



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The UK has an effective ban on standing sections in football stadia in the top-two tiers of English & Welsh football
- A recent inquiry does not find standing responsible for the Hillsborough Disaster; by contrast, poor management and policing are judged the culprit; many other recent stadium disasters have happened despite all-seater stadia
- Advances in seating technology and stadium management make ‘safe standing’ a plausible option for sections of UK football stadia
- Experience from other sports, lower football tiers, and around Europe show standing can be safe
- Fans overwhelmingly support the reintroduction of some standing in football stadia, including female fans, whenever they are asked
- Standing can increase densities, sometimes modestly, and sometimes impressively: this means lower prices for the same revenue, and more price points for clubs to offer
- European clubs with standing in their stadia have a much wider variation between the cheapest and most expensive tickets: even if Premier League clubs kept their most expensive ticket the same price, bringing the ratio of standing available up to the European level would cut the average cheapest season ticket by 57%, from £514 to £221
- The UK government should liberalise the safety regime to allow for limited safe standing sections in Premier League and Championship football clubs

1: THE CURRENT SYSTEM

Since the Football Spectators Act of 1989, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has had power over the Football Licensing Authority (FLA, since renamed the Sports Ground Safety Authority) to require seating conditions before it licenses football grounds. This is commonly considered to be a product of the Rt Hon Lord Justice Taylor’s two reports on the Hillsborough Disaster, but in fact it predated his 1990 final report.

The Football Spectators Act had initially been expected to lead to the introduction of ID cards, but the idea was shelved after Lord Taylor’s report judged that ID cards would actually have made the disaster worse at Leppings Lane.

As an alternative the FLA ended up requiring Premier League and Championship grounds to provide seating only stadiums for spectators. Of course, Premier League and Championship clubs occasionally get relegated, and since refitting grounds repeatedly is expensive, large portions of League One and League Two also have no standing accommodation.

In principle, clubs are expected to prevent fans from standing in seated areas as it is written into their ground regulations, but it is not a police issue and large sections of fans tend to stand, undisturbed, in almost every ground. The “safe standing vs. unsafe standing” conundrum will be discussed in more detail within this paper.

Crucially, the ban on top-two division clubs providing any standing area in their stadiums is a matter of regulatory discretion coming from the Secretary of State, and not a question of statute. Ministers have the power to change this rule without passing a law.

2: POLLING AND PREFERENCES

Every survey ever carried out has found that a large majority of people are in favour of allowing sections of football stadia to be configured for modern safe standing, with overwhelming support from fans themselves. The Football Supporters' Federation (FSF) lists twelve recent polls:

- The FSF's National Supporter Survey 2009 asked: “Do you think supporters should have the choice of sitting or standing, including having areas specifically designed for safe standing.” Almost 90% of the respondents said ‘Yes’ (89.8% of 5,470) with more than half stating that they preferred to stand (50.2% of 5,503 respondents). By 2012's FSF National Supporter Survey the proportion favouring allowing standing areas had risen to 92%.
- The Football Fans Census 2007 found that 92% of 2,100 respondents wanted to see safe standing areas at their club. (BBC, ‘Calls grow for return of terraces’, 14th March 2007)
- 82% of female football fans think there should be a choice to sit or stand, with 29.7% preferring to stand. (FSF National Supporter Survey 2009)
- In April 2010 The Guardian asked: “Don Foster, the liberal democrat spokesperson for Culture, Media and Sport, has suggested providing safe standing areas in football stadiums. Is this a sensible proposal?” 92.4% of respondents said ‘Yes’.
- In March 2011 The Guardian asked: “Would you like to be able to stand at top-level games again?” 76.4% said ‘Yes’.
- In October 2011 a Daily Star Sunday survey found that: “66.3% of football fans would support a return to standing. Only 17.3% opposed it, with the rest undecided. And if seats were ripped out, 73.5% would consider standing at games.”
- In November 2011 Talksport asked: “Should we have safe standing zones in football stadia?” 91% said ‘Yes’
- An online poll by The Gooner showed that eight out of 10 Arsenal fans wanted a safe standing trial at the Emirates, and 80% believed it would improve the

atmosphere. More than half of the respondents said that they personally would prefer to watch from a safe standing area.¹

Jon Darch, of the Safe Standing Roadshow, provided a list of the polls since 2011. Again, there is strong support for allowing safe standing sections:

