Alison Mutch
Senior Coroner Greater Manchester (South)
[redacted]
By email only

29 September 2026

Dear Senior Coroner

Norbert Stiles MBE

This is the response of The Football Association ("The FA") to the report to Prevent Future Deaths ("PFD report") issued on 4th August 2026, following the inquest into the death of Mr Stiles. As The FA was not involved in the inquest as an Interested Person, we are grateful to the Coroner for bringing these matters to our attention. At the outset, we would like to express our sincere condolences to Mr Stiles' family and friends for their loss. Mr Stiles was a much-loved player who will be remembered as a 1966 World Cup winner and a devoted family man.

Role of The FA

It will assist to provide a high-level summary of The FA's role, and how this fits in with the setting of certain rules and regulations.

The FA promotes participation in football and sets rules and regulations governing association football, from the professional to the amateur game, played across all age groups in England. It does so only at a national level and within the scope of its authority.

Whilst The FA can make or amend domestic rules and regulations, it cannot change the Laws of the Game which relate to how the game is actually played on the pitch. For example, the Laws of the Game include matters such as the size of the pitch, what constitutes a foul, what is offside etc. As the Coroner will appreciate, rules such as this need to be consistent internationally to ensure when teams from different countries face each other in a competition or match, each team and match official is familiar with the same basic rules of play.

As a result, it is the International Football Association Board ("IFAB") based in Zurich, Switzerland which sets the Laws of the Game. The FA is required to ensure that association football in England is played in compliance with the Laws of the Game because we are a member association of the Fédération Internationale de Football Association ("FIFA"), the international self-regulatory governing body of association football. The FIFA Statutes require all member associations to comply with the Laws of the Game.

As well as the examples referred to above, IFAB's Laws of the Game also include matters such as the specifications for balls (including with respect to their size, weight, and pressure), and the offence of handball, by which a player is allowed to touch the ball with any part of their body except for the hand or arm (which therefore includes heading the ball). As explained above, it is not within The FA's power to change the Laws of the Game unilaterally. Any change to the Laws of the Game would require a three-quarters majority of the eight votes allocated to IFAB members, of which The FA holds one.

Areas of concern

The PFD report identifies the Coroner's concerns that heading footballs in training and in matches creates a risk of players developing Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy ("CTE"). The Coroner's concern extends to footballers whether amateur or professional, adults and children. This is an area which is hugely important to us. We set out below details of our work in supporting research into neurodegenerative disease in football. This is an ongoing and voluntary process but one where we believe we have an important part to play. We also provide details of other voluntary measures we have taken which recognise this complex area of growing interest to those within football and the wider general public.

Research

The FA has been a prominent supporter of a great deal of groundbreaking and valuable research into head injuries and brain health in football. We have established expert groups to assist in assessing areas for development:

- The FA's Expert Panel on Concussion and Head Injury in Football: this independently-chaired group was established in 2015, with experts from the fields of neurology, neurosurgery, neuropathology and sports medicine. The Expert Panel provides advice to The FA in respect of concussion and head injuries generally, and provides recommendations for any changes they consider to be necessary to The FA's concussion guidelines in place across all levels of football.

- The FA's Brain Health Research Advisory Group ("BHRAG") (formerly known as the Research Task Force, established in 2019): this independently-chaired group of independent medical and technical experts advises The FA on matters relating to brain health, including research developments in this area. While there is some crossover between membership of the Expert Panel and BHRAG, the latter also includes experts in the fields of neuroscience, epidemiology, and dementia research. The FA consults with BHRAG before issuing calls for research proposals.

We set out below a brief summary of research studies The FA has funded or co-funded since the Expert Panel was established.

- In 2017, following a call for research proposals from the Expert Panel, The FA and the Professional Footballers' Association ("PFA") commissioned [redacted] and the University of Glasgow to lead an independent research study into the incidence of degenerative neurocognitive disease in ex-professional footballers. This was the study into Football's Influence on Lifelong Health and Dementia risk, commonly referred to since as the FIELD study. Its findings were published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2019. Following this, The FA set up the Research Task Force (above) to advise The FA on appropriate next steps. The FA continues to fund studies by the University of Glasgow which seek further insight from the databases used in the original FIELD study.

