

PUBLIC Q&A



Football Heading – U12 and below, Trial of Law Changes 2022/23

OVERVIEW

The FA has been granted approval from the International Football Association Board (IFAB) to introduce a new trial to remove deliberate heading in football matches across U12 level and below in England from the start of the 2022-23 season.

We are now inviting leagues and competitions across the country to take part in the trial that will run for the duration of the 2022-23 season. The trial will be coordinated with the County FA network, leagues, clubs and schools throughout the country.

Should the trial be a success, we will apply to IFAB for a Law change for all U12 matches and below from the start of the 2023-24 season. This step will bring matches across these age groups in line with our current heading guidance for training, which already recommends that heading is eliminated or restricted at this level.

The guidance for training in English football was established in partnership with key stakeholders across the grassroots and professional game following consultation with coaches and medical experts in football.

The aim was to help mitigate against any potential risks that may be linked to heading the ball, including injuries from head to head, elbow to head, or head to ground contact, and it represents a cautious approach to playing and enjoying football while ongoing research continues in this area.

Additional ideas to reduce heading in youth football without changing the fabric of the game will be explored in consultation with stakeholders in the game.

We will continue to work with the IFAB on the next steps and delivery of the trial to remove deliberate heading across U12 level and below from the start of the 2022-23 season, and further information will be announced in due course.

WHY HAVE THE FA MADE THE DECISION TO INTRODUCE THIS NEW TRIAL?

Last year we introduced Heading Guidance in Training which was well received. Now we want to align matches with training in these age groups. Currently heading in training amongst these age groups is eliminated or restricted, so this is the natural next step for these age groups.

Reducing heading at this level can support the development of more skilful players who are able to stay on the ball when in possession, contributing to the improved technical ability of our young players.

WHY ARE YOU BRINGING THIS TRIAL IN FOR NEXT SEASON?

We believe it is in the best interest of the youth game to introduce this trial for the 2022/23 season. Removing and restricting heading in training has worked well for these age groups, so it makes sense to take the same approach with matches. In addition, introducing this trial in time for the 2022/23 season will allow us to see exactly how the new laws can be implemented in the youth game. We can then carry out our own research which will help further decision-making later on. Naturally we will also work closely with our stakeholders, including CFAs, Coaches, Referees and IFAB to support the introduction and implementation of the trial.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS IN IMPLEMENTING THIS NEW TRIAL?

We are now inviting leagues and competitions across the country to take part in the trial that will run for the duration of the 2022-23 season. The trial will be coordinated with the County FA network, leagues, clubs and schools throughout the country. If the trial is successful, we will apply to IFAB for a Law change for all U12 matches and below from the start of the 2023-24 season. We will continue to explore further ideas, in consultation with stakeholders in the game, to reduce heading in youth football without fundamentally changing the fabric of the game.

HOW DO I SIGN UP TO BE PART OF THE TRIAL?

To register for your league or competition to be involved in the trial please use this [form](#).

HOW DO I PROVIDE FEEDBACK ON THE TRIAL AND/OR THE GAMES I'M INVOLVED IN?

As part of the sign-up process The FA will be collating contact details of league secretaries. These will be used by the Insight Team to contact the league and club workforce and to reach out to parents, coaches and match officials to collect feedback on experiences within the trial. We will also be exploring methodologies for capturing the experiences of youth players, as well as conducting observations to collect data during matches.

IS THIS TRIAL BEING INTRODUCED IN OTHER COUNTRIES? IF NOT, WHY ARE ENGLAND THE ONLY ONES DOING IT?

That would be a matter for The IFAB. Our request to IFAB was for any association with training guidance to be allowed to align with matches, so the trial should be open to any association in the same position as us. We are pleased that The IFAB approved the new trial and look forward to implementing it during the 2022/23 season. The US Soccer Federation introduced the removal of heading at U12 two seasons ago. IFAB are in conversation with them around the alignment to the trial protocol.

WHAT EXACTLY ARE THE NEW LAWS THAT WILL BE INTRODUCED AS PART OF THIS TRIAL?

The law changes for these trials are dictated by IFAB and state:

1. Deliberately heading the ball is an offence punishable by an indirect free kick. This will also mean the introduction of indirect free-kicks within mini-soccer for this circumstance.
2. The indirect free kick is taken at the point where the ball was deliberately headed, except:
 - Where a player of the defending team deliberately heads the balls in their own penalty area, the indirect free kick is taken from the penalty mark.
3. Deliberately heading the ball is not a cautionable (yellow card) or sending-off (red card) offence unless it:
 - Stops or interferes with a promising attack (yellow card)
 - Denies the opposing team a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity (red card)
 - Occur often enough to be considered 'persistent misconduct' (yellow card)

BUT MINI-SOCCER DOESN'T HAVE INDIRECT FREE-KICKS?

During this trial, indirect free-kicks will be introduced into mini-Soccer for the purpose of restarting play in the event of a deliberate header only. They will not be used in any other circumstance during mini-soccer.

HOW WILL YOU PREPARE CFAS, LEAGUES, COMPETITIONS, COACHES, PLAYERS, REFEREES ETC. TO IMPLEMENT THIS NEW TRIAL?

Advice, guidance and resource packs will be created for all stakeholders within the game regarding the trial processes and will be shared as soon as practically possible.

IF A CHILD PLAYS AT A HIGHER LEVEL THAN THEIR AGE GROUP (I.E. AN 11-YEAR-OLD PLAYING IN THE U13 AGE GROUP) ARE THEY ALLOWED TO HEAD THE BALL?

The trial will specifically relate to the relevant playing age groups, rather than the age of the player.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN ENGLISH U12 AND BELOW TEAMS PLAY INTERNATIONAL OPPOSITION?

The trial applies to individual leagues and competitions, therefore players will need to abide by the laws of the competition they are playing in.

HOW SHOULD WE SUPPORT THE TRANSITION INTO U13 WHERE PLAYERS CAN HEAD THE BALL?

Our advice remains consistent with the heading guidance for training, where **heading remains a low priority at this age and our expectation is that heading should not be introduced at this stage**. However, if coaches feel it necessary to introduce the technique of heading, due to the increased heading activity in the game, we strongly advise a maximum of **one session per week** with light balls, limited repetition of a **maximum of five headers**, using self-serve or short distances. These limited sessions should introduce the technique of heading and should always be unopposed.

WITHIN U12 FOOTBALL THE LACK OF QUALIFIED MATCH OFFICIALS OFTEN MEANS COACHES/PARENTS FULFIL THAT ROLE. HOW WILL THEY BE SUPPORTED?

As part of the resource packs, clubs and leagues will be given information that can be cascaded to coaches and parents regarding the protocols of the trial. Leagues will be responsible for information that the 'officials' receive before the match, if the match is included in the trial.