- February 2012: Aberdeen Supporters Trust (Near 500 responses): 92% of season ticket holders in favour of SPL proposals to introduce safe standing
- August 2012: FSF survey (4,074 responses): 91.1% of fans wanted a choice between sitting and standing
- October 2012: Swindon Town fan site 'The Washbag' (619 responses): 87% would support the provision of safe-standing areas
- January 2013: Barnsley Supporters Trust (300 respondents): 78% would like to see the introduction of a limited safe standing trial
- March 2013: Spurs fan site The Fighting Cock (2,017 responses): 95.1% in support of safe standing
- November 2013: Arsenal fans' group, the Black Scarf Movement (17,000): 91.5% back safe standing
- November 2013: Aston Villa Supporters Trust (974 respondents): 97.5% of respondents say "Yes" to safe standing
- January 2014: Huddersfield Town (204 respondents): an overwhelming 92% indicated that they would like to see Huddersfield Town formally support the Safe Standing campaign
- March 2014: Norwich City supporters group the Barclay End Projek (853 respondents): 89.21% in favour of seeing a safe standing area trialled
- March 2014: Multiple Chelsea supporters groups (4,239 responses): 96% in favour of implementing safe standing at Stamford Bridge
- May 2014: Scottish National survey run by the Scottish FA and Supporters Direct Scotland (circa 3,000 supporters responded): 91% in favour of safe standing
- February 2015: Welsh Conservatives (2,364 respondents): 96% in support of safe standing trials
- May 2015: Liverpool fan site 'The Anfield Wrap' (614 respondents): 97% back the running of a small number of closely monitored trials of safe standing at rail seats
- June 2015. Ipswich Town fan site 'TWTED' (2,442 respondents): 73% of supporters are in favour of standing areas being reintroduced at Portman Road
- July 2015. The Gooner (3,000 respondents): 79% think Arsenal should trial a safe standing section (as seen in Germany) at Ashburton Grove
- September 2015. The Express & Star newspaper finds that 80% of 2,500 Wolves fans backed the idea of safe standing at Molineux
- February 2016. A Manchester United Supporters Trust (3,000 respondents): 91% agree that fans should be able to stand, in designated areas, at football matches using the safe standing system

Usefully, the FSF also asked supporters why they so strongly favoured allowing safe standing, with supporters typically citing ticket pricing and atmosphere. In fact in

¹ <http://www.fsf.org.uk/campaigns/safe-standing/safe-standing-facts/#WHO>

the 2009 FSF survey showed that the single most important reason supporters liked to stand was because it improved the atmosphere. As a consequence many fans still stand, particularly at away games, causing friction with ground authorities and falsifying the claim in Taylor's 1990 report that fans would soon get used to sitting.

But it's not just fans on board, clubs are too. Recent numbers suggest that 70% of the Football League's 72 clubs are in favour of lobbying for safe standing; while 19 out of 20 Premier League clubs are open to the idea or in favour of it.^{2 3}

The FSF lists clubs including Aston Villa, Crystal Palace, Sunderland and Spurs among the 26 clubs that support their campaign for the liberalization in this area.⁴ On their website, the FSF also catalogues key industry figures, politicians, stadium designers and safety experts who favour a move to more liberalization, including a young Tony Blair, Kenneth Clarke, David Davis, Gus O'Donnell, Kate Hoey, Alastair Campbell, Tony Pulis, David Gold, The Independent Football Ombudsman, Nigel Clough, Arsene Wenger and Stan Collymore.⁵

3: HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED — STANDING IS SAFE

The main, close to the entire, case for the English & Welsh government's ban on standing in football stadia in the top-two tiers is that standing is unsafe, pointing particularly to disasters where many lost their lives. But football stadium disasters have rarely, if ever, been caused by standing per se. Of course the fans who died at Hillsborough in 1989 were in overcrowded, fenced-in 'pens' on a standing terrace, but although the Taylor Report into the disaster went on to recommend a move to all-seater stadia it did not blame standing itself for the tragedy. Instead, the report points at poor organisation as the main problem, both in ticketing and crowd management.

The immediate cause of the gross overcrowding and hence the disaster was the failure, when gate C was opened, to cut off access to the central pens which were already overfull.

