtures. There could also be a financial disadvantage to non-European clubs in the PL with the loss of EFL Cup revenue and EFL solidarity payments. BB encouraged FSA to make its case to UEFA.

DP said the FSA are looking to engage with UEFA on this matter. The FSA supports a vibrant PL, with a level playing field, based on merit and fair financial distribution to maintain competition balance. It does not believe there is an appetite amongst fans for more European football and is concerned that any changes that can be made to the “Swiss Model” are simply damage limitation.

- **Action:** The FSA to formally request clarification on the PL’s position regarding member clubs intending to join any European Super League.

No Room for Racism (Action Plan)

BB explained the PL welcomes proposed legislation concerning social media platforms and wants to work with the FSA to combat online abuse, much of which comes from outside of the UK and from individuals who do not attend football matches. 70% of abuse from outside the UK, 30% inside (and those people are not necessarily football fans or match-attenders). Abuse is rarely tied to a season ticket holder or member with a club database record. When they have been, clubs have acted robustly.

KM expressed disappointment at the FSA not being asked to be a co-signatory of the recent letter speaking out on this subject. BB apologised, accepting responsibility for the omission, stating they would look for ways for the PL and the FSA to work together on this subject.

AV outlined some plans for the recently established FSA working group set up to look at how to combat online abuse. It affects fans, player, referees. Social media companies need to act more quickly. Encouraging fans to police social media as they police the stadium.

MB expressed concerns that some supporters' groups had passed on to him that club comms teams aren't always tackling comments / removing users who make abusive comments on social media feeds (especially in relation to religious holidays / LGBT issues). BB said he'd raise the matter with clubs.

- **Action:** PL and FSA to meet to decide on practical steps to address online abuse
- **Action:** PL to raise the issue with member clubs re: tackling online abuse

Gambling Review

The PL favour a proportionate, evidence-based reform of gambling advertising that sees sports advertising / gambling dealt with through general standards and not as a specific case. PL do not want to see a specific tightening for football nor fans demonised for having a bet. TG said a survey by Fulham Supporters' Trust had shown that many fans will not buy a shirt with a gambling partner on it.

- **Action:** The FSA to provide evidence of gambling issues in football

VAR

SM outlined the work of the VAR working group, established to try and improve the experience of VAR for the match-going fan and to establish dialogue with PGMOL. A survey is planned, and dialogue has begun after positive briefing by Mike Riley and Adam Gale-Watts. Work is still needed regarding misinformation about VAR, post-match explanations and improving understanding of VAR and who governs it; the role of IFAB & FIFA. TGu confirmed PL want to do more in this area and will continue to promote engagement between the FSA and PGMOL.

Meeting closes