

Tuesday 4th August 2020
Via Email



**To: All Step 1-6 National League System Leagues & Clubs
All Regional NLS Feeder Leagues & Clubs**

Dear Secretary,

We are writing to you today to provide some further clarity around the current position on Spectators at pre-season matches. The guidance released by The FA on Saturday, 18th July was clear that all friendlies with National League System Clubs should be played behind closed doors. This has not changed. Whilst it is difficult to restrict spectators at a grassroots football fixture on a public recreation ground, this spectator guidance relates to low level numbers such as parents at a youth fixture in discrete six person gatherings and spread out.

Over the weekend, as clubs returned to pre-season competitive fixtures, we understand some fixtures were played with spectators and, in a small number of cases, with a crowd in excess of 100. The guidance regarding gatherings is a clear Government issued position and as such we must re-emphasise that ALL National League System pre-season fixtures should be played behind closed doors.

Due to evidence received over this weekend we now need to extend behind closed doors to Regional NLS Feeder League Clubs (Step 7) and this will also apply to pre-season matches played in an NLS or Regional NLS Feeder League ground including, for example, County FA or League Cup Finals.

Some Clubs and Leagues have also asked for further clarity on a couple of specific areas and we hope the following will be of use.

- **ALL** friendlies involving Step 1 to Regional NLS Feeder Leagues Clubs **should** be played behind closed doors, until further notice.
- **ALL** pre-season or other matches held at Step 1 to Regional NLS Feeder League grounds, including, for example, all County FA and League Cup Finals, should be played behind closed doors, until further notice.
- Clubs can operate their Clubhouses in accordance with Government hospitality guidance – but there should be no entry to the ground for spectators. Spectator and Hospitality guidance is covered separately by Government.
- Friendlies or other matches can have others not involved ‘on the pitch’ in the ground and this can provide for **essential** Club Officials only or, where an under 18 is playing in the fixture, a parent or guardian to fulfil safeguarding requirements. All must observe social distancing.



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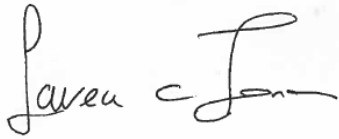
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The FA resubmitted a proposal for spectators at National League System & Women's Pyramid games to DCMS. You will be aware that Government suspended the test events for the return of spectators under Stage 5 of the Elite Sport Protocols, which much of the NLS does not fall under. As such, we are continuing our dialogue with DCMS separately to the Stage 5 pilot project. The suspension however of the Pilot Events which had low spectator numbers shows that Government are sensitive to crowds of all sizes and as such, crowds at pre-season matches does put the longer term supporter strategies at risk.

We are working continuously with the Sports Ground Safety Authority, DCMS, Leagues and colleagues within The FA to bring ultimate guidance for Spectator to return as soon as possible. We are still hopeful of meeting the timescale outlined in our initial guidance, but we do need to do so with the approval or support from Government and therefore during this time ask for your support.

We will write again as and when we have further DCMS clarification.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Laurence C Jones', written in a cursive style.

Laurence C Jones
Head of National League System

Cc: All County FA's