They were already overfull because no safe maximum capacities had been laid down, no attempt was made to control entry to individual pens numerically and there was no effective visual monitoring of crowd density.

When the influx from gate C entered pen 3, the layout of the barriers there afforded less protection than it should and a barrier collapsed. Again, the lack of vigilant monitoring caused a sluggish reaction and response when the crush occurred. The

² <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/sport/football/competitions/championship/10623219/Football-League-to-lobby-Government-in-major-move-for-safe-standing-areas.html>

³ <http://www.efl.com/news/article/league-clubs-consider-results-of-standing-consultation-1872155.aspx>

⁴ <http://www.fsf.org.uk/campaigns/safe-standing/>

⁵ <http://www.fsf.org.uk/campaigns/safe-standing/who-backs-safe-standing/>

small size and number of gates to the track retarded rescue efforts. So, in the initial stages, did lack of leadership.

In their excellent 2007 report on the topic, the FSF takes this further, pointing out that the biggest disasters since Hillsborough—Harare in 2000, Johannesburg in 2000 and Accra in 2001—all occurred in all-seater stadia.

Since their paper is now almost nine years old, I undertook a quick review of all of the other recent stadium disasters I could find, and the vast majority of them were unrelated to standing or happened in all-seater stadia.

All seater:

- The 2006 PhilSports arena stampede that killed 74 and injured 627 (Philippines)
- The 2015 Zamalek stadium stampede that killed 19-30 and injured many more (Egypt)

Unrelated to seating:

- The 2009 Houphouët-Boigny stampede that killed 19 and injured 132 and the 2013 stampede that killed 60 and injured 200 (Cote d'Ivoire)
- The 2008 Matokeo riot-stampede that killed 13 and injured 36 (Congo)
- The 2008 Mbizo stampede that killed 11 and injured 40 (Zimbabwe)
- The 2013 Cidadela Desportiva crush that killed an estimated 16 people (Angola)

There are other examples which are harder to categorise, but which rarely or never appear to be failures of standing. In most of the tragedies I've deemed unrelated to standing, the crush came when people were exiting, or when police tried to control crowds by firing tear gas indiscriminately, causing a riot. Others are down to fake tickets and over-attendance. But it's clear that standing, just like seated accommodation, has played only an incidental role in most disasters. The case against standing as such is weak.

We also know from the Hillsborough Inquest that police errors, rather than unsafe standing, were to blame for the 96 deaths that day.⁶ Insofar as the stadium itself contributed to the disaster, it was narrow bottlenecks at the entrance and exit, penning in, and other features, that were the main factors.

4: THE MONETARY BENEFITS OF STANDING

People take up less floor space when they are standing than when they are seated. Typically, the space that one person takes up with a seat can fit 1.2 to 1.8 people standing up. This varies between grounds; 1.2 people is appropriate in older stadia such as Villa Park which was built at time when seats were narrower and legroom

⁶ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/26/Hillsborough-disaster-verdict-96-victims-unlawfully-killed-jury-concludes/>

less generous; 1.8 would be appropriate for newer stadia like The Emirates Stadium or the new Wembley⁷, and is the maximum recommendation in the fifth edition of the government's Green Guide on sports ground safety.

Rubbing shoulders a bit more closely is one reason why fans expect a better atmosphere and sense of community in safe standing areas than in all-seater stadia. With increased capacities in such areas, a stadium's total capacity goes up as well, meaning that clubs can turn over the same total revenue with lower average ticket prices. And the ability to differentiate their offering means clubs can make their price structure more elastic. These cheaper standing places could potentially lure in younger fans with lower disposable incomes, who may thereby become more attached to the club over their lifetimes, while those with more disposable income still have the option to sit.