- The University of Glasgow's BrainHOPE programme, co-funded with FIFA and run in collaboration with the wider PREVENT population study (which is based at Imperial College London and is looking at the possible prevention of Alzheimer's Disease through environmental intervention). BrainHOPE, which commenced in 2022 and has not yet concluded, has used data to better understand the brains of former professional footballers in midlife as compared against the general population, looking to gain insights into modifiable risk factors.

- The Advanced Brain Health Clinic, which has been running since 2022. The clinic provides a service for former professional footballers and collects biomarkers that can be monitored over time to assess brain health. This is run alongside a similar rugby cohort to try and compare these two sporting populations. The clinic is run by the Institute of Sport, Exercise and Health, a partnership between organisations including University College London Hospitals and University College London.

- The University of Nottingham's FOCUS study, jointly funded with the PFA to investigate whether retired professional male football players would perform worse on cognitive tests and be more likely to self-report dementia than males from a control group of the general population.

- A study by Loughborough University Sports Technology Institute to examine the forces transmitted by footballs from different eras. The results of this study were published in 2026. The FA has also funded a further Loughborough study, which has not yet reported its conclusions, to explore impact forces caused by the ball shell rather than overall ball momentum.

- The Injury and Illness Surveillance Study by Nottingham Trent University (co-funded with the Women's Super League and the English Football League), which studies data on various different types of injury across professional football and has published research on concussion rates in men's and women's professional football, with a further study on concussion rates by player position set to be published in future. A similar pilot study in grassroots football has also been launched.

- The FA's BHRAG has recently issued a further call for research proposals (the deadline for which was 31 July 2026) in relation to the question: *"How can we accurately and consistently establish methods of measuring heading load in football?"*

As part of our ongoing work in this area, we also regularly meet with other key stakeholders, including standing meetings with the professional leagues, PFA and League Managers Association, and the health and safety subcommittee of the Professional Football Negotiating and Consultative Committee.

Guidelines and rules

The FA has made changes as a precautionary measure to reduce head impacts where possible in football by:

(i) implementing world-leading concussion guidelines;
(ii) implementing youth heading guidance and adult amateur heading guidance;
(iii) removing deliberate heading in grassroots football at U11 level and below (as described below); and
(iv) working with stakeholders such as the professional leagues and the PFA to establish heading guidelines with a view to limiting heading in training in the professional game.

Specific measures have been implemented in relation to the grassroots youth game as permitted by IFAB.

In 2022, IFAB introduced the ability for National Associations to take part in a trial permitting the removal of deliberate heading in U12 matches. The FA decided to participate in the trial and invited leagues and competitions across the country to take part on a voluntary basis during the 2022-23 season. This followed the introduction by The FA of new heading guidance for training ahead of the 2021-22 season, which recommended restrictions on heading at this level.

After two seasons of the voluntary trial, and following feedback and consultation with representatives across the grassroots game, The FA introduced a new rule to phase out deliberate heading in grassroots football across U7 to U11 over the course of the following three seasons in line with the parameters established by IFAB. The removal of deliberate heading at U11 level from the 2026-27 season is the culmination of that phased process. For U12 age group, heading is permitted in matches (with limited heading in training) as players transition to secondary school age groups.

The new rule could help mitigate against any possible risks that may potentially be linked to heading the ball, including injuries from head-to-head, elbow-to-head, or head-to-ground contact.

Related proceedings

Civil proceedings were issued in the High Court in 2022 on behalf of more than 90 former footballers and the families of deceased players, including the Stiles family, against football's governing bodies, including The FA.

The issue of causation is a central part of those proceedings and will be the subject of detailed expert medical, technical, and biomechanical evidence, which will be considered and examined in great detail as part of the litigation process.

Conclusion

The issue of brain health and the impact of heading in football is vastly complex and a matter we take very seriously. It continues to be the subject of ongoing medical and scientific research. We

remain committed to supporting this research and, where appropriate, issuing guidance and guidelines with supporting educational measures where we have authority to do so. We are aware of the public importance of the issue and keep it under constant review.

The above constitutes The FA's response to the PFD report.

The Football Association