This could make a large difference. European clubs with standing sections in their stadia have systematically wider price gulfs between the cheapest and most expensive tickets. Even if we assume that the top price does not change, and the average barely shifts, introducing a tier of cheaper tickets at the bottom could cut prices hugely. I estimate that bringing the ratio between the cheapest and most expensive ticket in the Premier League to the standard of top European clubs who do have standing would cut the price of the cheapest tickets by 57% on average.⁸

| CLUB | LOWEST SEASON TICKET PRICE | HIGHEST SEASON TICKET PRICE | RATIO | NEW LOWEST | % OF ORIGINAL |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|
| Arsenal | £1,014.00 | £2,013.00 | 1.99 | £501.48 | 49% |
| Aston Villa | £335.00 | £615.00 | 1.84 | £153.21 | 46% |
| Bournemouth | £550.00 | £760.00 | 1.38 | £189.33 | 34% |
| Chelsea | £750.00 | £1,250.00 | 1.67 | £311.40 | 42% |
| Crystal Palace | £420.00 | £680.00 | 1.62 | £169.40 | 40% |
| Everton | £444.00 | £719.00 | 1.62 | £179.12 | 40% |
| Leicester City | £365.00 | £730.00 | 2.00 | £181.86 | 50% |
| Liverpool | £710.00 | £869.00 | 1.22 | £216.49 | 30% |
| Manchester City | £299.00 | £900.00 | 3.01 | £224.21 | 75% |
| Manchester United | £532.00 | £950.00 | 1.79 | £236.67 | 44% |
| Newcastle United | £475.00 | £710.00 | 1.49 | £176.88 | 37% |
| Norwich City | £499.50 | £646.00 | 1.29 | £160.93 | 32% |
| Southampton | £541.00 | £853.00 | 1.58 | £212.50 | 39% |
| Stoke City | £294.00 | £609.00 | 2.07 | £151.71 | 52% |
| Sunderland | £370.00 | £525.00 | 1.42 | £130.79 | 35% |
| Swansea City* | - | - | - | - | - |
| Tottenham Hotspur | £765.00 | £1,895.00 | 2.48 | £472.08 | 62% |
| Watford | £385.00 | £650.00 | 1.69 | £161.93 | 42% |
| West Bromwich Albion | £399.00 | £509.00 | 1.28 | £126.80 | 32% |
| West Ham United | £617.50 | £955.00 | 1.55 | £237.91 | 39% |
| <u>Averages</u> | <u>£513.95</u> | <u>£866.21</u> | <u>1.72</u> | <u>£220.77</u> | <u>43%</u> |

⁷ <http://www.safetyatsportsgrounds.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/green-guide.pdf>

⁸ Here I use data from the BBC's Price of Football 2015 survey, which reports data for the Premier League, the divisions of the Football League, and a selected array of top European clubs <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-34507719>

| CLUB | LOWEST SEASON TICKET PRICE | HIGHEST SEASON TICKET PRICE | RATIO |
|-------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| Bayern Munich | £104.48 | £559.71 | 5.36 |
| Schalke 04 | £142.17 | £659.71 | 4.64 |
| Borussia Dortmund | £154.48 | £660.46 | 4.28 |
| Bayer Leverkusen | £141.79 | £444.04 | 3.13 |
| IFK Goteborg | £79.60 | £343.60 | 4.32 |
| Malmo | £131.60 | £359.60 | 2.73 |
| <u>Averages</u> | <u>£125.69</u> | <u>£504.52</u> | <u>4.01</u> |

For some clubs, cutting the ratio to the standard of European clubs would slash their cheapest ticket by as much as 70% (Liverpool) or 68% (Bournemouth).

What's more, standing fans and a better atmosphere makes for a better TV offering; who hasn't marvelled at the incredible buzz generated by die Südtribüne - the 25,000 capacity wall of black and yellow - when watching Dortmund play league games at home. More fans in the ground also means more burgers and pints sold (the average fan has a secondary spend of £11). Finally, and not insignificantly, the current range of seats break a lot, with clubs replacing hundreds after each match, for around £30-60 a pop. All this together means there could be bottom-line considerations for both clubs and fans, such that if clubs are merely allowed to convert seats into standing areas, they may well do so (though not, of course, across the whole stadium).

5: SAFE STANDING VS. UNSAFE STANDING

In a video interview in 2014, West Ham chairman David Gold said:

I am a great supporter of safe standing; it is interesting that for many years we have had unsafe standing...I don't think there is a ground in the country that are all seater stadium that don't have their fans in some area of the ground standing.

Right now in most football grounds, many of the most enthusiastic fans will stand throughout the match, regardless of the all-seater nature of Premier League and Championship stadia. There used to be regular squabbles with stewards, but nowadays they mostly turn a blind eye. As Gold points out, this is dangerous as supporters will regularly fall over the seats in front of them into the next row.

It also causes steady, attritional damage, especially when particularly exuberant away supporters visit—as with a recent cup tie that brought Manchester United to Derby:

United will be asked to compensate Derby County after a significant number of seats were damaged in the away end when the teams met in the FA Cup fourth-round at the end of last month, resulting in a 3-1 win for Louis van Gaal's team. Derby have already informed United about what their ground

staff found on the morning after the match and intend to charge them for the relevant repairs, claiming that more than 300 seats were broken or pulled off whole.

Each match can cost thousands—peanuts in Premier League money but still a cost worth considering, especially when there’s an alternative. Safe standing alternatives such as rail seats do not have breakages that require replacements every week; the seat is tucked away, clipped off, or much harder to break.

Of course this isn’t the main reason to favour a relaxation of the rules, to allow clubs in the top two tiers to emulate Germany, Sweden, Austria and the lower tiers where standing has been safely allowed. But it is another reason to consider why we are risking serious injuries when no risk is necessary.

6: THE ALTERNATIVES — RAIL SEATS AND CLIP-ONS

There are three main alternatives to all-seater stands: rail seats, clip-on seats, and foldaway seats, with rail seats the most prevalent and popular.

RAIL SEATS

Rail seats are widely used in countries like Austria, Sweden and Germany, where standing is permitted for national games, but where clubs want to be able to field an all-seater stadium in European-wide and international competitions regulated by FIFA/UEFA. Rail seats are extremely robust, easy to switch between upright and seated position, and relatively cheap to install. They allow densities of up to 1.8x seating. The rail barriers between each row mean that a press of the sort that caused past tragedies is simply impossible.



Figure 1: Rail seats at Hannover 96’s HDI Arena

CLIP ON SEATS

Clip-on or bolt-on seats involve regular terraces with removable crush barriers that have spots for attaching seats when needed.



Figure 2: Regular terraces, to be fitted with clip-on seats for UEFA and international games

FOLDAWAY SEATS

The third option is foldaway seats. Stands with foldaway seats have metal edges to each tier, from which seats are pulled out for the necessary games.

7: SAFE STANDING TO BE INTRODUCED AT CELTIC IN SCOTLAND

Whereas Wales does not have the power to set its stadium seating policy independently (perhaps understandably, since Welsh teams such as Cardiff and Swansea compete in the regular English football tiers), Scotland does. The Welsh conservatives have called for devolution, but as yet have not been successful.

In 2011 the Scottish Premier League announced that they would accept applications from clubs to run safe standing trials and in 2013 the formation of the SPFL saw the previous league rule, requiring all-seater stadia in the top flight, completely removed. Glasgow City Council decided in June 2015 to allow Celtic to introduce a rail seating area from the start of 2016-17, accommodating just under 3,000 supporters. This will prove to be the first example of a formal standing area in the top British divisions for decades.

Tracey Crouch, Parliamentary Undersecretary of State for Sport, Tourism and Heritage, said the government was not “at present, persuaded by the case put forward to re-introduce standing accommodation in grounds covered by the all-

seater requirement,” but that the government would “monitor its introduction in Scotland closely and reassess this position once evidence from the Scottish experience is available.”

This is a major shift in opinion from the more negative tone sounded by previous sports minister Helen Grant, who claimed that “all-seater stadia [are] the best way to ensure the safety, security and comfort of spectators at football grounds.”

8: CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The introduction of new rules after the disasters and tragedies of the 1980s was understandable, and perhaps necessary, but better organisation, management, design, and more advanced systems for keeping out troublemakers and preventing violence mean that the blanket ban is no longer necessary for safety and comfort. Fans want safe standing, clubs want to offer it to them, and we know it is safe from lower tiers, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, and elsewhere. The trial in Glasgow may yet provide further evidence.

Other than the desire to liberalise a shared national pleasure, allowing people to transact and freely associate, only stepping in to prevent spillover harms, there are other reasons to favour allowing standing. Recent ticket price problems can partly be alleviated by increasing attendances and adding to the variety clubs can offer. Improved atmosphere is a benefit for fans on TV and around the world.

Tracey Crouch and the government should consider lifting the ban on standing in the Championship and Premiership, and allowing clubs to convert seats to safe standing areas, under the guidelines laid out in the Green Guide, ensuring safety, comfort, and proper sightlines. The government has a chance to deliver a liberalization that will be popular across the board.